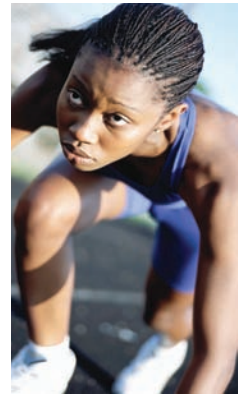


PhysicallyFIT

Taking on the TRIATHLON

By Gavin McKay



"So where is the Triathlon? Right here in Fairmont Park. Wait, you're going to swim in the Schuylkill? Good luck with that." This statement sums up most of the conversations I had with interested friends before race day. Funny I hadn't even thought of the cleanliness of the Schuylkill (which is clean... enough). I was too busy thinking of why I signed myself up for a .5 mile swim, 13 mile bike, and 3.5 mile run and how to get through it when I hadn't swam more than a few times since childhood. And to top it off, I only had a twelve year old mountain bike on which to ride.

I was always intrigued and a bit scared by the idea of racing Triathlons. It is a mark of a well-rounded athlete and elite club for those willing to stretch their abilities across three very different athletic pursuits. Being more of a sprinting and strength athlete, endurance clearly had been outside of my comfort zone. I learned that like most challenges in life, they seem scarier than they are, and they are completely attainable for most people.

In preparing for the big race, I found an expert Fusion client, David Bishop, a veteran and now sponsored triathlete (shown in the epic with me after finishing), to help me with my training. My resident triathlon expert, Dave, gave me the low down on how to schedule a week of training that included swimming, biking, and running, how long to train for each session, and how to start to combine the segments (called a "brick" training session). With about seven weeks I had enough time, but was definitely cutting it close. All athletes have their strengths and weaknesses. I studied Dave's triathlon books on form, cadence, heart rate, endurance vs. speed training, etc. and talked to as many people as I could. I received tips here and there which all came together to educate me enough to "take on the triathlon".

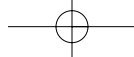
For Dave, the sprint triathlon was just a warm-up to the "big" Olympic distance event the next day. Yes the next day. Dave was a 'tri-animal', but he wasn't the only 'tri-fanatic' out at this year's Philadelphia Insurance Triathlon benefiting CHOP. There was an entire community of mostly amateur triathletes who challenged themselves to a truly balanced race event. Dave placed in the top ten in both races, although he was out numbered by men and women from their early twenties through their fifties who just wanted to have a good day of it.

Showing up to the transition area on race day, I felt like the new kid in school on the first day of classes; only I was wearing Kmart clothes. The pre-game faces were on- one of concentration that can easily come off as the 'cold shoulder' in the mind of a newbie. Once I figured out where I was supposed to be, I pushed my hunk of junk passed the shiny, new speedsters while averting eye contact. Luckily, I saw a few familiar faces near my parking spot that made me feel welcome.

During the short warm-up run, all I could think about was getting through the swim. The swim starts in waves, and when my group was called I was happily

surprised to find the water was actually warm and inviting. "Just stay calm and find a nice stroke, keep it calm, keep it calm," I thought to myself. For those who haven't swam in a Triathlon, let me tell you, it's not at all like an orderly lap pool. It's every man for himself. My first stroke was good and then WAP! I was hit on the head. WAP, hit on the leg, and so on until we spread out. By that time I was breathing every stroke and struggling- so much for remaining calm. Somehow on race day I found a way to keep going; switching from freestyle to every swim stroke in the book on the long leg back to shore.

The transitions are fun, it's like being on a NASCAR pit crew- take off cap and goggles, pull on socks, slip on bike shoes and you're off running your bike up the entryway to the road. The cycling went off without a hitch thankfully, except for the brief moment of self-consciousness upon fixing my eyes on the bulging, powerful, cycling calves of the fifty seven year old who passed me during the second loop. I hope I am rocking it at that age! By the time I reached the run, my legs were definitely feeling heavy and awkward as they were filled with blood from the cycling. After .5 mile, I hit a decent stride, the blood moved up



throughout my body and I ran as hard as I could to the finish line. I was shocked to find out later that I finished the 3.5 miles faster than any endurance foot race to date.

I had taken on the Tri and conquered it without injury or embarrassment! It was over, and while physically my legs felt cramping, mentally I was riding high from my feeling of accomplishment. As you come through the finish line volunteers place a medal around your neck. At first I thought these prizes would just get tossed out as junk. However, all the medals being flashed after the race were actually badges of honor for triathletes. The medals find a place to be displayed as a reminder of huge obstacles that were overcome.

I highly recommend a triathlon (starting at sprint distances) to anyone interested in challenging themselves in new ways. Don't be intimidated, as nobody racing these events is a master of all three segments. By working through your weakest segment, you can gain more physical fitness and confidence than via any other activity. Whether or not you choose to race a triathlon, or embark on any personal challenge, building up the courage to face your fears, the determination to practice consistently, and the heart to finish will provide you with one of life's most valuable lessons- empowerment to achieve your dreams.



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