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From Accountant to IRONMAN Pro, Utah's Skye Moench is One to Watch in the Upcoming IRONMAN® World Championship

Skye Moench of Salt Lake City may have gone pro later in life, but she's showing the world that age shouldn't stop anyone from pursuing their dreams, a motto she keeps close to her heart.

As it turns out, her love of triathlon is one of the greatest Cinderella stories of the sport, one of utter determination, and perhaps one reason why she doesn't idolize traditional star athletes, but rather, the everyday person who's taken a big leap of faith to sign up for an athletic sporting event.

Most athletes draw inspiration from somewhere, and for Skye, she looks up to individuals who pursue their goals and dreams wholeheartedly, even if it seems crazy, like a 50-year-old woman who's never ridden a bike. She's most inspired by anyone who is gutsy, especially when things are "scary and impossible" in their eyes.

At 33-years-old, Skye has racked up some impressive credentials – IRONMAN® European Champion 2019, the fastest American female IRONMAN distance record at IRONMAN Chattanooga 2021, and representing USA at the inaugural Collins Cup in 2021.

Now, she's returning to St. George to compete in the 2021 Intermountain Healthcare IRONMAN World Championship presented by Utah Sports Commission in May, and after that, the 2022 IRONMAN World Championship in Kona, October 6–8. As for the IRONMAN® 70.3® World Championship in St. George October 28–29, she still has to qualify.

From Canada to Utah in her youth

Skye hails from Lethbridge, Alberta, a province in Canada. At 12 years old, she moved with her mother and sisters to Washington State, eventually landing in Utah, where she graduated from Lehi High School.

As a child, Skye's family moved around a lot and that made it hard for her to be in sports. Her mother worked full-time and she didn't have rides. So, athletics wasn't a focus, until a kind neighbor across the street got her into running.



Skye's neighbor was friends with her mom and one day, she asked Skye to go running with her. The neighbor was in her mid 20s, and the pair started running every evening. They ran a marathon together when she was 16, and by then, she was hooked.

She was in track and field in school, but she says she was no all-star athlete. Now in love with running, Skye continued running every day in college. She liked feeling fit and being able to eat and not worry about her waistline, but it was mostly the mental aspect she loved. She also had running buddies in college.

Embarking on an accounting career

Skye wasn't always a professional athlete. She studied accounting at Brigham Young University (BYU), working all through college to pay her tuition and graduate debt-free. She didn't have a bike, but badly wanted to compete in her first triathlon, BYU's True Cougar Triathlon (2009). Her friend said he had a bike and she could borrow it to do the little event. Having so much fun, she doesn't remember how she placed, but she did pretty good for used her friend's bike.

From that point forward, Skye was keen on getting all of her triathlon gear. She was on a paid internship at Ernst & Young (EY), earning a good wage, and was able to afford a bike and a wetsuit and jump into the world of triathlon. Her first bike was a very entry-level bike. It was 2010 and she only spent about \$1,500, costing far less than the bike she rides now.

She graduated BYU in 2011 and went straight to studying for CPA exams while working at EY in Salt Lake City. After her internship, EY hired her full-time where she was a tax accountant and her office was at The Gateway in downtown Salt Lake City. She had a gym pass and would train at the gym by her office before and after work.

Sometimes, after work, she'd ride her bike at Emigration Canyon or Big Mountain, depending on how much time and daylight she had. If she only had an hour, she could get from her house to the top of Emigration Canyon in an hour. If she had two hours, she'd hit Big Mountain.

At this time, Skye was doing a fair amount of half marathons. She was getting faster and had a strong desire to improve. Four years into working at EY, she was generally dissatisfied at work, sorely missing the feeling of satisfaction and a good challenge. She excelled at her job, had good reviews, nice raises, and had fun with her coworkers, but for some reason, triathlon was speaking to her.

Taking the plunge to go pro

As Skye learned more about triathlon and she became a big fan of the sport. She learned Kona (the IRONMAN World Championship) was the biggest race of the year, and she watched an NBC special on the Kona IRONMAN World Championship. She remembers watching one of the live-streamed, nine-hour specials glued to the television, and one day she thought, "I can do that." She was having all these feelings in her gut about IRONMAN, but as for work, she was no longer getting the challenge she needed.



Skye had a great job, but she also believes you have to love what you're doing. It took her a while to figure out what she was going to do. She says quitting your job is a big deal, so she was strategic, sitting on it for about a year, going back and forth pondering, "Do I want to do this?"

She had no idea with being a professional triathlete entailed, but if she was going to do it, she wanted to do it well. Skye knew that to go pro, she had to work less and get a coach. She started by reducing her hours to part time at EY in April 2015, and hired a coach.

Skye left EY in 2016, a year after going part time. She was spending \$30,000 a year on bikes, equipment, and travel, so she did contract accounting to pay for it all. She said 2019 was the first year she made a profit as a triathlete, and 2021 was the first year she didn't look for accounting work – surmising that 2020 probably would have been that way if it weren't for COVID.

Initially, Skye did triathlon combined with earning a living as an accountant, but it all changed after she won her first two races and received prize money. Now, she has sponsors including TREK, SRAM, Zipp, Garmin, Supersapiens, Deboer Wetsuits, FORM Swim, and Clearwater Private Wealth Advisors. She also switched coaches in 2018, and that made a big difference in her performance, she said.

Enjoying the perks

As a full-time professional triathlete, Skye's enjoying all the perks, such as not having a boss. She says it's a pretty unusual life compared to the normal, like when she used to go to work, but the biggest benefit is how it's opened up her eyes to the world. She's made many friends across the globe, traveled all over, and been to places she's never been, spending a lot of time in Europe and Australia.

