

Athletes competing in the Rohto Ironman 70.3 Miami event on October 30, 2010, who raised money for the Blazeman Foundation helped provide funds for the current grant to support ALS research being conducted by Dr. Carol Milligan.



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The late Jonathan “Blazeman” Blais, elite athlete and multi-sport competitor, was diagnosed with ALS in 2005 at age 33.

Funds from Ironman Events Promote Research

Bob and Mary Ann Blais were looking for the right kind of ALS research project to help fund. Ramon Jimenez-Moreno, PhD, was looking for the right kind of funding to help his ALS research project. Thanks to a conference presentation that brought them together, seed funding is now in place to explore a promising ALS treatment.

The Blaises run the Blazeman Foundation for ALS, founded by their late son, Jonathan “Blazeman” Blais. He was an elite athlete and multi-sport competitor when he was diagnosed with ALS in 2005 at age 33, and he set up the foundation to carry on his fight.

Jimenez-Moreno noted in his presentation—given at Johns Hopkins in spring 2010—that his research project could move forward if funding could be found. Hearing the presentation, the Blaises became interested. After learning more about the research and the ALS program at Wake Forest Baptist, they directed a foundation grant of \$11,300 to fund the project, with the possibility of providing an additional \$11,000.

The foundation, which is based in Seekonk, Mass., raises money primarily from triathlon ironman events across the country.

“Jon felt strongly that the multi-sport community would play an important role in finding, at minimum, an effective treatment for ALS at its early stage,” said Bob Blais. “This study hopefully will lead to that effective treatment.”

The study being conducted by Jimenez-Moreno, who is a research fellow, and Professor Carol Milligan, PhD, will examine the use of the FDA-approved drug AICAR in inducing muscle-fiber type switch in the mouse model of ALS. Positive results in the study could provide the first step toward a clinical trial of AICAR for treating ALS symptoms.

“The Blazeman Foundation for ALS provides funds to explore new ideas,” said Milligan. “They are, without a doubt, laying a foundation for large advancements in understanding the disease and the development of effective therapeutics.”

Milligan said researchers working on ALS and other neurodegenerative diseases often lack the funding needed to obtain preliminary data. She said the grant addresses that need, which will make it easier to secure additional funding from other sources and promote further research.