

Sika Henry

History-Making Professional Triathlete, Ultramarathoner

What if you don't quit: It is easy to give up, but what happens if you keep going? Sika Henry was well on her way to becoming the first African American Woman to turn professional in the sport of triathlon until a horrific accident changed everything. After suffering a list of traumatic injuries, including a broken nose, lacerated face, and oral injuries that left Sika unrecognizable, her only thought was "I quit". Initially she wanted no part of the sport, until she thought "but what would happen if I didn't quit?" Once Sika was cleared by the doctors to resume training, Sika began swimming, cycling, and running twice a day, nearly every day while working a full-time corporate job as an analyst. Less than six months after her accident, Sika competed in the IRONMAN World Championships in Kona, Hawaii – a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, and 26.2-mile run – widely considered one of the most difficult one-day sporting events in the world. And in 2021, Sika qualified for her elite card, becoming the first African American Woman to race professionally in triathlon.

The importance of diversity and representation: If you can see it, you can be it. When Sika Henry showed up to her first triathlon, she was the only person of color competing at the event. When she discovered that only 0.5% of participants in triathlon were African American, and that a black woman had never competed professionally in the sport, it reminded her of the importance of role models – that seeing the reflection of someone who looks like you, breaking barriers, setting records, or winning an Olympic medal can shape your imagination and dreams about what is possible. In 2017, Sika set a goal to qualify for her pro card in triathlon. After enduring numerous setbacks, including a horrific cycling accident, as well as a global pandemic, Sika became the first African American Woman to race professionally in the sport of triathlon in 2021. She has since become an Ambassador for the IRONMAN Foundation's Race for Change initiative to get more people of color in the sport, and has become a mentor to young black women across the country.