

DIVING INTO YOUR FIRST TRI

by MELONEE HURT



If you have ever considered dipping your toe in the waters of the sport of triathlon, the best place to begin is at the finish. Spend 10 minutes at the finish line of any triathlon and you will be hooked by the passion, enthusiasm, determination and sense of accomplishment you will see on every sweaty face crossing that sacred line. And contrary to what your pre-conceived notions may be about the sport, you will see athletes representing all ages, all body types, and all skill levels.

Yes, there will be elite racers on very expensive tri bikes who train year-round and wear tri gear emblazoned with sponsors. But there will also be the new mom who has worked like a dog to get her baby weight off, and the 50-year-old brothers who have used triathlon training as a challenge to see who can get the fittest.

You'll see kiddos fervently cheering on Mom or Dad. You'll see gray hair, old injuries bandaged up and first-time finishers beaming with equal parts surprise and satisfaction.

USA Triathlon-certified coach and seasoned triathlete Derek Stone

agrees that even after competing in the sport for years, finish lines can spark new interest or even renew someone's fire for the sport.

"Look at all the shapes and sizes of the finishers," he says. "It's astonishing. You realize from seeing people come across the finish line that the sport isn't just elite racers with record times. There's a lot of regular people out there trying to finish a race – and they are doing it. It's very inspirational."

GET STARTED

The sport of triathlon comes in

many forms and sizes. Races consist of a swim, a bike and a run, although many race organizers have instituted relay teams and divisions that only involve two of the three disciplines in an attempt to make the sport accessible to even more people.

Race distances vary from beginner-friendly "sprint" races, which are generally a 200- to 400-meter swim, a 10-mile bike and a 5k run, to a full Ironman distance, which is a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike and then a marathon, or 26.2 miles.

Faye Yates, co-director of Team Magic Multisports, which executes

the Eddie Ferrell Music City Triathlon and the Tri Nashville Triathlon in Nashville as well as other races across the Southeast, said the future of the sport lies in growing the field of athletes.

"We love our elite racers, of course, yet the heart and soul of this sport are the weekend warriors who are out there trying to better themselves," Yates said. "At every race we do, there is always a beginner friendly option, ranging from a sprint race, to categories such as the AquaBike or the CycloRun which open the sport up to people who maybe aren't comfortable doing the swim or maybe can't run a long distance. We also always have a relay option."

JUMP IN

The best way to prepare for the triathlon season, which generally runs April through September, is to start now. Yes now. It's 30 degrees outside, dark at 4 p.m. and there's a wind whipping so hard you can hear it.

But beginning to swim, bike and run now is what will set you up for a rewarding triathlon this summer.

Conrad Goeringer, owner of Working Triathlete and Ironman-certified coach says the two best

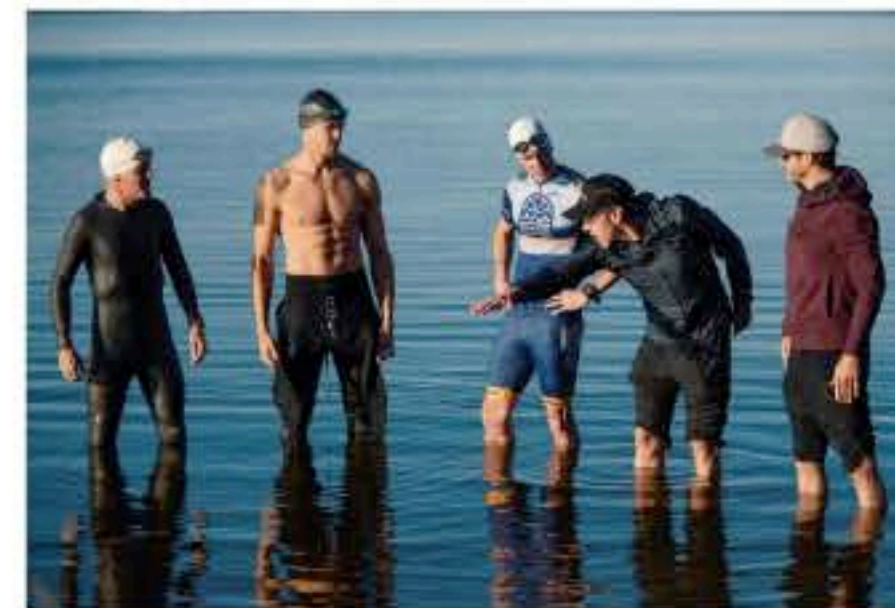
ways to begin to train are to build a foundation of some good habits and to find a group to train with.

