

YOUR FIRST TRIATHLON

BY JOE FRIEL

RACE-READY IN 5 HOURS A WEEK

2ND EDITION



WORKOUTS, TRAINING PLANS & ADVICE FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE BEST-SELLING TRIATHLETE'S TRAINING BIBLE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the sport of triathlon!

You're about to embark on an exciting adventure that will improve your fitness, boost your health, and raise your self-esteem. Most of all, it will make your life richer and more enjoyable. While triathlon is fun, it is also challenging. In fact, it may well be the challenge that attracted you. Most new triathletes tell me that they came to the sport simply to see if they could do it—to challenge themselves. Once they tried it, they were hooked.

I'm sure that mastering three endurance sports and doing them all back-to-back, nonstop, seems like a rather daunting task. It should, but I'm sure you can do it. I've helped many people become triathletes over the past 25 years. With your motivation and my guidance, I'm certain you will do just fine. I have no doubt that, armed with the answers to basic questions and a dedication to training, you will successfully finish your first triathlon in a few weeks. That is the single purpose of this book—for you to cross the finish line with a smile on your face and become a triathlete.

Your First Triathlon provides the answers to many common triathlon questions:

How do I need to train?

What should I eat?

Do I need a new bike?

Which race should I enter?

Should I buy special triathlon clothing?
What happens at a triathlon?

Of course, there are hundreds of other questions you will have before your first race. Due to its inherent nature, blending three sports into one, triathlon is a complex undertaking. Most of your questions will be answered in the following pages, but there could be some left unresolved after you've read this book. Another resource you can use is my blog (joefrielsblog.com). Use the "search" function to look for key words in your question. If that doesn't help, feel free to send me an email (address listed on the blog page). One of my coaches will get back to you with an answer. Believe me, if you have a question, someone else has had that same question before, and I can help you with it.

Your First Triathlon gently guides you through the adventure of preparing for a sprint- or an Olympic-distance triathlon. In the first four chapters the basics of getting your lifestyle organized around triathlon training are discussed. This includes such topics as understanding the basics of the sport, setting goals, controlling body weight, eating for triathlon, and receiving outside support.

Chapters 5 through 8 cover the nuts and bolts of triathlon training—swimming, biking, and running. Here you'll also find simple ways to improve muscle strength and flexibility to avoid injuries and become more fit. Then we bring it all together in Chapter 9 with a training plan that fits your new lifestyle and your level of commitment. If you've just discovered this book and have your first triathlon coming up in 12 weeks or less, start with Chapter 9 so you can begin training right away. Then go back and read the supporting chapters.

Chapter 10 is a quick overview of some additional equipment you may want to consider buying to train more effectively. And finally, Chapter 11 gets you ready to go to your first triathlon feeling confident. Here you'll discover what to plan on for race day and before, how to dress, what exactly you need to bring with you, how to set up your transition area, and what to expect when swimming, biking, running, and finishing the race.

The appendixes provide you with other helpful information, including web and book resources, checklists, and a glossary of triathlon terms. Whenever you come across a term you don't understand, check out the Glossary in the back of the book. Appendix A will provide the details you need to do the workouts listed in Chapter 9.

All this information may seem a bit overwhelming. That's understandable; the sport of triathlon can be quite intimidating at first. But learning in small doses what to expect and what it takes to get there will make this challenge less daunting and more fun. And fun is what it's all about. Let's get started!



YOUR NEW CHALLENGE

Why do you want to do a triathlon? Maybe it's because you've heard that exercise is good for you and that people who exercise regularly have a lower risk of heart disease, cancer, and other diseases, that they live longer and have a better quality of life. Or maybe it's because exercise has been shown to reduce stress, promote clear thinking and creativity, and build confidence.

Although these are all good reasons to take up triathlon, I'll bet you are thinking of doing a triathlon for far more pragmatic reasons. Chances are your friend registered for a race and has talked you into doing it also. Or it could be that triathlon is the new challenge that you've been looking for, a sport that will test your limits. There's no doubt that it will. Losing weight, looking better, and eating without guilt could be the things that are motivating you. Then again, maybe you just want to have fun. Triathlon can help you accomplish all this and more.

