

The Inaugural Family Circle Triathlon
Sunday, September 28, 2003
-race report by Jane West

I will remember this race for a long time. The Family Circle Tennis Center on Daniel Island really is a great place to have a triathlon. We especially loved the stadium bathrooms! "I like the flushing part," said my friend, Melanie. I also liked being able to rack my bike and lay my things on a non-grassy, non-sandy, dry, clean, smooth surface!

There was, of course, the issue of having to run a good ways from the swim to the bike, but having a "mini-transition area" for shoes (and socks for some of us) and a goggles/cap/wetsuit drop-off was really good. And that little run through the woods was actually a nice little warm-up for the bike. The roads are great in Daniel Island, both for the bike (well, except those two bridges) and the run. And we all liked the fact that the end of the run was familiar, since that was precisely where we had run after the swim!

So it was a great race course, and we are all VERY thankful to Paul and Kathleen King, the Family Circle Tennis Center, and all of the other sponsors and volunteers who made it possible. I, for one, hope that this was the first of many annual Family Circle Triathlons!

Of course, there was the issue with the swim course. We weren't really sure where we were supposed to be swimming to or around since the buoys wouldn't hold and the kayaks couldn't stay in one spot! But it seemed to work out alright. It did seem a little on the short side, though.

Okay, so why am I writing this race report? Why will I, personally, remember this race for a long time? Well, one of the reasons that I'm writing it is that I want to assure everyone that I really did not mean to mow over the poor gentleman in my crazy rush at the end! Let me explain with a little bit of background.

My first triathlon was at Hilton Head a year ago (September 2002), and it was awesome. I was hooked immediately, partly because I placed 2nd in my age group and decided that I had finally found "my sport." I wondered if someday I could actually come in first!

Then I found out about the Memorial Health Triathlon last October in Savannah and convinced my family to come with me to that one, too. I got a better bike (well, a little better than the hybrid I had ridden at Hilton Head – this was an old 10-speed from a pawn shop that I had ended up completely overhauling), and raced as hard as I could. Again, I placed 2nd in my age group! Very cool, I thought, until my dad wrote to me saying, "Why always SECOND?" He was kidding, of course, well, sort of, I think.

So I trained hard all winter and did Hilton Head again in the spring. I even wore a little wetsuit that Ricky Rikard had so generously given me. It's a shorty that I had

altered by removing the sleeves, since they seemed to make swimming harder, and then hemmed up as best I could to avoid extra drag. And I got a used Cannondale road bike. I was ready! And it went very well. You guessed it: I placed 2nd in my age group! Yet again. (I think I stopped telling my dad at this point.)

Well, I got a wake-up call at the Lake Murray triathlon: 2nd is good! This was a tougher one. I was quite happy with my 4th place. (I didn't want one of those little red plastic trees, anyway, right?)

In the James Island Sprint Series, I was happy to place at all, especially with people like Jana Campbell in my age group! And so I mainly focused on improvement. It was nice, I thought, to be able to do the same course over and over and really work for PR's. (Most gratifying for me was a 5K PR in the last one!) And I'm really proud of my set of mugs, representing 3 more 2nd places and a 3rd place under my belt. It's really okay that I'm never 1st, I decided. I'm doing great.

Then came Kiawah, where I really just wanted to finish strong. This was my first "long one" (as I call it), and I didn't know what to expect. It went much better than I had even hoped. I thought 3rd in my age group for this one was incredible.

So then came this triathlon. A little bit longer than a sprint. Nice and flat. And new. I thought maybe not as many people would compete. I thought "Hmmm.... maybe? Maybe now is my chance to place 1st in my age group?" But I tried not to get my hopes up. Just do what works best for you and see what happens, I told myself.

So I got up that morning and had my (probably somewhat unusual) pre-race meal of 1 banana, 2 hard-boiled egg whites, 1 cup of flavored light yogurt, and black coffee. (The banana has carbs and potassium, for energy and to avoid muscle cramping, the egg whites have easily-digested pure protein, and the yogurt is mainly to avoid acid stomach problems that had plagued me in my early spring races. Someone suggested that I eat yogurt, and I remembered that it had worked well last fall. Once I put it back in my pre-race meal, the stomach problems went away! Plus it has more carbs.)

I filled all 20 water bottles (okay, maybe 5-6) with ice, filled half of them with water, and grabbed Gatorade for the rest. (I tend to go a bit overboard on the liquids – better safe than sorry, right?) My backpack was ready to go (packed the night before), and my "make-shift" wetsuit was by the door.

I got my new (well, new to me – thanks to Jana!) Quintana Roo Kilo tri-bike out of the garage, and sat on the porch to wait for Melanie to come pick me up. Oops – I was 20 minutes early! Dang – I could've slept longer! Well, no, actually, I couldn't have. (My eyes had popped open at 5 am.) So I sat and read the paper (well, stared at it, anyway) until she arrived.

Everything went fine before the race, racking the bike, getting set up, getting body-marked, and getting our chips. I even had time to get and set up an aero bottle

between my new aero bars. Only one problem – I forgot to warm up! Oh well, the walk to the swim should do it, right? At least I remembered to eat a gel before the race. But remind me next time NOT to eat a gel, okay? That might be part of the cause of those acid stomach problems.

