

# Triathlons with a twist aim to attract beginners

by Tammy Mills | Kalamazoo Gazette  
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Multi-sport events are nothing new to this corner of Southwest Michigan. Weekend warriors can find a race just about any weekend of the summer. But two triathlons -- one brand new and one revamped with a new identity -- are looking to attract fresh faces to the sport.

The Physically Strong Triathlon on Aug. 29 is a first-year race geared toward newbies and features off-road courses -- a short one for kids ages 7-13 and a longer, slightly more challenging one for ages 14-and-older.

Girls Best Friend triathlon and duathlon, formerly the Prairie View Triathlon, is now a female-only event, put on by 3 Disciplines Racing. "Both of these are just opening the door for a lot more people to get involved," said Megan James, treasurer of the Trikats, a triathlon and multi-sport club in Kalamazoo. Both races will also be held Aug. 29, potentially creating a tough choice for women that day.

James, a veteran triathlete, competed in Chelsea's SheRocks Triathlon at the end of June and found the experience and the vibe of the event uplifting. "It was very different from most of the races I've competed in," she said. "Really all the women were kind of there for each other ... which I think is really good for people just starting out." A quick search on [www.findaraceevent.com](http://www.findaraceevent.com) turned up 99 women-only triathlons in the country in 2009, a number that is rising each year, James said.

"We're starting to see a lot more of those races pick up," James said. "The whole point of doing them is to get women into them." Girls Best Friend, to be held at Prairie View Park in Vicksburg and featuring three course options, should be a decent draw, James said, especially after this inaugural year. The race in previous years attracted about 200 athletes, said Jim Mishler, who was the announcer for the SheRocks race in June. "Everybody's going to be watching to see how the numbers shake out for that one," he said.

Mishler will be busy that day with a race of his own as the director of the Physically Strong Triathlon, an event owned by and benefiting the Southwest Michigan Council, Boy Scouts of America. Parts of the Al Sabo Land Preserve and the Rota-Kiwan Scouting Reservation will be used for the courses. "We don't have very many short-distance, part off-road triathlons for attracting new people into the sport," said Mishler, who has been the race director for the Seahorse Triathlon and assistant director for the YMCA's Shermanator, and is involved in some capacity with a half-dozen area events. "Very few are short enough ... that someone could take their normal bike and their helmet and some goggles and some shoes and do a multi-sport event like that. And that's always been my big push in the sport, is to help get people started doing it."

Physically Strong's short course features a 100-yard swim, 1.3-mile bike and a 0.3-mile run. The long course is a 400-yard swim, 6.5-mile bike and 3.1-mile run. James said the movement to get kids involved is "starting to be popular and really fabulous. There's a lot of kids that think a triathlon isn't something that a kid could do."

It's a trend that Mishler is confident will do well in this area. "The really good races are holding on really well, and the new races are coming on strong," he said. "I really think we're going to be in that coming-on-strong category."