

News Release



Triathlon Stories

Coach and Athlete Learn Together

Jenny Miner had only been a triathlon coach for a little less than a year when she was approached with a very interesting offer. A Maitland father wanted her to coach him and his special needs son to prepare them for a spring triathlon. Jenny, who had participated in the St. Anthony's Triathlon before, thought the Meek & Mighty Triathlon would be a perfect fit.

"His dad wanted someone to be able to do the race with his son," Jenny said. "I'll be in the pool, on the bike and on the run to give him direction and help him get where he needs to go in transition. I felt that the Meek & Mighty has the best race for a special needs athlete. It is a well-directed race."

Jenny has never worked with children or special needs athletes before. It's been a learning experience for both the coach and the athlete, **Chris Nikic**, 16. His father, **Nik Nikic** will also be doing the race. He's just worried he won't be able to keep up with Chris.

Chris is no stranger to sport. He has been involved in the Special Olympics. He made local news when he carried the Special Olympics Torch through Disney on its way to Los Angeles.

For Jenny, the goal is to finish the race and have fun doing it. "Chris is very excited," she said. "He's got a brand new bike and is really eager to compete. It's been really interesting to watch his progression."

The Family That Plays Together

Michael Reilly, MD, a St. Anthony's physician who is board-certified in family, adolescent and sports medicine, has been a triathlon enthusiast since the 1970s, even before the beginning of the St. Anthony's Triathlon in 1984. "I've raced in all but one of them," said Dr. Reilly. "I've acted as a host

home for visiting pros and will serve again as a medical tent physician at the Meek & Mighty Triathlon.”

Dr. Reilly, who also is the medical team physician for the Tampa Bay Rays, has a special interest in the Meek & Mighty Triathlon. All six of his children will be participating in that race on April 23. “The children, all boys, range in age from 6-15, and are all excited to follow in their father’s footsteps.

They get in bike training by riding their bikes to school with dad. Dr. Reilly said the kids look at it as a nice challenge. “They aren’t really happy just to participate; they work to come in with a good time in the race.”

Chris, 15, is a high school sophomore. His brothers are Andrew, 14, eighth grade; Tim, 12, seventh grade; Joseph, 11, fifth grade; John, 9, second grade; and David, 6, kindergarten.

“Triathlon is really an offshoot of what kids do anyway – swimming, biking and running. They play in all the team sports – tennis, basketball, baseball, tennis twice a week,” Dr. Reilly said. “Triathlon gives them more variety. It’s natural for them to do it.”

Dr. Reilly will participate in his 32nd St. Anthony’s Triathlon on April 24.

Local Triathlete Looks to Grow as a Pro

Brittany Pierce, 31, was born in St. Petersburg and now lives in Clearwater working as a lifeguard on Clearwater Beach. She occasionally began competing in sprint triathlons at the age of 12 during the summer months when she was out of school. After graduating from college, she took time off from the sport but missed it. In 2011, she qualified to compete at the 2012 70.3 World Championships and the following year, she made the USA Team to compete at the ITU Olympic Distance World Championship in London. During her 2013 season, she also qualified for my pro card at Vineman 70.3 Ironman. This year will be her third year racing as a pro. One of her future goals is to qualify for the 70.3 World Championships as a pro.

Blind Athlete Lives Life Without Limits

Kyle Coon will be participating in the St. Anthony’s Triathlon for the second consecutive year. Kyle, who has been completely blind since he was 6, has packed a lot into his 24 years.

At 10 months old he was diagnosed with Bilateral Sporadic Retinoblastoma, a rare form of eye cancer. He lost his left eye when he was 5 and his right eye when he was 6. He says that he had poor eyesight so when he became completely blind, he really didn’t know anything different. “I mean I knew I was a

little different but my parents didn't treat me any different from my sisters. When I lost my sight completely, I was lucky enough to be connected with the right people, chief among them Erik Weihenmayer (a world-class athlete who also is blind) who pushed me down the right path," Kyle said.

By the time he had graduated high school, he had already climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and trekked through Machu Picchu. At 14, he appeared on *Oprah*. He currently lives in Orlando and works for the Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division in Orlando.

He will be participating in the St. Anthony's Triathlon with his roommate, Dr. Michael Melton, who acts as his guide throughout the race. "St. Anthony's was the first-ever triathlon I had done and I loved it so much, I wanted to come back and do it again," Kyle said. As a side note, Dr. Melton was born at St. Anthony's and that is one reason he likes to come back and do this race.

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