

# LIMIT LESS



Meet ice swimmer Ryan Stamrood, the man who's capable of the impossible

**F**or the average South African, encounters with ice are limited to partially frosted windscreens during winter and ice buckets for cooling bottles of wine in summer. For Ryan Stamrood, ice swimmer and motivational speaker, however, sitting in ice tubs at I&J is just a typical day at the office. Even though he considers himself to be an 'average Joe', the amazing feats his mind and body have accomplished in water below 0°C have far removed him from that label. A pioneer in the sport, Ryan has defied what medical journals say is the norm and has bulldozed the idea of a comfort zone – he even swims to Robben Island before work!

#### MIND'S GAME

Intense body conditioning is imperative, but there is only so much you can do to make sure your body is ready for swims in such extreme conditions. Once Ryan has settled into a tub full of ice and has let his body adjust, it then turns into a mind game. 'Our minds are designed to make us believe in our limitations,' he says. 'If you believe in your own limitations, you have no reason to challenge them.' The real training session therefore begins as soon as Ryan has broken through this restrictive state of mind.

Ryan believes these limits are there for a reason, as it is human nature to want to avoid situations that are lethal. 'It is great for the survival of the species and all of that, but you don't learn anything,' he says. 'If I believed what I did was impossible and I just did it, what else can I achieve that I believe is impossible?'

This idea of overcoming the impossible got its water wings when Ryan first started swimming to Robben Island. 'Back in the day, that particular swim was reserved for superhumans. Then I did it. I've now done it a total of 54 times.' Next, Ryan set his sights on the English Channel, a 40 km

#### RYAN'S THREE KEY LESSONS FROM ICE SWIMMING:

1. 'I am much more capable of doing things than I actually believed. I've applied what I've learnt in the water to other areas of my life. For instance, what's stopping my business from pitching for the same account as our bigger competitors?'
2. 'I understand that if I stay in my comfort zone, I will learn nothing. It is like being alright with delivering limited performances at work, as it gets you by. But, you will not learn. You have to try get outside of your comfort zone.'
3. 'Try not to take things too seriously. Yes, we do put our bodies on the line when we get into the extremely cold water, but we have a lot of fun before and after (mostly after). The trick is to stay true to yourself.'



else had dared to go before: 'Founder and Chairman of the International Ice Swimming Association (IISA) Ram Barkai and Kieron Palframan and I wanted to be the first to do an official mile swim in the arctic circle,' he says.

Ryan set off with fellow ice swimmers to one of the coldest places on Earth: the Arctic Circle. The swim would take place in a 25m pool cut out of the ice, the water sitting at 0°C and air temperature at -10°C. 'All I was wearing was a speedo, cap and goggles. I had to do 66 laps with two colleagues,' he says. 'I got extremely emotional beforehand. Your mind is such a powerful tool that it does everything it can to try and force you to get out of the situation.'

Ryan describes the turmoil his body experienced and the mental tug-of-war his mind played with him once he was in the water: 'It is difficult to describe how frightening it is when you feel yourself physically shutting down,' he says. 'You are dying, but you are not at the end of the pool yet, you have still got 300m to swim, if you're going to make your goal.' If it was not for his support crew cheering him on and keeping their eyes on him every stroke of the way, Ryan would not have made it. 'I knew they would not let me sink,' he says. 'You put your whole life in their hands.'

#### WRITING THE BOOK

When it comes to preparing for these extremely cold swims, there is little to no information to use as a point of reference. 'We're pioneers. With others, we're writing the book, basically,' Ryan says. 'That's why it is so nerve-racking.' There are medical journals that stipulate how it is impossible (or 'just very hard', as Ryan puts it) to perform in certain conditions over a particular period of time. Ryan put their claims to the test, however, when he went to the Antarctic Circle to do another one-mile swim.

The water was -1°C. There's very little research in this area; however, it's generally accepted that a person will be unable to perform for longer than five to 10 minutes before hypothermia kicks in. 'I swam the

cold-water swim. 'About 700 people did it before me, so I knew it was possible, but I didn't believe it was possible for me,' he says. Ryan completed the swim in 13 hours and proved to himself that he can do more than he thinks he is capable of.

#### ICE SCREAM

Ryan's desire to push his mind and body even further was spurred on by these big accomplishments. The mental breakthrough he experienced opened up a new realm in his brain that needed to be explored, and tried and tested on a more extreme level. The ultimate test was to go where no one

#### THE AFTER-DROP

The most dangerous part of the swim is when you get out, Ryan says. Your body is on the brink of hypothermia and it experiences what is called the after-drop. 'Your body starts sending blood to your core in order to protect your vital organs,' he says. This makes it very difficult for the rest of your body to perform because there is no blood left in your muscles. 'The blood rushes from your shoulders, thighs, toes and everywhere else,' Ryan says. 'The warm blood cools down as it recirculates back to your core, but now it is a lot colder.' This means the core temperature will continue to drop as you get out of the water. 'If your core temperature drops one degree, then you're dead.'

#### THRIVE PERSONALITY

#### WILDLIFE ENCOUNTERS

Leopard seals in Antarctica - 400 kg of muscle with loads of teeth 'They're petrifying, Neanderthal-like creatures,' Ryan says. 'I didn't even know they existed before then.'



Whales near Robben Island 'While I was swimming, I looked down and saw that the ground was suddenly two metres below me. I was a third of the way and there aren't any rocks there. It was a whale. Its tail came right up by my head.'

full mile in 32 minutes,' Ryan says. 'Our expedition company is now rewriting its medical journal's procedures according to what they learnt from us.'

Not only is this a chance for the medical field to expand their knowledge, but it has also taught Ryan quite a bit about his capabilities as a person. 'I learnt a lot about myself and my abilities, not just when I'm in the cold,' he says. 'I don't possess any superhuman abilities to preheat my core as some apparently do, but through a simple belief in myself and by pushing past my own impossible, I continue to achieve way beyond anyone's wildest expectations.'

Ryan is a founding member of the IISA, an organisation that defines and refines ice swims around the world. He also works in advertising at Stramrood Connect, his advertising agency. Above all, he cannot stress enough how he is just like everybody else. 'I'm absolutely average. I have a day job, a family and a bond,' he says. 'I've just done the training and planning, and I believe in myself.' **Man**

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