Regardless of your reason, you certainly want your first triathlon to go well, so you bought this book to find tips on how to prepare. You did the right thing. I've been coaching triathletes since the early days of the

sport, and I've prepared many novices for their first races. I'm sure I can help you, too. This book is filled with advice that will guide you through the planning and training and ultimately across the finish line.

Let's start with the best advice I have to offer you: You should have only one goal for your first triathlon—to finish the race with a smile on your face. It doesn't matter what your time is or how you place in your age group or even if you are one of the last finishers. Just finish the race. Nothing else matters, other than the smile, of course. I've been saying this to new triathletes for more than 30 years. Those who follow my ad-

How Triathlon Got Its Start

In 1974 the San Diego Track Club added a short race to its calendar, a combination of running 4.8 miles, biking 5 miles, and swimming half a mile. All three sports were popular pastimes in Southern California, which was a natural fit for the birth of the sport.

In 1978 the first Ironman triathlon was held in Oahu, Hawaii, with 15 participants. The race was meant to determine who was the best athlete—the swimmer, the biker, or the runner. The athletes swam 2.4 miles at Waikiki Beach, biked 115 miles around the island, and ran a 26.2-mile marathon. The first winner, Gordon Haller, was a navy man and former pentathlete.

For the next 20 years the sport grew slowly but steadily, with a mix of both short- and long-distance races. In 1996 the international Olympic Committee announced that triathlon would be an Olympic sport in the 2000 Games in Sydney, Australia, a country that had also embraced triathlon. At the Sydney Olympics the women's triathlon was the first event, with the men's race the following day. I was there with Team USA and watched both races. The Australian crowd was incredibly enthusiastic about this "new" sport. Both events were televised around the world and created a lot of excitement for triathlon. Since then, triathlon has experienced phenomenal growth both in the United States and around the world.

vice have a lot of fun and a long triathlon career. Those who disregard it often don't finish their first triathlon, find themselves depressed afterward, and don't stay in the sport for very long. My purpose in this book is to help you accomplish this one simple goal. I will be coaching you, and I'm certain that, if you follow my advice, you will be successful.

RACE DISTANCES

Today there are four common triathlon distances. The longest, and the one most people think of when they hear the word "triathlon," is the Ironman-distance or "ultra-distance" race. Ironman is the most readily recognized race, probably because it gets the most press and has been around a long time. The swim is 2.4 miles (4,000 m) in open water, the bike portion is 112 miles (180 km), and the run is 26.2 miles (42.2 km). The winning times are generally about eight hours for the men and nine for the women. The last-finisher cutoff time is 17 hours.

The next-longest race distance is the half-Ironman or "long-course" race, with a 1.2-mile (2,000-m) open-water swim, a 56-mile (90-km) bike ride, and a 13.1-mile (21.1-km) run. It's sometimes called a "70.3" race since that's what the race distances in miles add up to. This is a very popular event among seasoned triathletes and is growing rapidly. The participants complete the race in about four to eight hours.

The Olympic-distance triathlon, sometimes called the "international-distance" race, dates back to the early 1980s and is the distance used today in Olympic and World Cup competitions. In these elite-only events the athletes are allowed to draft, or to follow closely behind each other, on the bike. In almost all the races done by amateurs, regardless of distance, drafting is not allowed. The Olympic-distance swim at 1,500 meters is just short of a mile, the bike leg is 25 miles (40 km), and the run is 6.2 miles (10 km). The pros generally complete the race in under two hours, with the last finishers taking up to five hours.

The shortest-distance triathlon is the "sprint" or "short-course" race. The typical sprint is a half-mile (750 m) swim, a 12.4-mile (20-km)

bike ride, and a 3.1-mile (5-km) run, but the distances may be longer or shorter. The swim is often done in a pool, which makes it a good event for the triathlon newbie. Open water can be a bit intimidating to some novice swimmers. These races take one to two hours to complete, so they are hardly a real “sprint” except when compared with an Ironman.