Anyway, although the swim was a little unorthodox and I could not bust out of a small tangle of other women for a while after the start, eventually I got a rhythm and before I knew it, we were heading in to shore. The wetsuit came off and the shoes went on (not quite that smoothly, as Jana and John can attest to, but not too bad), and I was off to my bike!

I LOVE the bike. The bike is my thing. I never even knew I had a “thing” until this summer. I guess that’s how I was competitive even with not-as-good bikes. (I attribute it to lots of squats and leg presses in the gym over the years, and a possibly dangerous love for speed.) And now I have this great tri-bike! Actually, I had to work really hard at the beginning of the bike segment, and didn’t feel that great, but then something happened on the way to Clements Ferry Road. I guess it was the infamous “second wind” kicking in. It was really something – all of the sudden, my legs felt strong and powerful and my breathing became smoother. Melanie’s theory is that my body “changed fuel-burning modes” at that point. I’ll buy that. Whatever it was, it felt great! Well, until the turn-around into the wind, that is. My 24 mph with the wind quickly went down to 19! And it was work to keep it there. But thank goodness for aerobars! (Of course, there was that one guy that passed me sitting straight up on his bike. Hmmm.)

So the bike went GREAT up until the very end. On the last corner, I hit a bump in the road – one of those water covers or something – and ended up turning way too wide, even into the running lane! I apologized to the runners that I almost hit and went on toward the stadium, hoping I wouldn’t be disqualified for safety. Then my stomach decided to act up and I went to spit to the side and almost totally lost control. I forgot how even a slight lean can affect this bike! It was a sudden, scary zigzag (fortunately, no one was around) that left me quite shaken as I was coming into transition. But when someone yelled “You’re the second female!”, I quickly forgot about it!

Unfortunately, I didn’t feel well, and the run isn’t really my forte, so I really didn’t get too excited. I just changed shoes and hats, put on my waist belt with my Gatorade and race number, and grabbed my music. I started the run slowly and turned on my tape player, ready to get a boost from Van Halen, only to hear “ERROORROORROO...” instead! Crap. Low battery. Well, the radio worked (less drag on batteries). So then I spent the first mile, at least, fiddling with that stupid thing, trying to find a station! And I couldn’t find one that would come in clearly and play a decent song. Wasted energy, wasted time. So finally I decided that enough was enough and I wrapped up my headphones and stuck the thing into my waist pack. (This will be good practice for Hickory Knob, I decided, where headphones aren’t allowed!) I remember being totally crushed when I found out that headphones weren’t allowed at the Lake Murray triathlon. I really love running to music. Anyway, fortunately a woman had passed me at a pace that I could just keep steady with. I felt like I was drafting!

Eventually, I was able to pass her, at which point she said, “You can pull me for a while, now!” It was funny. I think we were over halfway at this point, but I didn’t ever see a single mile marker. I was feeling better, though, and started thinking again about the possibility of winning my age group after a 43-year-old woman ran by me (not my age group quite yet), when lo and behold, a 37-year-old woman ran by me, too! Rats. Not again. This always happens!! Do you know how many of my 2nd places have been a result of my getting passed on the run? I stopped counting them. (Here’s another great quote from my father: “When you sense someone coming up behind you, just run faster!” Yeah, right. I had given the woman in my age group who had passed me at Lake Murray a bit of a chase after that, but to no avail.) Oh well, just keep running, I thought. Just do as well as you can. Just come in as close behind her as you can, I told myself. So I pushed it and kept her in view. Then we hit the trail at the end of the run, and I thought to myself, “What am I afraid of?” “A little pain?” “I can handle pain!!” (I have 2 children, by the way.) So I went for it. I put it in gear and ran as fast as I could. And I started gaining on her! What a thrill!! Could I do it? I kept running. Fast as I could. She was so close! Then there was this guy and not much room... I said, “I’m sorry!” as I sideswiped him! He was so nice – he said something like “That’s okay! Go get her!” So I kept pushing it, fueled by his comment and cheers from my friends, and I DID IT!! I couldn’t believe it! I passed her! But then came the 180 degree turn into the finish line area and I just about choked. Fortunately, it was still mind-over-matter at that point and I got myself going again and made it to the finish line ahead of her! I was SOOO excited, I cannot tell you. I had REALLY done it. I had passed her back! (When she came in right behind me, I apologized and tried to explain to her my motivation. And she was really cool about it.) All I could think about was “Did I win my age group this time?” But then she asked if I was 2nd or 3rd, because she knew there was at least one ahead of me, so I disappointedly said that I didn’t know. Later, she clarified: she meant at least one FEMALE, not at least one IN OUR AGE GROUP! I couldn’t believe it. I had never even considered placing overall! But no, this was like the James Island sprints, with an open/elite division. I had probably won my age group this time!

Then the awards came and Paul said that there were no females in the open/elite division, so he was going to pull the top 3 females out of their age groups to get overall awards. I know I should have been thrilled, and really I am (in fact, I can’t stop telling people about it), but how I wanted that “1st place” award! But congratulations, Cal – you really do deserve it! And congratulations to Melanie! She won the 30-34 age group! You guys are awesome!!!

I guess I’ll just have to settle for 2nd again. ☺ Maybe next time...