

Thirteen Injured Veterans from Challenged Athletes Foundation's Operation Rebound Program to Compete at IRONMAN® 70.3® Oceanside

Award-Winning PBS, CNN Journalist Miles O'Brien, Who Lost Arm Nearly 4 Years Ago, Will Compete Alongside His Navy Lieutenant Son to Raise Funds for Operation Rebound

SAN DIEGO, CA – (February 7, 2018) – On April 7, (13) resilient Challenged Athletes Foundation's (CAF) Operation Rebound® (OR) athletes will compete at the IRONMAN® 70.3® Oceanside. The Operation Rebound competitors will join over 5,000 athletes to swim 1.2 miles in Oceanside Harbor, cycle a 56-mile bike route through San Onofre Bluffs State Park and Marine Corps Base at Camp Pendleton and run 13.1 miles through Oceanside. In addition, former CNN anchor and current PBS NewsHour science correspondent Miles O'Brien, who lost his arm nearly four years ago, is travelling from Boston to compete and raise funds for Operation Rebound alongside his Navy Lieutenant son.

CAF's Operation Rebound program (OR) has partnered with IRONMAN® in Oceanside for the last 10 years, working together to strengthen the mental and physical well-being of veterans, military personnel and first responders with permanent physical injuries. OR athletes compete every year in this event, either on a relay team or as individuals, reigniting their competitive spirit and finding community within their team of athletes.

"There is nothing more empowering than sport and competition to help get our injured veterans back in action and motivated to take on more. It pulls together injured veterans and a community of supporters on one team with the common goal of finishing an IRONMAN or IRONMAN 70.3 event," said Nico Marcolongo, Senior Program Manager for CAF's Operation Rebound program."

The 13 OR Challenged Athletes competing at IRONMAN 70.3 Oceanside include Carlsbad's **Lance Weir**, Marine Corps veteran; Captain **Eric McElvenny**, USMC (ret.) and Kona Ironman, **Scott Leason**, Navy Veteran – visually impaired; **Col. Patricia Collins**, U.S. Army (ret.), Paralympian, world record holder of the 70.3 distance triathlon for female amputees; Sgt. **Steve Walker**, U.S.M.C. (ret.); Sgt. **Michael Gallardo**, U.S. Army (ret.) and video producer for MLB Network; Col. **David Rozelle**, U.S. Army and Kona Ironman, Cpl. **Evan Morgan**, U.S.M.C. (ret.); **Logan Farr**, Air Force Veteran, **Raul Romero**, Army Veteran, **Maj. Anthony Smith**, U.S. Army (ret.), **Spc. Dan Oakland**, U.S. Army (ret.) and **Col Danny Dudek**, U.S. Army. In addition, Challenged Athletes **Miles O'Brien**, **Adrian Broca**, **Edwin Figueroa** and **Rob Balucas** will also be competing for CAF's Operation Rebound team.

Miles O'Brien, an award-winning television news journalist, is nearly four years into his new life as an arm-amputee and will be coming from Washington D.C. to Oceanside to compete with his son on behalf of CAF. He lost his arm due to compartment syndrome after a case of TV gear fell onto his forearm.

"When my Navy Lieutenant son challenged me to join him in competing in Oceanside, I knew I had found the main event that I'd been looking for since my amputation. I know first-hand what great work CAF does and I want to do whatever I can to help their important mission. So, I told my son 'game on' and got busy swimming, biking, running, and fundraising," said O'Brien.

CAF's Operation Rebound challenged athletes competing at IRONMAN 70.3 Oceanside include:

- **Dave Rozelle** — Rozelle is an icon, resource and inspirational figure for American service members injured in recent conflicts. Dave lost his leg when a landmine exploded under his Humvee while on deployment in Iraq. A year to the date of his accident, Dave assumed command of his unit in Iraq, becoming the first service member to return to combat command. Rozelle was the inspiration behind CAF's Operation Rebound program and continues to push the limits in the world of triathlon and beyond.

- **Evan Morgan** — While stationed in Iraq on his second tour, Evan's vehicle was struck by an IED and as a result, he lost his right leg above the knee, left leg below the knee and sight in one eye. While in recovery at Brooke Army Medical Center in Texas, Evan became a regular at the gym. He was active prior to the injury, but now activity became a necessary part of his life. Evan became interested in triathlon and competed in CAF's SDTC and IRONMAN 70.3 Oceanside in 2008 and 2009, hoping to encourage others to live an active lifestyle.

- **Patty Collins** — After returning home from deployment in Iraq, Patty was hit by a car while cycling to work. The injuries she sustained led to the amputation of her leg below the knee. Patty began running and cycling, turning her passion for sports into a career and mentorship opportunities. Patty is the CAF record holder of the half-distance triathlon for female amputees.

- **Danny Dudek** — On July, 19 2007 while serving the 4th Stryker Brigade Stryker Battalion in, Iraq, Danny's Stryker armored vehicle was struck by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) the blast from which paralyzed him from the waist down. Soon after being evacuated to the U.S., with his wife Megan by his side, Danny began working on his recovery. Danny was introduced to CAF in 2011. An avid skier from the Great Northwest, Danny applied for and received a mono-ski from CAF Operation Rebound. Danny is active in skiing, chair racing, handcycling and triathlon. This is his first IRONMAN 70.3 Oceanside.