You’ll find that there are slight variations in these distances—especially the sprint—and that there are some races that don’t fit neatly into any of these categories. There are also other combinations of the three sports, such as swim-run-bike and run-bike-swim. Run-bike-run races are called “duathlons” or sometimes “biathlons.” Some cities have swim-run races, known officially by the tongue-twisting name “aquathlon” but usually called something like “splash and dash” or “stroke and stride.” The distances for these sport variations are not standard, but they tend to be like the Olympic- or sprint-distance triathlons.

CHOOSING AND ENTERING A RACE

Selecting the right first race is as important as training for it. There’s a real advantage to racing in your hometown because you might already know the course or at least have the opportunity to practice on it. Familiarity and easy logistics will give you a bit of a psychological boost and reduce the uneasiness you might otherwise feel on race day.

If you need help finding a race, go online to www.trifind.com. This search engine allows you to sort events by state and by race distance. You can also find a listing of triathlons for beginners, women, and kids. For an updated list of events sanctioned by USA Triathlon (USAT), check out their calendar at www.USATriathlon.org. Then select “short” (sprint distance) or “intermediate” (Olympic distance) along with preferred dates, location, and other details to view a list of all such races sanctioned by USAT.

You can sign up for many of these races online, and a link is provided to each on both the TriFind.com and USAT web sites. If the race you plan

to participate in isn't listed, you may have to register locally or mail in your registration form.

Most races require a USA Triathlon racing license. Some small local events that aren't USA Triathlon-sanctioned don't require a license. You can purchase either a one-day license or one to cover the entire season. If you think you'll do more than one race this year, the seasonal license is the way to go. As of this writing a seasonal license costs \$39—get yours at the USA Triathlon web site or at registration. Race-day-only licenses are always available when you register for the race. Expect to pay about \$10. In either case, this will be made clear when you sign up for the race.

YOUR FIRST RACE

If you have decided on a race to enter, I hope it is a sprint- or Olympic-distance triathlon. The time commitment is less than five hours a week if you follow the training plan in Chapter 9. An Olympic triathlon will take a bit more time. Expect to work out about seven hours a week for this distance. With a day off each week to make sure you get enough rest, this works out to less than an hour a day for a sprint-distance race and about one hour each day for an Olympic-distance race. Of course, if you have more time than that, you can fit in more workouts. My training plans (found in the appendixes) include optional swim, bike, and run workouts each week to supplement your basic training.

If you hope to complete a longer triathlon on your first attempt, I advise you to reconsider. I've noticed that it's not uncommon for ambitious newcomers to choose an Ironman-distance race as their first triathlon. They jump at the chance to experience the ultimate challenge right away. Most athletes have no idea what they are up against and are in for a rude awakening. It may look easy on TV, but the difficulty of completing an Ironman on race day is well beyond what most could even imagine, and training for such an endeavor is like having a part-time job.

The best way to prepare for an Ironman-distance triathlon is to first do a sprint or an Olympic triathlon and then work your way up to completion of several Olympic races and a few half-Ironman events. Starting from the get-go with an Ironman can be devastating and typically leads to a very short tri career.

CAN YOU DO IT?

Attitude in sport is everything. If you believe in yourself and reinforce positive thinking habits daily, you will succeed. Your goal is to finish a triathlon—smiling. I know you can do it because I've seen many others succeed. In fact, I've never had anyone fail who followed the guidelines and training program I present here. I believe in you.

Others also believe you can do it. But there may be some who don't, and they may even tell you so. The most important opinion, however, is yours. Do you believe? What is the voice in your head saying about your chances of success as a triathlete? When it comes to success or failure in this sport, the voice in your head can be your strongest ally or your greatest enemy. You decide which it will be.

