

## **Never Too Young to Tri**

What is the fastest growing sector of the United States Triathlon Association's (USAT) membership? Youth. Approximately 20% of USAT members are youth members, an encouraging statistic in today's world of video games and text messaging. Triathlon promotes physical fitness, self confidence and a healthy lifestyle. This sport is a fantastic way to get kids outside and moving. Based on the way that our nation's youth is flocking to triathlon, the future of the sport looks bright indeed.

### What is a youth triathlete?

The "Youth" age division is comprised of athletes under the age of 16, with racing age determined on December 31st of the competition year. The "Junior" division is ages 16-19. Youth and Junior athletes have the opportunity to compete in two distinct styles of racing. Most youth athletes participate in youth-only triathlons, sometimes called "Kids Triathlons." The races are intended simply to expose the youngest triathletes to basics and give them a taste of the wonderful feeling that comes with finishing a triathlon.

Youth athletes between the ages of 13 and 15 as well as Juniors have the opportunity to compete in draft-legal triathlons. These races – Youth Elite Cups and Junior Elite cups - mimic the Olympic/ITU format of racing. You do not have to qualify for these events, but competitors generally have triathlon experience, above-average swim skills, the ability to ride in a group, and a strong run.

### How did youth triathlon get started?

Youth triathlon has its roots in the IronKids Races which started in 1985. To instill the Ironkids "every finisher is a winner" spirit, each child has the chance to break the tape at the finishing line. IronKids hosts a series of races across the nation, and more than one of today's top triathletes started off as IronKids. 2004 Olympian, 2008 Olympic hopeful, and Wheaties box cover model Hunter Kemper, and 2008 Olympic hopeful and swimming phenom Sara McLarty were once IronKids.

### How long are youth events?

USAT emphasizes that race distances be age appropriate, thus kids races are shorter than adult triathlons. Recommended distances for youth and juniors are: ages 7-8 swim 50-100 meters, bike 2 kilometers, run 1 kilometer ; ages 9-10 swim 100 meters, bike 3 kilometers, run 1 kilometer; ages 11-12 swim 200 meters, bike 5-7 kilometers, run 2 kilometers; ages 13-15 swim 200-400 meters, bike 8-10 kilometers, run 2-3 kilometers, and ages 16-19 swim 400-750 meters, bike 15-20 kilometers, and run 5 kilometers.

### How can a Kentuckiana youth learn about and become involved in triathlon?

On July 31 at E.P "Tom" Sawyer Park, Train Smart is putting on a triathlon clinic for kids ages 7 to 15. On August 7 at E.P. "Tom" Sawyer Park, Headfirst Performance is

putting on the “Kids 4 Kids Tri.” At the clinic, we will teach the basics of the sport while keeping fun as the focus. We will practice on the race course so that the kids can become familiar with the course for the upcoming triathlon.

The “Kids 4 Kids Tri” is a stand alone kids event. The swim will be in the Tom Sawyer Park 50 meter pool. The younger kids will start first and be allowed to completely finish before the older kids start. The race distances will be in keeping with the recommended USAT distances listed above. We will need plenty of volunteers, so please contact me if you are interested in helping out with the clinic or the triathlon.

Article By Nancy McElwain

Nancy has a Masters Degree in Exercise Physiology and is a USAT Level II certified coach. In 1999, she founded Train Smart, a multisport coaching business which specializes in individual coaching. Nancy is a past triathlon age group National Champion, 2005 Hawaii Ironman finisher (10:59:44) and 2004 World Long Course Triathlon Champion. You may reach her at [nancy.mcelwain@gmail.com](mailto:nancy.mcelwain@gmail.com) or learn more about Train Smart’s coaching services at [www.trainsmartmultisport.com](http://www.trainsmartmultisport.com).