



Could have been a ‘Contender’. Then I discovered modern day Triathlon. Ryan Williams

As a young guy I was top of my game – Ulster Swim Champion, Ulster track 800m and 1500m Champion, cross country at Ulster and All Ireland level. At University started weight training, grew some muscles (still looked like a jockey’s whip with a few bumps), played Waterpolo for Queens, ran a bit, swam a bit... the usual ... obviously in between getting hammered at the Bot in Belfast to the whimsical tunes of Skip Alexander.

Early 20’s and 30’s I kept at it – weights, fitness, did some long-distance endurance events (not by today’s standards back then endurance meant you were still back in the same day), ran a bit, swam a bit.... You know enough to stay on the right side of a size 34 trouser. Had the usual mid-life crisis at 40 and did the Amazing 12 programme – 12 weeks of strict diet and weight training 6 days a week – at the end had the body of Batman and the face of a heroin addict. It was absolutely class. I loved it even though the family all thought I was a bit mad.

So, what do you do next to stay focused as you edge towards mid-40. Well **every** man in his mid-40’s irrespective of weight, fitness, ability or sense now does triathlon. I’m not sure if it’s down to our purpose as men changing at probably the most rapid pace in history, or the fact the kids are now up a bit and require a bit less attention (unless they are now training with you ... as in my case and making me look like a well-worn penny farthing on a weekly basis), or this particular demographic just need something to hang their hat on, find their place in the world.. or someone has spiked the water supply with a 40 plus triathlon pheromone.

Triathlon is ridiculous. It makes no sense. In one of the 8 events I did this season the winner was a 17-year-old whippet and the guy who came second was 52... by 7 seconds. It’s also one of those sports where most people are really good at one discipline – you can be a hero in the water, Forest Gump on the run but on the bike if you have stabilisers and handlebar ribbons things aren’t going to go well. Then there’s transition... Jesus don’t mention transition. Who knew that a flask of coffee and a scone (with jam and cream) wasn’t an option!



I guess the life lessons on Triathlon are many. However, the best one for me in this first season is just to understand how shit you actually are – guys with belly's, taped legs, old bikes, half a wetsuit are quite simply better than you. Much better. It's not a place for finely tuned abs and 'suns out guns out'. Even the top guys look like willing members of a Japanese Prisoner of War Camp fraternity – no one is making it as the next main character on Netflix 'Power'. Raw, stubborn brawn has its place in this new amphibious land of misery and murder. Maybe that's why we love it so much – it's a simplicity of purpose, the cheesecake of the plus 40. The other lesson is that ability to resign yourself to the inevitable pain – every Triathlete walking towards the lake/sea/river swim is thinking... 'What the f**k am I doing this for'... its hilarious .. you can see it on everyone's face from Zeus in his HUUB Archimedes to Penfold in his mates water-skiing suit he borrowed for the weekend. Usually Penfold beats Zeus by the way... never trust a triathlete in a HUUB wetsuit or with an Ironman tattoo on his calf.

The lessons for business - never ever underestimate the competition ... and they are rarely the ones purporting to be the best. It's the ones working from home, killing it for 80 hours a week, grinding out sale after sale. The guy in the 7 Series, with the Rolex and Gucci shoes has not only bad taste but is probably owned by the bank. Don't judge a swimmer by his wetsuit.

So, what else have I learned in Triathlon – I started the season finishing just below 50% of finishers (I was devastated, humbled and motivated). Over the season have made it to the top 25-30% of finishers. To get to the top 20% the level of middle-aged commitment requires an off season intensive training plan, the diet of a Spartan, daily cyro baths and possibly a hip transplant. Will I do it ... absolutely. I am almost mid 40's... it comes with the turf!

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