If you've trained the voice to find fault, you probably won't make it across that finish line. But if your self-talk is positive, success is practically ensured. Negative self-talk focuses your mind on the obstacles. And, rest assured, your mind will come up with plenty of obstacles to get you out of training: "I'm too busy to work out today." "I'm too tired to get up early." "I just don't feel like it." A positive attitude allows you to clearly see ways around such obstacles and keeps you on track.

Certainly there will be setbacks; that's the way life is. Instead of dwelling on what you could have done, look for the learning experience in every misfortune. The only difference between winning and losing in triathlon, as in life, is that when we fail, we learn something—or at least we should.

Imagine how boring and unfulfilling life would be without obstacles. Where would the thrill of victory come from were it not for the agony

of defeat? Obstacles are good. Accept them while focusing on their challenges, and you will enjoy satisfaction and fulfillment in triathlon and in life. Wallow in them, and you will ensure defeat. Some opposition is always necessary for attainment. Kites rise against, not with, the wind.

Defeat in whatever form is often blamed on physical obstacles, such as lack of some physical ability, like endurance, strength, or speed. The negative thinker sees this obstacle as insurmountable. The positive athlete instead sees two opportunities: taking advantage of known strengths and learning about weaknesses so that they can be improved upon. Endurance, strength, and speed can all be developed.

What if you don't see the opportunities? Start by recognizing your shortcomings and being open to change. This is 90 percent of what it takes to cultivate a positive attitude. The final 10 percent comes with positive reinforcement, practiced daily. Here's a strategy to get you on the right track: Every night when you go to bed, between the time when the lights go out and you fall asleep, review your greatest success of the day, no matter how trivial. Perhaps you completed a workout that was difficult; relive that accomplishment. It could even be something as seemingly minor as starting a workout when motivation was low. Remember the success. Mentally celebrate the victory. Look for and relive your successes every day, and your attitude and belief in yourself will improve. I've advised every athlete I've coached, from newbie to Olympian, to adopt this strategy. It works.

A NEW SPORT (OR THREE)

In the early days of the sport (ca. 1983), most of those doing a first triathlon were injured runners. That's how I got started. Every time I'd break down while training for the next marathon, I'd get my bike out of the garage and ride it. Then one day I had a bad bike accident and broke my shoulder. The doctor said one of the best ways to rehabilitate it was swimming. While I was in the pool one day after the shoulder had healed, it

dawned on me that I was swimming, biking, and running, so why not try out that new sport—triathlon? I did and was hooked.

Things have changed since then. Most people who are new to triathlon don't have a background in another sport. For them triathlon is their first and only sport. Part of the attraction of triathlon for newcomers is that it's a bit like being a kid again, with lots of variety and options. It's fun to alternate among swimming, biking, and running instead of being stuck with one sport. What better way to seek a brief escape from the daily chores and responsibilities of life than to head to the pool or to go out on the road?

Your friends and family might not share this sentiment. Most outside observers see triathletes as masochists and can't imagine why anyone would want to do such a thing. That's probably due to the sport's roots and Julie Moss's famous crawl to the finish line in the Hawaii Ironman[®] in 1982. The media still foster this image of the "gruelathon," of participants "pushing the limits of human endurance" and fighting through unbelievable suffering as they struggle to the finish. It really isn't like that.

Don't get me wrong—triathlon is hard work. You won't get fit in three sports without dedication and perseverance. Although you've probably done harder things, this will rank right up there with some of the bigger challenges of your life. It will also be one of the most fun challenges you've ever taken on.



YOUR TRIATHLON LIFESTYLE

Preparing for your first triathlon will demand a lot of you. First and foremost, it requires dedication. How are you going to fit swimming, biking, and running into your already busy life? The goal of finishing a triathlon is a worthy one, but the reality is that your free time is quite limited. It won't be easy at first; you might miss some workouts due to other commitments. On those days you will question whether you can be fit and ready by race day.

