**Interview with Gatorade Commercial Star Chris Legh**

****

You know him as the guy in the most recent, amazing Gatorade commercial. He’s triathlete Chris Legh, who 50 meters before the finish of the 1997 Ironman in Hawaii collapsed and almost died. The commercial, which debuted Jan. 1, takes viewers through that day in Hawaii and shows how Legh went to Gatorade Sports Science Institute and used the data and the diet the lab recommended for him to become a better athlete.

The spot – the third in a series of Origin spots narrated by college football announcer Keith Jackson -- includes Dr. Bob Murray, the director of GSSI, cameraman Peter Henning, who shot the footage of Legh’s collapse and his wife Sarah (yes her name is Sarah Legh!), who was as close as one could be to the drama. The commercial ends with Legh going on to win the 2004 Ironman USA at Coeur d’Alene.

Curious to know more about his career, we chatted with the Australian who has won about 80 races worldwide. He’s 32 years old and lives in Melbourne, Australia and Lyons, Colorado.

**How many Ironmans had you done prior to the one in Hawaii in 1997?**

Chris: It was my third.

**How soon did you know during that race that things weren’t going well?**

Chris: I knew from the beginning things weren’t going well. I had an average swim and was still in the race at that point, but once I got on the bike, I couldn’t keep anything down. At about the halfway point on the bike, I was six minutes behind the pack. I put my head down and worked myself back to the lead group, but every time I would try to eat or drink, I would vomit it up. I got off the bike in second place, but with 12 miles to go, I really started to deteriorate. I was zig-zagging my way through trying to get to the end.

**What do you remember about the fall near the finish?**

Chris: I remember bits and pieces. I had fallen down five or six times and I remember people telling that it was against the rules to hold onto the fence or take any drink from someone in the crowd. What you see in the commercial is my final attempt. Five minutes after I began crawling, I was unconscious.

**What happened after that?**

Amazingly, I stayed in the medical tent where I was unconscious for three hours. They put me on a bed of ice because my temperature was so high. People were definitely freaking out. When my temperature came down, I finally came to and they sent me back to my hotel. I couldn’t move that night or the next day so I knew something was going on. When my temperature started to rise again that evening, we went back to the hospital.

**What took place at the hospital?**

We met up with this surgeon who said to me, “We heard what happened down at the race, we’ve been expecting you.” That guy was actually supposed to be in the commercial as well. He told me that he was going to do some exploratory surgery and he had me sign a document that said that if he found something, I would authorize him to operate. When I woke up, I ran my hand down to my stomach and there were 16 staples there. I thought to myself, “I’ve really done some damage this time.” I had a part of my large intestine removed. A large portion of it was gangrenous because I was so dehydrated.

**How did this affect your career?**

I doubted that I would be able to continue racing. I knew looking back at the race that if I were in the same position, I should have made a smarter, more informed decision. But I came back. In February 1998, I raced in the Victorian Long Course (a Half-Ironman). I did well in the swim and when I got off the bike, I was leading by 12 minutes. I won by something like 16 minutes and set a course record. In April of that year, I did the Ironman in Australia and lost by five seconds in a sprint finish to (three-time Ironman World Champion) Peter Reid. The funny thing was we raced together the whole time for eight hours and 21 minutes and we never said a word to each other.

**So why did you need the help of the Gatorade Sports Science Institute?**

Well, I was really inconsistent. I’d do well and then I’d have problems again. In 1999, I was racing in Holland and I had to have another surgery related to the initial surgery. I didn’t want my sponsors to know so I just told them that I was injured.

**How did you get in touch with Gatorade?**

I was still having problems when I met David Knight (vice president for Gatorade, PepsiCo Beverages International) at the Ironman in Lake Placid in 2003. David offered for me to come to the Gatorade Sports Science Institute so that they could test my fluid losses. I turned him down, telling him I was fine. Well, halfway through the marathon, I fell to pieces. I felt horrible. The next day I woke up and chased down David. I was soon at the Institute (in Barrington, Illinois).

**What did they do to you there?**

I worked out on the bike and treadmill for two hours each at Ironman pace. They also simulated the conditions that I face in Hawaii with the humidity and took into account all the nutrition involved. They took blood tests and I had patches all over me. That night they got the results back and I chatted with Bob Murray and a dietician and they came up with recommendations for me. From that time on, I’ve competed in 16 half Ironmans and won 10 or 11 of them. I’ve always said that there are two certainties in an Ironman race – vomiting over your right shoulder and peeing in your left shoe. But since I’ve been to GSSI, I haven’t vomited once during a race.

**Do you drink regular Gatorade when you are training?**

I’ve always needed a little more sodium so that I don’t cramp, so it’s great that they now have the Endurance Formula. I usually drink the Endurance Formula and supplement it with Gatorlytes.