

## OWLS Members Pursue Triathlon

By Andria Joseph

When I crossed the finish line of my first competitive triathlon last spring, it was a euphoric moment. Not only had I accomplished something that just a few months earlier I would have thought next to impossible, but I had actually enjoyed the experience, survived to tell the tale, and even had enough steam to haul my bike out to my car when it was all over.

Not long ago, when I thought of the sport of triathlon, my mind went to images of Kona and Ironman triathletes pushing their bodies to the brink under brutal conditions. Impressive? Yes. My idea of a good time? Definitely not. Later, though, I began to hear about triathlons that seemed achievable by “mere mortals.” I also saw ads for women-only triathlons, for shorter, untimed, “tri-it” distances, and the idea of doing a triathlon began to intrigue me. But how to get started?

I should make clear that I am not anyone’s idea of a “hard core athlete.” I swam competitively in high school (a long time ago), I walked the Portland Marathon in 2003 and 2004, and I count myself a member of the OWLS DragonFlies dragon boat team. But I was not a runner or a cyclist or an endurance athlete by any means. I am a busy mom with a full-time job and a full-time-plus family who, with some success, tries very hard to get to the gym four or five days a week. Kona is not in the cards for me, but the idea—the allure—of taking on the unique challenge of triathlon wouldn’t leave me alone.

The sport of triathlon started in 1974, with the first Ironman taking place in 1978. In 2000, triathlon debuted as an Olympic Sport at the Summer Games in Sydney, Australia.<sup>i</sup> It is a sport that has grown exponentially since its relatively recent beginnings. Twelve men finished the first Ironman in 1978. In 2007, 1,500 people were competing in Ironman annually. Today USA Triathlon boasts over 110,000 members,<sup>ii</sup> and there are thousands of events worldwide with hundreds of thousands of participants. There are all-women’s events; short, non-competitive “tri-it” races; and even events for kids, ranging from “Splash, Pedal, Dash” events to a newly launched IronKids series for children as young as six!

While the Ironman distance is probably the most recognizable, the international or “Olympic” distance is the most popular and is the format used at the triathlon world championships and the Olympics. An Olympic-distance triathlon consists of a 1.5km swim, 40km bike ride, and 10k run. Sprint events, which are roughly half the distance of an Olympic-distance race, are also very popular. My first competitive triathlon was a sprint distance out at Blue Lake Park near Portland. It was a “practice” race in preparation for the upcoming Olympic distance I would be competing in at the Pacific Crest Sports Festival in June in Sunriver.

Why would someone take on the challenge of a triathlon? And if you decided to go for it, how would you get started? There are as many answers to these questions as there are people to ask them. Some are drawn by the challenge, some by the variety of the training, some for the allure of being able to call themselves a triathlete and impress their friends at dinner parties. Some, like local attorney

Kristin Sterling, were motivated by hearing about the experiences of others and wanting to “tri” it out. She and I are among at least a handful of OWLS members who are training or planning to train for a triathlon.

There are also numerous ways to pursue your training. Countless resources online and in bookstores can provide guidance, encouragement, and training plans. Clubs have formed in local gyms and in the Portland community, like the Portland Tri Club, that offer the camaraderie and accountability of group training. And organizations like Team in Training with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society provide coaching, mentoring, group workouts, training plans, race day support, and an opportunity to fundraise for a worthwhile organization while you pursue your own personal goals.

Kristin and I both trained with Team in Training (TNT), although in different years. I also met another Portland attorney through TNT when we, by chance, became training partners. She and I continue to train together and plan future races. Kristin recommends starting your training with a group: “There is so much you need to know, and it really helps to have a good group of people you can ask your pesky questions to and a training schedule and training buddies to keep you on track.” There are those amazingly self-disciplined and determined people out there, though, who successfully train on their own. The important thing is to know yourself and find the best path for your own personality and style.

However you pursue triathlon, starting and sticking with training can be overwhelming, especially trying to fit it into the already busy schedules so many of us have. In the past year I have had the opportunity to meet a lot of amazing people, many of them women and several of them attorneys, who have taken on triathlon. Their tips include having a good calendar and putting every workout on it, planning workouts around getting to and from work, finding a workout buddy even if you are training on your own, letting family and friends know what you are doing—their support and encouragement are important, remembering to give yourself some downtime, and most of all, enjoying the experience.

Getting in shape, meeting amazing people, challenging yourself and overcoming boundaries are only some of the incredible benefits of training for a triathlon. I have found that the variety has kept me interested and motivated to work out and has also kept me from injuries that often sprout up from single sport training. I love the whole-body workout of swimming, cycling and running, and I think that pursuing my goals in triathlon has, in many ways, improved my professional and personal life. I believe, and I think many others would agree, that pursuing the sport of triathlon is a life-changing process. If that challenge calls to you, I would encourage you to strike out and “tri” it.

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<sup>i</sup> Colin Barr and Steve Katai, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Triathlon Training* 4–5 (2007).

<sup>ii</sup> USA Triathlon, *History of Triathlon*, <http://www.usatriathlon.org/content/index/56> (last visited September 2009).