Despite the inevitable setbacks, there is no doubt that you can do it if you fully commit to your goal. You must also accept that you are not perfect and that there will be days when things don't go right. Even experienced triathletes miss workouts due to other important responsibilities; however, missing a workout must be a rare occurrence rather than a common one if you are to become a triathlete.

Consistency is key to success. Exercise needs to become the focal point of each and every day. Everything you do and when you do it must be determined by your next workout. This includes eating, working, preparing meals, mowing the lawn, and tackling hobbies and all other

GLOSSARY

The following terms are used in books and magazines about triathlon and by triathletes in conversation.

Active recovery. A very easy workout intended to promote recovery from hard training. See also Passive recovery

Age group. A competitive division among the amateurs in a race, such as “female 30–34.”

Age grouper. An amateur triathlete.

Aerobars. A type of bike handlebar that makes the rider more aerodynamic.

Body marking. The writing of your race number and age group on your arm and leg by a race volunteer before a triathlon.

Bonk. Extreme exhaustion, usually caused by using up most of the carbohydrates stored in your muscles.

BOP. A triathlete who usually finishes in the “back of the pack,” or among the last of the entrants.

Brick. A continuous, combination workout including either the swim and bike or bike and run.

Cadence. Revolutions or cycles per minute of the swim stroke, pedal stroke, or run stride.

Cooldown. Low-intensity exercise at the end of a workout.

DNF. Abbreviation for “did not finish” in the race results.

Drafting. Swimming, biking, or running closely behind someone else to reduce effort.

Drops. The lower portion of turned-down handlebars.

Free weights. Weights that are not part of an exercise machine, such as barbells and dumbbells.

Frequency. The number of times per week that someone works out.

Half-Ironman. A triathlon with 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike, and 13.1-mile run portions.

Hammer. A fast, sustained effort.

Hamstring. The muscle on the back of your thigh that flexes the knee and extends the hip.

Hoods. On drop handlebars, the covers of the brake handles.

Intervals. A type of high-intensity exercise marked by short but regularly repeated periods of hard efforts separated by periods of recovery.

Ironman. A trademarked brand owned by the World Triathlon Corporation, referring to a triathlon with 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, and 26.2-mile run portions.

Mash. To push a high gear on your bike.

MOP. A triathlete who usually finishes in the “middle of the pack” of entrants.

Newbie. Someone new to triathlon.

Olympic-distance race. A triathlon with 1,500-meter swim, 25-mile bike, and 6.2-mile run portions.

Passive recovery. A period of time with no workouts, intended to promote recovery from hard training; a day off from exercise. (*See also* Active recovery.)

Periodization. A method of sequentially organizing training to achieve a high level of fitness by the time of an important race.

PR. Abbreviation for “personal record”—someone’s best time ever for a given swim, bike, or run distance; also sometimes referred to as “PB” for “personal best.”

Quadriceps (“quads”). The large muscle in front of the thigh that straightens the knee and flexes the hip.

Repetition. The number of times a task, such as lifting a weight, is repeated.

RPM. Revolutions per minute. Same as cadence.

Set. A group of repetitions.

Singlet. A sleeveless shirt, often worn when running or biking.

Spinning. Pedaling at a high cadence or RPM.

Split. Someone's time for a given portion of the race, such as the bike split.

Sprint-distance race. A short triathlon with distances that are generally about 400–500 meters for the swim, 10–15 miles for the bike, and 3 miles for the run.

T1. Transition #1—the swim-to-bike transition.

T2. Transition #2—the bike-to-run transition.

Taper. A short period of time, generally a few days or one to two weeks, before an important race during which the amount of training done is reduced to increase rest, which produces greater fitness.

Transition. An area designated for changing from one sport to the next, such as from swim to bike (*see* T1) and bike to run (*see* T2).

Tops. The portion of the drop-down handlebars closest to the stem.

Warm-up. The period of gradually increasing intensity of exercise at the start of a workout.

Wave. A group of triathletes within a race who are started at the same time in order to prevent overcrowding on the course.

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