LONGMEADOW – Seven years ago, B.J. Williams made a decision that would change his life, end a promising hockey career and damage his brain.

“It was the first time in my life I didn’t wear a seat belt,” he remembers.

A native of Longmeadow, Williams landed a construction job in the summer of 2005. He was 21. But on the way home from a job on July 28, the pickup truck in which Williams was riding shot off the Massachusetts Turnpike in Warren. The driver was speeding, and Williams was ejected from the passenger door.

“I only remember getting onto the Mass. Pike. That’s the last thing I remember. Then I remember waking up in the hospital two days later,” he said.

Williams’ recovery has been nothing short of miraculous. Although he’s had to hang up his hockey skates, he’s competing in new arenas – biking, swimming and running marathons.
"I took a new approach to life and now set out for things I could never do. I don’t want to take a step back physically in any way," he said.

Williams has dedicated his life and career to preventing brain injuries and supporting survivors. He is manager of prevention programs for the Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts, a non-profit organization that will hold its fifth annual B.J. Williams Road Race here on July 14.

**IF YOU GO**

- **Event:** B.J. Williams Road Racedline
- **When:** July 14, 9 a.m.
- **Where:** Wolf Swamp Fields, across from the Twin Hills Country Club, Longmeadow
- **For info:** Online, [www.biama.org](http://www.biama.org) and click on “Get Involved” and then “Fundraising;” call (508) 475-0032

The race raises money to fund the association’s work for support, education and advocacy programs.

Williams’ recovery has been remarkable, but it’s not been complete. He’s lost his sense of smell and taste, he’s deaf in his right ear, occasionally loses his equilibrium and balance, and suffers from between one and two migraine headaches every week.

"The brain will never fully heal 100 percent. In some cases, it changes your hopes and dreams, and it changes families and lives forever," he said.

Williams suffered for years from anxiety and depression. He grew distant from people and lost close friends.

"Emotionally, I struggle with the fact that I can’t play hockey anymore, but I want to still be dominant physically in some way, to show myself that I’m not physically impaired – that I can still be that athlete that I always wanted to be," said Williams.

In August 2010, Williams ran from Longmeadow to Boston – 98 miles in 22 hours and 31 minutes. He’s competed in two Iron Man triathlons that include a 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike ride and a marathon.

"I did it to inspire people who are suffering some way, whether they’re battling something traumatic in life or some other kind of setback," he said.

Williams says 44,000 people in Massachusetts suffer brain injuries every year and that brain trauma strikes someone in the U.S. every 23 seconds. Williams had planned on a career in hockey. Instead, his goal now is to tell his story – one that could have had a tragic ending.

"I’m very fortunate compared to a lot of brain injury survivors. This shows me what I should really be grateful for in life and how important life really is."