- **Logan Farr** — Upon completion of his time in the Air Force, Logan became a firefighter, and then three years later, was hit by a train and lost both of his feet on his 21st birthday. Within two weeks of his accident, Logan was released from the hospital and back in the gym that same day. He now competes in CrossFit and is a certified instructor, with goals of competing in the Paralympic games.

- **Michael Gallardo** — On a combat tour in Iraq with the U.S. Army, Mike sustained a severe injury to his right leg when two IEDs simultaneously detonated beneath his truck. Mike decided to amputate his leg in order to lead an active lifestyle and hasn't looked back since. Mike now works at the MLB network in New York and remains active in numerous sports including CrossFit and Para equestrian.

- **Scott Leason** — When Scott was 20-years-old, he joined the U.S. Navy and served honorably for seven years. While working at a convenience store, Scott was shot in the head during a robbery and lost both of his eyes and sense of smell. In 2007, Scott began waterskiing again; this time as a visually impaired athlete. With the help of CAF's Operation Rebound program, he has competed in multiple IRONMAN races, waterski events, and was the sole visually impaired athlete on Team USA at the ISA World Adaptive Surfing Championship presented by Team CAF.

- **Eric McElvenny** — McElvenny excelled in both baseball and football throughout high school and went on to major in Mechanical Engineering at the U.S Naval Academy. Following graduation and Marine Corps training, Eric deployed three times to the Middle East. On his third deployment to Afghanistan, Eric was working with Afghan soldiers and stepped on an IED, suffering the loss of his right leg below the knee in the explosion. Eric used surfing as part of his recovery and from there, started competing in triathlon. In 2013, Eric completed the IRONMAN World Championship in Kailua-Kona, HI and has gone on to complete a number of IRONMAN and IRONMAN 70.3 events since that time.

- **Dan Oakland** — Dan was drafted into U.S. Army during the Vietnam War. Within 3 weeks of completing basic training, Dan lost his right leg below the knee to an anti-personnel mine while on patrol in South Vietnam. Dan is now an active cyclist and is participating in his first IRONMAN 70.3.

- **Raul Romero** — Raul enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War to serve his adopted country. He served as a medic and saved a number of lives, earning him a Bronze Star for valor. Upon returning from Vietnam, Raul helped start the San Diego Running Club and became an avid marathon runner. In 2012, Raul's leg was left paralyzed during a surgical mishap and finally in January of 2017, he elected to have his leg amputated, regaining his active lifestyle of cycling and running.

- **Anthony Smith** — Smith took a direct hit from a rocket-propelled grenade while on deployment in Iraq. He was put in a body bag before a nurse noticed air bubbles coming up through the blood. Anthony was in

a coma for 62 days and only recently regained most of his memory. He lost his right arm below the elbow and underwent dozens of surgeries, learning to write and throw a ball to his child with his left hand. Anthony later started competing in triathlons, did CAF's 620-mile Million Dollar Challenge ride and earned his black belt in martial arts, opening his own studio. He is currently training for the U.S. Paralympic Tae Kwan Do team that will debut at the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics.

- **Steve Walker** — While serving in the Marine Corps, Walker was diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa, a condition that rapidly deteriorated his ability to see. Steve recently graduated college with a degree in Psychology, specializing in Marriage and Family therapy along with Sports psychology. He now helps fellow veterans who have disabilities transition back to civilian life. In 2014, Steve completed his first IRONMAN event and has been a finisher at the IRONMAN World Championship in Kailua-Kona, HI.

- **Lance Weir** — Marine Corps Reservist Weir was dislodging a canoe in a river, when afterwards, he leaned headfirst into the water to retrieve his baseball cap. His head hit a submerged rock, shattering his C5 vertebrae and he became a quadriplegic. 17 years after his injury, CAF's Operation Rebound encouraged Weir to enrich his life through sport. Over the years, he has earned 8 gold medals in Air Rifle at both the Marine Corps Trials and the Warrior Games. In 2017, Lance and his pilot became the first tandem handcycle team to compete in an IRONMAN 70.3 event in Oceanside.

CAF's Operation Rebound program funds equipment, training and travel expenses that can help our injured troops and first responders harness the healing power of sport – whether the goal is to win Paralympic gold or simply run around the block with their kids. In 2017, CAF awarded a record 307 Operation Rebound grants totaling \$480,000. Since 2004, CAF has awarded 2,222 Operation Rebound grants and supported 1,200 individuals, totaling \$3.4 Million in support.

To learn more about CAF's Operation Rebound program visit: <http://operationrebound.org/>

CAF's Operation Rebound program is supported by the following Program Sponsors: Accenture, VAVI Sport & Social, Spinergy, Del Mar Mud Run and XTERRA WETSUITS.

CAF is accredited by The Patriots Initiative (TPI), as one of finest non-profit organizations in the nation supporting America's armed forces service members, veterans and their families.

To register for a remaining spot racing IRONMAN 70.3 Oceanside with Team CAF, visit <http://www.challengedathletes.org/events/ironman-70-3-california/>

About the Challenged Athletes Foundation

The Challenged Athletes Foundation® (CAF) is a world leader in helping people with physical challenges lead active, healthy lifestyles. CAF believes that participation in physical activity at any level increases self-esteem, encourages independence and enhances quality of life. Since 1994, more than \$93 million has been raised and over 18,000 funding requests from people with physical challenges 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 \$2,500 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 opportunities and support to those with the desire to live active, athletic lifestyle. To learn more, visit challengedathletes.org or call 858-866-0959.

#