

APPROACHING 200 MULTISPORT RACES

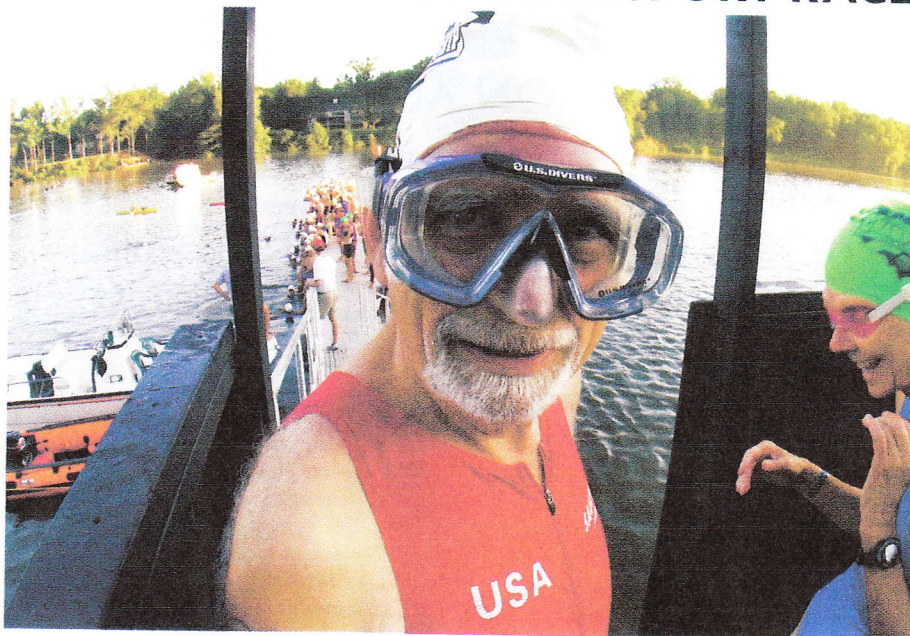
Some years ago in an exchange of correspondence with Dave Scott, I happened to send him a copy of a photo of me finishing the triathlon at the International Masters Games held at Hagg Lake, Ore., on August 20, 1998. In one communication, evidently misreading what I had said in describing the photo, Dave said, "I particularly enjoyed the attached cover photo of your 4th place finish at the Masters Games! You look awfully fresh!" In responding to Dave I said, "My finish in that race was 4th from last, not 4th place!" I went on to say: "My freshness is a measure of my approach to racing: to go out at a comfortable pace, make my primary objective crossing the finish line, and have fun."

I am writing this column on July 10, 2009. As of today I have completed 198 multisport races – 121 triathlons and 77 duathlons (and yes, as a former non-athlete I have a record of every one of them!) On August 9, 2009, I planned to do what will be my 200th multisport race, the Central Park Triathlon in New York City. (Yes indeed there is a CPT, with the swim in an open-air pool at the north end of the park.) A non-athlete into my mid-40s, I originally took up running as a way to get somewhat fit for the first time in my life. I got into triathlon, at age 46, because I thought that cross training sounded like a good idea, and the races themselves sounded like fun. And boy was I right – on both counts!

But from the beginning I have been slow. And as I get older, even though I am in better shape than ever, I am getting slower. Nevertheless, I am having as much fun as ever, maybe even more (especially in races in which there are 3 or fewer of us in my shrinking active age cohort: when I cross the finish line I even get a plaque!). Throughout my triathlon/duathlon career I have followed one of my major precepts not only for sport, but for life itself: "Explore your limits; recognize your limitations."

I recognized very early on my principal limitation in our sport: I was just slow in all three events, it would take an awful lot of work to become even reasonably fast, and I didn't want to do that. So I began to explore my limits, first as to distance. In the summer of 1985 I completed my first long race, the Green Mountain (VT) Steelman (a half-ironman-plus event). Three weeks later, I finished the Cape Cod (MA) Endurance (an Ironman-distance event). In both races, I finished last but under the time limit and very happy.

Now in my 27th racing season, having explored how long a race I can do (having started five and finished three, the Ironman distance was definitely my limit, and my last of those was the Great Floridian in 1994) I am well into the process of exploring for how long I can continue to race. When I did my 100th 200 years ago, I set my sights on doing my second



hundred by age 75 and being in a race as a member of the 80-plus age group. Well I have been lucky enough to get to 200 by age 72. Still looking at racing in the 80-plus, I am now hoping to have at least 250 races under my belt when I get there.

My top five triathlon experiences, so far? First was, of course, my first race, the 1983 Mighty Hamptons Triathlon at Sag Harbor, N.Y. Not only was I flying mentally for at least two weeks after it, but having found nothing in the then-limited triathlon literature aimed at beginners, in the transition-area after the race I determined to write the book that became *Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals*. While as you know I do not consider "doing an Ironman" the gold standard of our sport, for me, that former non-athlete, second was finishing that first Ironman, at Cape Cod. Third was finishing my 100th multisport race, the 1999 Mighty Montauk. I began going to ITU Age Group World Championships in the mid-00s, again because my age cohort started to shrink. My fourth top experience was my first Worlds finish, at Lausanne in 2006. (Due to hypothermia in the swim, I had a DNF at my first Worlds at Madeira Island in 2004.) The fifth top will be when I make that expected finish line-crossing at Central Park on August 9, 2009.

There were many other races I have enjoyed of course (and, yes, a few that I didn't, for a variety of reasons). But equal to my top racing experiences in our sport has been getting to know so many wonderful people. To name just a few, there were Ray and Donna Charron, organizers of the original Mighty Hamptons, who did so much to launch triathlon in the northeast back in the 80s; Fred Feller, owner of Carl Hart Bicycles of Middle Island, NY, personal friend and benefactor; Dave McGillivray, early

leader of our sport in New England; my friend from the days of Tri-Fed, Mark Sisson; my USAT special friends Tim Yount and many others too numerous to name; John Hanc, health and fitness writer non-parallèle for Long Island's *Newsday* and *Runners World*; Lew Kidder, editor and publisher of the old *Triathlon Today*, who gave me a chance to write about my favorite sport every month; and last, but certainly not least, my good friend Dan Honig, without whom triathlon/duathlon racing in the New York metropolitan area would not be at anything like the level it is.

What's the secret of my longevity in the sport, you might ask? I think that part of it is precisely that I don't go very fast in the races, I don't go very fast in my training, and while I am very regular in training on a year-round basis I don't do a heck of a lot of it. Throughout the season I average 5-6 hours per week, all three sports, and I count my minutes in the races towards my weekly totals. Thus I limit the pounding and I don't get injured much (and those injuries I do get are usually minor). Most importantly, I keep it all in perspective. I do triathlons and duathlons; I don't let them do me. And I keep having fun. For if it ever stops being fun, I will know that the end of my career in the sport is at hand. ■

