

USA Triathlon Age Group National Championships 10/4/2003

1249 of the best age group triathletes from around the country, and me, all migrated to Shreveport, Louisiana for the USA Triathlon Age Group National Championships on October 4, 2003. For anyone who has never been to the National Championship triathlon, it is quite a production. This happened to be the fourth National Championship Triathlon in which I have competed. I competed in Leon's Triathlon twice as the National Championships, and I competed in Columbia, Maryland for the National Championships in 1997. The competition is unlike that of any local event. The atmosphere reeks of competitiveness and everyone around looks in great shape. This was however, the first time I had traveled with my bike. I opted to ship the bike a week early to the hotel via FedEx. This turned out to be a great idea. It cost \$31 to FedEx the bike to the hotel vice \$80 to drag the bike along on the plane. We were given updates weekly from the race director that Shreveport Regional Airport was a small airport and only commuter jets flew into it. Delta, the carrier I chose to use, would only allow two bike cases per plane.

The Monday before the race, the update from the race director advised that the water temperature in Lake Champion was a very warm 84 degrees and it looked as though a wetsuit legal race was not on the agenda. I decided to pack mine just in case. Since I am a poor swimmer, I would do a lot of praying for a cold front to move in on Northwest Louisiana. I flew out of Charleston on Thursday for the Saturday morning race. This would allow me plenty of time to check-in to the hotel, assemble my bike, and if there were any problems, I had all day Friday to take care of it. As expected, the bike case was at the hotel waiting on me. Whew! I assembled the bike Thursday night and went for a ride along the bike course on Friday morning. A few minor adjustments later, I was happy with the way it rode. I woke up Friday morning and drove to the race site. The water temperature was posted as 71 degrees. Maybe I should start going to church I thought. I donned my wetsuit and went for a very easy swim in Lake Champion. The Lake was about five feet deep in the middle and the bottom was nothing but soft mud. At points in the lake, the mud was higher than my knee, yuck! Anyway, my little warm up swim felt very good. I then went for an easy bike ride and ran a little along the course. That's all my training until the race tomorrow and I felt very tapered.

At about noon on Friday, I headed to the Civic Center for registration, packet pickup, and a mandatory race meeting. The race expo was very weak considering this was a National Championship race. At the race meeting, USAT Deputy Director Tim Yount was explaining the agenda and giving a course description. The first wave would go off at 7:00 AM. My wave, the 30-34 men, did not start until 8:41 AM. The last wave would leave at 9:04 AM. The announcement was made at the meeting that the race would indeed be a wetsuit legal race. One of the silliest rules in triathlon, I think, is that you have to check your bike into the transition area the night before the race. That in itself is not that silly, however, once the bike is in the transition area, you cannot remove it until the race has started. Why they do this is beyond me. It also makes it impossible to do a warm up ride before the race. The racecourse was great. Nearly the entire bike course was on the completely closed to traffic Clyde Fant Parkway. The course was set

up like a zigzag. Down one direction, back the other, down again, and back again. The run was through the local neighborhoods and several locals came out to watch the spectacle. Several of them had their sprinklers aimed in the street to cool the runners. With my bike now checked in at the transition area, it was time to grab some grub and get some sleep.

Saturday morning came bright and early. Body marking was to take place from 5:30-6:40 AM and the transition area had to be cleared out by 6:45 AM. Once the first wave went off, no one was allowed in the transition area. This meant I had to remember to take my wetsuit, goggles, swim cap, and vegetable spray with me when I left. After the first wave went off, I went back to the car to eat breakfast. After all, I have almost two hours before my race starts. At the swim start, I put on my wetsuit and headed for the water. I seeded myself in the middle of the pack of 87 athletes in my age group. The gun went off and all I could see was murky water being churned in front of me. I settled into a pace and felt very good. In fact, I had the best 1500-meter swim I've ever had. Out of the water in 24:28. The run to the transition area was very long, but allowed me plenty of time to peel the wetsuit down. I grabbed the bike and headed out onto the course. The weather was perfect, around 75 degrees, sunny, and no wind to speak of. Out on the bike, three people in my age group passed me. I was passing several people both in my age group and in the waves that started ahead of me. The bike was on a concrete parkway and I was pushing so hard, I didn't even mind the separation bumps every few feet. I heard several people talking about them after the race. In from the bike and out for my favorite part of the triathlon, the end, er uh, I mean the run! The first half mile of the run is on an off road trail, it also happens to be the last half mile. The rest of the run is through neighborhoods, and I was feeling great. I really started to push the pace the last half of the 10K. Finally, the finish line was near and I started my all out sprint. Finish time of 2:08:35. My previous best at this distance was a 2:12:36. Great I thought, no awards, but a very satisfying 41 of 87 in my age group and 147 overall out of about 1073.

This was the sixth year that the National Championships has been owned by USAT. What does that mean? In the past, the race directors had full control of the race venue, but now, USAT has a loud voice in what goes on at the National Championships. They do an incredible job and everything is run very smoothly. This course is great and the city really appreciates the athletes being there. The National Championships will be hosted in Shreveport again next year, and I would encourage anyone who is interested, to try and qualify and make the trip. It is a great race in a great city and makes for a great weekend.

Athletes who are interested in competing in the 2003 Age Group National Championships are required to qualify. Criteria is one of the following:

1. All Team USA Triathlon members from any year since 1989.
2. Competition in a sanctioned non-championship event (triathlon and duathlon), finish in the top three or 25 percent of the age group, whichever is easiest to meet.
3. In a sanctioned regional or national championship event (both triathlon and duathlon), finish in the top five or 33.3 percent of the age group, whichever is easiest to meet. Events where qualifying is to be met must have taken place between the last nationals in September and the next nationals in October (the weekend before this year's nationals).