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USA Triathlon History

Triathlon in the United States has its roots set firmly in Southern California. The early races were held in San Diego's Mission Bay. It was only natural that the initial interest for a National Governing Body came from the same area.

In 1982, two independent groups were formed, both with the purpose of providing government for the rapidly developing sport. On Feb. 16, 1982, James Gayton and John Disterdick founded the U.S. Triathlon Association. On March 15, 1982, Jarold Johnson, Michael Gilmore and Penny Little founded the American Triathlon Association. On April 9, 1982, the two organizations held a joint meeting in Sacramento, Calif. The two existing organizations merged under one unified national governing body called the U.S. Triathlon Association. By the end of 1982, USTA membership had reached approximately 1,500.

In 1983, an insurance and risk-management coverage agreement was signed and USTA turned much of its attention to sanctioning events nationwide. In August 1983, the name of the organization was changed to Triathlon Federation USA. The organization quickly picked up a colloquial name by members and athletes nationwide — Tri Fed. During 1984, Tri Fed sanctioned more than 1,000 events.

In June 1985, the first National Board of Governors meeting was held in Springfield, Ill., to chart the direction of the young sport and its younger National Governing Body. Clear goals and objectives were set forth in several areas: creating a uniform set of competitive rules, enforcing those rules, continuing to increase the number of sanctioned events, improving the federation's credibility as a voice for the sport, providing a clearinghouse for members' questions on training and technical information, promoting event safety and sponsoring championships.

On Nov. 1, 1986, Federation representatives met with the U. S. Olympic Committee in Dallas. In this meeting the USOC explained the minor changes needed in the Tri Fed bylaws before the Federation's application to the USOC could be accepted. At the end of 1986, membership had grown to 5,589 annual members.

In 1987, Tri Fed mandated that any athlete competing in a sanctioned event had to obtain an annual membership. Membership skyrocketed to more than 34,000. This mandate only lasted one year because the Federation recognized the policy, although fiscally positive in the interim, was detrimental to the long-term growth of the sport because it discouraged the novice triathlete from competing. In 1988, Tri Fed planned a move to its current home of Colorado Springs, Colo., a move that was consistent with the long-term Olympic goal of the sport and the federation, as the USOC is based in Colorado Springs.

In 1989, the International Triathlon Union and the Triathlon World Championship (at the Olympic distance of a 1.5k swim, 40k bike, 10k run) was created. The Federation now had 24,729 members. In August 1990, the United States hosted the second ITU Triathlon World Championship in Orlando, Fla. More than 1,200 athletes from 40 countries competed. The International Olympic Committee officially recognized triathlon as an Olympic sport and the ITU as the sole international governing body in 1991. In 1993, the Pan American Games approved triathlon for competition at the 1995 Pan Am Games in Mar De Plata, Argentina.

The IOC's recognition of triathlon as an Olympic sport allowed the federation to be eligible for up to \$250,000 in grants from the USOC. The first Goodwill Games Triathlon was held in St. Petersburg, Russia, on July 23, 1994. The sport finally reached its ultimate goal of being included on the Olympic program at the 2000 Games in Sydney, Australia.

In February 1996, Triathlon Federation USA changed its name to the present USA Triathlon, a move that further identified the federation with other USOC-recognized National Governing Bodies. USA Triathlon supports national teams on several different levels and many developmental programs for athletes, coaches, race directors and officials.

In 2000, USA Triathlon selected its first Olympic team. Jennifer Gutierrez, Sheila Taormina and Joanna Zeiger were on the women's team and Ryan Bolton, Hunter Kemper and Nick Radkewich were on the men's team. Zeiger went on to finish fourth at the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia. Kemper had the best men's finish in 17th.

In 2004, USA Triathlon had 53,000 annual members. The organization sanctioned more than 1,000 races around the country. The United States also won its first Olympic medal in triathlon when Susan Williams took the bronze at the Summer Games in Athens, Greece. Hunter Kemper had the best U.S. men's finish in ninth. Kemper finished the 2005 World Cup season ranked No. 1 in the world. He would go on to receive the Jim Thorpe All-Around Award and the United States Olympic Committee's SportsMan of the Year Award, the first such honor for a triathlete.

At the end of 2006, membership had exceeded 80,000 and the number of sanctioned races had reached more than 2,000.

Kemper became a three-time Olympian in 2008, placing seventh at the Beijing Olympic Games. Laura Bennett narrowly missed the podium with a fourth-place finish.

After eclipsing the 100,000-member mark in 2007, USA Triathlon continued its rapid growth in 2009 with more than 130,000 members and more than 3,100 sanctioned events. Those totals reached 150,000 members and 4,300 sanctioned events in 2011. Also, the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association estimated that 2.3 million unique individuals completed a triathlon in the United States in 2010.



MEMBER

