

**WHY  
I TRI**

# “I DID IMUK IN HONOUR OF MY FRIEND”

*With no triathlon experience, Ruben den Hartog undertook an Ironman to honour a friend he lost to suicide*

I was lying on a beach in France when the thought of doing an Ironman popped into my head. I immediately thought of doing it as a fundraiser in honour of my friend Jochem, who committed suicide three years ago. He was 20.

I usually don't believe in destiny, but that evening I saw on Facebook that it would have been Jochem's birthday that day. Back at home I immediately enrolled in IMUK.

When I told Jochem's parents about my plan, they were very emotional. I asked them to pick a charity for my fundraiser. They chose Grip op je Dip, a Dutch non-profit institution that supports young people with depressive thoughts.

I was at work when I got the call that Jochem had committed suicide. My world collapsed. His parents thought he was with his boyfriend, and vice versa. I knew Jochem struggled with depression. But I never thought he would end his own life. We were part of a group of friends that were really tight. Jochem was an amazing storyteller, he could always make us laugh.

## **RUBEN DEN HARTOG**

Ruben den Hartog is a 22-year-old physical therapy graduate from the Netherlands. He completed his first Ironman in Bolton in July in honour of his friend Jochem, who committed suicide at the age of 20.



*“When it was finally my turn to cross the finish line, I choked”*

I didn't have any triathlon experience. Most guys my age start with Olympic distance, but I took a gap year between studies and had time to train for an Ironman so it felt like the right time. I was especially inexperienced in swimming. During my first session I got a shoulder injury and couldn't swim for a month.

After 10 months of training non-stop it was finally time for the race. I struggled a lot during the bike. I'd cycled in the Austrian and French Alps, but this bike course was by far the toughest I'd ever ridden. It was brutal. It was a constant mix of steep climbing with technical and dangerous downhills.

The British crowds were really something else. Riding up those climbs I felt like I was riding Alpe d'Huez in the Tour de France – there were people with cowbells and drums, shouting my name and cheering me on. Some competitors would even ride alongside me saying: “You can do this!”

I'll never forget crossing the finish. I was eyeing the carpet every time I passed it, hearing, “You are an Ironman!”. When it was finally my turn, with the crowds and my friends and family cheering, I choked. It was an emotional moment.

Depression is a much bigger issue than people think, we only see the tip of the iceberg. I hope the money from the fundraiser will help a lot of youngsters. But even if it only prevents one person from committing suicide, it will have all been worth it. **220**

Find out more about Ruben's fundraising here: [http://bit.ly/IMR\\_A](http://bit.ly/IMR_A)