One thing she didn't realize when signing up to be a professional athlete is it also means signing up to be a professional Instagram poster, but she likes it because it's given her the opportunity to be a positive influencer.

What does she do for fun outside of training hard every day? When she isn't training, Skye spends time with her husband, Matt, and Cavapoo (a Poodle and King Charles Cavalier mix), Winston. She enjoys board games, hiking, cooking, baking, and recently, watching (not playing) tennis.

Since she's into eating well, she spends a lot of time looking up new recipes. She loves traditional sugar and butter, but she loves finding healthier baking recipes. She can be found dehydrating fruit, making her own healthy muffins, cookies, and energy balls with oats, peanut butter, honey, chia seeds, pecans, and dates. She also makes bars with granola, dates, cashews.

Life as a professional triathlete

Being a pro athlete is a full-time job. Skye trains three times a day, 25-30 hours a week. She swims first thing in the morning, followed by a bike session and a run session later in the day. As for her



agenda over the next year, between now and 2023, she's racing some other IRONMAN and IRONMAN 70.3 events.

"I would love to get back over to Europe to do some races – any race in Switzerland would be great! I would love to also do some events I haven't done before," said Skye. "I am looking forward to finally getting to the IRONMAN World Championship in Kona, Hawaii this year. I am also going to be racing the PTO (Professional Triathletes Organisation) events this year in Canada and the USA."

Skye has raced the IRONMAN 70.3 in St. George in May several times, and finished sixth at the 2021 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship in St. George. "Every time I compete in St. George, it's a beautiful and challenging experience, and it makes me really proud to be a Utah resident and to have this incredible venue to host world class triathlon events."

One of her favorite things to do in St. George is hike. She believes the desert scenery in Greater Zion is just beautiful, which is why she also enjoys riding her bike in the area. Some of her favorite places to visit are Snow Canyon and Zion National Park.

As far as who she believes is her biggest competition at IRONMAN, she said, "There are so many incredible female athletes who are pushing the IRONMAN limits: Lucy Charles-Barclay, Daniela Ryf, Laura Philipp, Anne Haug, Katrina Matthews, just to name a few! IRONMAN is also very much a competition against yourself — your physical and mental limits and ability to handle a challenging day."

Who does she think will be victorious in St. George at the 2021 IRONMAN World Championship and the IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship in October? She said October is too far away to say. "There could be a lot of short-course athletes who start racing 70.3 races that we haven't seen over that distance yet. I think there are several men and several women who are capable of winning the 2021 World Championship in St. George, but I don't really like guessing who will win. A lot can happen on race day and it's anyone's game."

As a big fan of the sport, she's a big fan of a lot of competitors. "On the men's side, Sam Long, Lionel Sanders, Gustav Iden, Joe Skipper. They all offer different things to the racing scene and I enjoy seeing what they do!"

Skye loves the race courses in St. George. "I am really looking forward to doing the IRONMAN World Championship course for the first time there. It's going to be beautiful and very challenging, which will make for exciting racing! I also know there will be amazing crowd and volunteer support cheering us on all day, and that makes the race course even more fun and special."

IRONMAN has a really special community, and race day is full of special moments, she said. "At IRONMAN Florida 2021, I had finished the race and was trying to find some calories to get in post-race. (She says ice cream always sounds good and goes down easy after a race.) The sooner you can eat, the better you start feeling and recovering after an IRONMAN."



"My husband wasn't able to come to that race, so he wasn't at the finish line to assist with getting me some food. Some very kind volunteers/spectators at the finish noticed my husband wasn't there and offered to go get me some ice cream from the shop that was right at the finish line. I was physically and mentally exhausted from the day, and it meant a lot that those people were willing to help me and care for me after the grueling race!"

One of her post-race rituals recently has been ice cream right after the race so she can get calories in, typically going for mint chocolate chip, mint, or mint Oreo depending on what's available. Beyond ice cream, usually, what she craves after races are salads and vegetables because leading to a race, she doesn't eat a lot of fiber. The whole day before, she doesn't eat anything green or colorful at all. And during triathlons, she's eating gels for nine hours straight, so all she wants is yummy, nutritious fresh food.

For newcomers interested in participating in an IRONMAN event, Skye says to find a way to make it fun and enjoyable. "You will want to make sure you are well-prepared to go the distance, but enjoying the training and preparation along the way is very important."

When asked about the biggest moments of her athletic career, Skye said, "I just consider it a big accomplishment to make it from being a tax accountant to working hard and making a living as a pro triathlete." Skye sure is proving that dreams do come true, and it doesn't matter how late in life you start, it's just a matter of taking that first step and following through.

The Intermountain Healthcare IRONMAN World Championship presented by Utah Sports Commission comes to Greater Zion on May 7, marking the first time this iconic endurance race leaves its home in Hawaii. For more information, visit GreaterZion.com.

About Greater Zion

Located in the southwest corner of Utah, Greater Zion is a destination that offers more than 2,400 square miles of adventure and inspiration. Zion National Park, the fourth most visited National Park in the United States, is the premier attraction, but Zion is only the beginning. Four state parks and a multitude of year-round recreational lands set the stage for a burgeoning mountain biking scene, some of the best off-highway vehicle riding in the country, scenic and challenging play at 13 top-rated golf courses, world-class cultural performances at Tuacahn Center for the Arts and so much more. The vibrant communities of St. George, Springdale, Hurricane, Ivins and towns in between offer a wide range of lodging options, dining experiences and access to outdoor pursuits through local outfitters and tour companies. Home to the 2021 and 2022 IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship, and the 2021 IRONMAN World Championship, Greater Zion also is a world-class destination for sporting events, conferences and meetings. The Greater Zion Convention and Tourism Office is a transient-room-tax-funded entity of Washington County, Utah. For more information, please visit GreaterZion.com.