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TEENAGER BRODIE SEELEN TO PUT LIFE THREATENING DIAGNOSIS BEHIND HIM TO PREPARE FOR NUTRI-GRAIN IRONMAN NEW ZEALAND

Nelson teenager Brodie Seelen is preparing to put the most challenging 18 months of his life behind him as he heads to the start line of Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand next March, with the support of the Tony Jackson Scholarship.

Last February when aged just 16 Brodie's life was turned on its head when he underwent a routine MRI for a sore back. What followed was a whirlwind of tests, specialist appointments and diagnoses for illnesses including extensive cancer of the spine and pelvis, and rare bone diseases.

Six months later Brodie and his family found themselves in Christchurch for two weeks of every test imaginable, and then following that another eight weeks of tests to eliminate every possibility, with the final genome testing back from Finland, specialists in Christchurch discovered that Brodie has a life-threatening and incredibly rare auto-immune blood disease, Aplastic Anaemia.

What would follow was a bone marrow transplant thanks to his younger brother Liam and months of treatment in Christchurch, but Brodie is finally on the mend and has next year's IRONMAN New Zealand to work towards.

"It sure has been a crazy last year, the last 18 months are certainly not what I expected to have happen," said Brodie. "I've always believed that mindset is the biggest thing when it comes to any challenge and my mindset over the 18 months especially has just been to focus on the next step and then go from there and I guess I've always known that I've wanted to do an IRONMAN.

"I watched a video on YouTube by Yes Theory about a normal guy deciding to do his first IRONMAN a couple of years ago and as soon as I saw that I was hooked on getting into these adventure races, and these long endurance sports," he said. "I was looking to do one last year but obviously life had other plans but now that I am where I am, and I've come through what I've come through and I'm excited to be able to get out doing it."

Brodie will be taking part in his first IRONMAN with the support of the Tony Jackson Scholarship, which was created in memory of Tony Jackson, an IRONMAN New Zealand 28-time finisher and Hall of Fame member. The scholarship acknowledges Tony's outstanding contribution to IRONMAN and continues his passion of encouraging, helping, inspiring and motivating athletes to achieve their goals regardless of their ability or background.

"First of all, it's a huge honour, Tony is a real inspiration to a lot of people, and to be able to go out there next year knowing that I've won this scholarship and to be able to do it for Tony and to show other people that nothing is impossible, it's awesome," said Brodie. "It helps in so many different ways, not only financially as the last 18 months has impacted the amount of work my parents and I could do, but also with coaching and support."

Brodie's diagnosis, along with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, had a significant impact on his parents' work, with his mother Mary unable to work as a teacher due to Brodie being immune impaired, and the family going back and forth between Nelson and Christchurch on numerous occasions, but as Brodie's condition continues to improve they're looking forward to getting back on track.

Brodie, now 18 years old, will prepare for the 2022 IRONMAN New Zealand by lining up at this December's IRONMAN 70.3 Taupō, with the event providing him the perfect opportunity to see how he's progressing, with it also taking place on a special day.

"IRONMAN 70.3 Taupō is on 11 December, a year to the day since I had my bone marrow transplant," said Brodie. "Looking back 12 months ago on that day I would have been in hospital having just finished chemotherapy and having just had my bone marrow transplant and here I am just a year in the future to be able to be out doing things, and things I love as well. It's a pretty special thing."

Brodie is also committed to using his experience to raise much needed funds for those who supported himself and his family during this tough time, Ranui House in Christchurch and the Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Service (AYACS).

"Last year, just before I underwent Chemo, I thought rather than have my hair come out in small clumps I'd do the Shave for a Cure," he said. "I managed to convince a bunch of my mates and a few of my teachers to do it with me and together we raised about \$28,000 for Leukaemia and Blood Cancer New Zealand which was great, it felt really good to be able to give back. This year, I know that I definitely want to help two other amazing organisations who did so much for me, they literally helped save my life, and they help so many patients and their families. Ranui House and AYACS are the two organisations I'm fundraising for and I'm planning on raising \$100,000 for them over the next six months."

Verna Cook-Jackson said that Brodie was a very worthy recipient of this year's Tony Jackson Scholarship.

"When I look at the nominations I always think what would Tony think and I know he would have felt strongly about Brodie's story," said Verna. "Despite what he went through Brodie immediately got on with life, he went back to school, and he made something positive out of something negative, he's moving forward with his life and he will inspire others."

"Brodie didn't allow illness to pull him down, he's doing much the same thing as Tony did and I look forward to following his journey," she said.

To help Brodie reach his fundraising goal of \$100,000 visit <https://givealittle.co.nz/fundraiser/help-patients-and-their-families-get>

The 2022 Tony Jackson Scholarship includes:

- Entry into the 2022 Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand
- Two nights' accommodation Taupō prior to the event for training
- A \$1,000 Prezzy card for training needs
- A bike fit from Performance Bicycle Tuning
- A coaching package from Boost Coaching

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