

GOING TO WORLDS (OR NOT) BUT STILL GOING



Going to Worlds and being part of Team USA for our sport is a great experience, as just about everyone who has ever had the privilege of doing so will tell you.

You made it to the top 16 of your age group. You join a happy, healthy group of people representing your country in an international, amateur competition. You get to travel to do it, almost always to another country. (The last triathlon World Championship in the U.S. was in Hawaii in 2005, and there is not another one presently on the schedule). If you've got a bit of extra time, there is the potential for sightseeing, and you can make going to the race part of a longer trip.

You do have to qualify for Team USA, of course. The qualification requirements vary by the distance of the event you would like to do. They can be found on the USA Triathlon website.

For the worlds-qualifying nationals that I go to regularly, the Olympic distance (1.5k swim, 40k bike, 10k run), one needs to qualify for nationals first, as specified on the USAT website. There are qualification requirements for other distances, ranging from sprint to long course. There are also nationals and worlds for duathlon, aquathlon, and winter triathlon. Once you have made Team USA for your first Olympic

distance Triathlon Worlds, you automatically qualify for Age Group Nationals for life.

To get a Team USA spot in the very competitive age groups is not easy. But it is not impossible either. There are 16 slots for each five-year age group, and in some years there have been roll downs to the 25th finisher from anyone above the lower-finishing slots who chooses not to go to worlds. Nationals themselves are a great experience, with a similarly happy, healthy group of people and world-class race organization. At the first two Olympic distance events I went to, I had no chance of qualifying for Team USA, but I thoroughly enjoyed the experience anyway. And I did eventually make it, for a race, as it happened, that was not especially sought after because of its timing and its distance from home. So hey, you never know. It's always fun to try.

But let's say that you are in a very competitive age group and your chances of making Team USA are slim, at least until you age up enough so that your age cohort thins out like mine has. And you would still like to have the feeling of going to a world-class international event with all the bells and whistles. In 2007, I was lucky enough to make Team USA for Worlds in Hamburg, Germany. The day before our race, the organizers run the Hamburg City Man (<http://www.hamburgcityman.de/>). Hamburg is a beautiful city, completely rebuilt after its destruction by the Royal Air Force in World War II. City Man is virtually the same race as Worlds. The swim is in a lake in the center of this leafy town (don't

be fooled; the water temperature can be in the low 60s) and both the bike and run are flat and fast. The logistics for the race are very manageable if you stay in one of the many hotels within walking distance of the transition area. And the whole city welcomes the event and its participants.

This past summer, I did the London Triathlon (<http://www.thelondontriathlon.com/>). Talk about a world-class event in a world-class city. It is a series of races at three distances, held over two days, centered on the London Docklands, a huge redevelopment area in the old Port of London. I actually doubled, doing the Super Sprint one day and the Age Group Olympic the next. The huge transition area is indoors, in the ExCel Center – a giant exhibition hall. The swim is in what amounts to a very large semi-saltwater pool, part of the original dock area. The bike and run, like Hamburg, are flat, fast, and scenic. The logistics are a bit complex, for you really have to stay down in the Docklands. You can easily get up to London for sightseeing, via the Docklands Light Railway which connects with the London Underground, but it does take a bit of time.

But what a trip! 10,000 athletes competing in an ongoing series of races over the two days, beautifully organized, with tons of helpful and cheerful volunteers. So, if you can't make Team USA for the "triathlon experience" abroad, think about Hamburg or London or one of many other international triathlons that you can locate through <http://www.trifind.com/ia/>. The experience will be worth the trip. ■