"Your training sessions don't have to be long. It's about habits and building a rhythm. Get out there for 30 minutes. The biggest thing is getting started. Negotiate with yourself. Just get out the door. Once you are there you can usually keep it going."

If you are uncertain about how to train, where to train and what pitfalls to avoid, check into a local triathlon club.

John Marks, President and co-founder of East Nashville Triathlon Club, said his group prides itself on being an inclusive club for anyone getting started in the sport.

"With all the different gear, technical terms, and training approaches, it can be overwhelming to get started in the sport, so we really focus on making the club a fun and welcoming place," he said. "Group training is a great motivating



tool, and that's even more true during the off season. When it's cold and wet and dark, it's very tempting to stay inside. Knowing other people are out there to train with you, and hearing from teammates about their plans for next season can give athletes an extra boost.

John Turner with MidTn Multisport Tri Club said the main thing you get from training with a group right now is accountability.

"Get with a club and be around people who have the same goals you have," he said. "As the weather starts getting better, we have group runs and bikes and open water swims a couple of days a week."

FEEL LIKE A KID AGAIN

If the thought of taking on essentially three sports in one seems daunting, Goeringer says to embrace it, not fear it.

"This is what makes triathlons awesome," he said. "There is enough variety that it doesn't get monotonous. There's always something to improve upon. This is an area in your life where there's an opportunity to progress and it's measurable."

Turner sees it as an opportunity to get to experience three modalities that almost take you back to how you used to play as a child. Kids, he said, 'play' by running around, riding their bikes and hitting the swimming pool. "These are things we considered



Photos by Sam Carbine @scarbine

fun as kids," he said. "As we age, we get away from that, but we shouldn't. This sport takes you back to your childhood and you also aren't beating your body up running all the time."

Goeringer said that athletes should trust their body's ability to adapt to training.

"The swim is a big obstacle. Most people can swim to not drown. But they can't grasp swimming 1,500 meters. But those same people have never strung together 12 swim sessions. It's incredible how it clicks. You can become a competent, proficient swimmer. Don't be intimidated or afraid."

Triathlete Tracy Turner said when she did her first sprint race in 2010, she thought she was going to die in the water because of her fear of open-water swimming. To date, she has done four half-Ironman races.

"To be able to conquer that fear was awesome," she said. "I know I have this pride that there was something that terrified me, and I overcame it. That was really exciting to me."

NEXT STEPS

The USA Triathlon web site is another great resource for training tips, club contacts and a massive race calendar. Stone recommends picking a sprint race and working backwards from there.

"If you know you are going to do a race, say, the first Saturday in May, then that gives you a clear training calendar that can help you stay on track, scale your workouts and structure your training," he said. "I recommend that a beginner train a minimum of six hours a week. That's an hour a day with one day off."

Goeringer adds to not let your daily schedule be a limiting factor to your ability to train at that pace. Plenty of people with kids and busy jobs still find a way to do it, and you can too.

"You have to be real with yourself and understand your life schedule," he said. "If you aren't a morning person, that's fine. You don't have to wake up at 4 a.m. to get a great workout in. Do it at lunch or after the kids go to bed. Find the path of least resistance."

Triathlons happen all over the country, but Nashvillians are lucky to have one of the best right here in their own back yard. The Eddie Ferrell Music City Triathlon stages at Titans Nissan Stadium, with a downstream swim in the Cumberland River, (and starts with a jump from the General Jackson Showboat if you do the Olympic distance.) The bike is on Ellington Parkway, which is closed to traffic and the run is a totally flat course.

"Music City is my favorite race and it's a great triathlon for beginners," Goeringer said. "You can wrap your head around the distances. Anyone who is healthy can train for that race. It's such a fun, vibrant venue."

And you just never know how the discipline of training for a triathlon might benefit you outside of your time in the pool, on the bike or out for a run.

"The triathlon community is full of people who tend to be high achievers," Goeringer said. "You surround yourself with people who are ambitious and that translates to other areas of your life, whether that's your work or your sense of self."

