

For Immediate Release
November 24, 2009

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No Legs... No Limits

San Diego, California - Rudy Garcia-Tolson became the first double above-knee amputee to finish an Ironman Triathlon when he completed the Ford Ironman Arizona on Sunday, November 22, 2009 in Tempe. "The Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF) has been fortunate enough to watch Rudy grow up right in front of our eyes for the past 14 years," says CAF Vice-President Bob Babbitt. "When he was eight years old, he told us that he was going to win a Paralympic Gold Medal in swimming one day. So far he has won two, one in Athens and another in Beijing. Nothing this young man accomplishes surprises any of us. There are certain athletes that are special and Rudy is definitely one of them."

Garcia-Tolson, who lives in Bloomington, California, attempted the Ford Ironman World Championship in Hawaii on October 10th, but when he missed the 5:30 pm bike cutoff time by eight minutes, he knew that he had to give the event another shot. "I know it's a challenge to try and ride 112 miles without the use of quads or hamstrings and then to get off the bike and try to run a marathon," says Garcia-Tolson who is a spokesperson for both CAF and Ossur Americas, "but I knew that to change the perception of what someone with a disability can accomplish, finishing the Ironman under all of the time cut-offs was a huge step not only for me, but for all of the kids and adults who are out there dealing with limb loss and other challenges."

Garcia-Tolson has spent most of his 21 years pushing boundaries to show that there really are no limits to what he or any other challenged athletes can accomplish. "For me, having my legs amputated at the age of five was the best thing that ever happened to me," he continues. "For the first five years of my life I was in a wheelchair and wasn't able to play with my friends. But after the amputation a whole world of activities opened up for me and today I'm a surfer, skateboarder, runner, cyclist, swimmer and triathlete... and now, an Ironman finisher. Sport is a great equalizer."

In Tempe, Arizona, Garcia-Tolson completed the 2.4 mile swim in 1:00:42, the 112 mile bike in 8:44:45 and the 26.2 mile marathon in 6:00:22 for a total time of 16:06:27. His next goal? He has a little bit of unfinished business in Hawaii. "I would like to go back to Kona next October to give the Ford Ironman World Championship another shot," he admits, "and in 2012 I'd like to go to London and swim in my third Paralympic Games."

Garcia-Tolson has raced on triathlon relay teams with Robin Williams, won the Casey Martin and the Arete Awards and been showcased on national television shows ranging from Oprah and Nightline to the Disney Channel. A large amount of his time is spent speaking to fellow amputees- and their parents- about what the future holds.

"Rudy is amazingly inspirational," continues Babbitt. "The crowds in Arizona were chanting for him all day long. He is someone who touches every life he comes in contact with."

"Reaching this goal has been a dream of mine for years now and I couldn't have done it without my network of supporters including the Challenged Athletes Foundation, Ossur Americas (who makes my advanced prosthetic running feet), PowerBar, my coaches, the fans and most importantly, the next generation of challenged athlete kids that look up to me" says Garcia-Tolson. "To lead by example and show others that the sky is the limit motivates me to continue to push boundaries."

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Challenged Athletes Foundation

The Challenged Athletes Foundation (CAF) is a world leader in helping individuals with physical challenges get involved – and stay involved – in sports. CAF believes that participation in sports at any level increases self-esteem, encourages independence and enhances quality of life. Since 1994, more than \$26 million has been raised and almost 4,000 funding requests from challenged athletes in all 50 states and dozens of countries have been satisfied. Additionally, CAF's outreach efforts reach another 60,000 individuals each year. Whether it's a \$2,000 grant for a handcycle, helping underwrite a carbon fiber running foot not covered by insurance, or arranging enthusiastic encouragement from a mentor who has triumphed over a similar challenge, CAF's mission is clear: give those with the desire to live active, athletic lifestyles every opportunity to compete in the sports they love. To learn more, log on to www.challengedathletes.org or call 858-866-0959.