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Athlete Profile: Terry Smallin

By Amy E. Tucker

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Age: 47**Occupation:** Involved in health and fitness/wellness programs for 19 years; Division 3 college swim coach and assistant coach at Hartwick; coached high school track and field; most recently fitness director for the Albany Jewish Community Center; now General Manager for the Lake Placid Health and Fitness Center.**Sport:** Triathlon**Residence:** Formerly of Troy, recently relocated to Lake Placid**Family:** Married with 2 children

At 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, July 30th, Terry Smallin will take a 2.4 mile swim in Mirror Lake, cycle 112 miles past Whiteface Mountain and sites from the 1932 and 1980 Olympic Games, and wrap up the day with a 26.2 mile run through the Lake Placid village. Smallin is one of 1700 triathletes to tackle the Isuzu Ironman Triathlon in Lake Placid — the first sanctioned Ironman race in the continental US. This will be the tenth Ironman for Smallin who has been doing triathlons since 1987.



"Physical fitness has been my lifestyle for 47 years of living," says Smallin. "I got into triathlons as part of a challenge. I ran marathons and did a lot of road racing. I wanted something I could do that would allow me to cross train and do this until I'm 70 or 80 years old."

Smallin trains on a 49-week program with a couple of weeks off to rejuvenate. He maintains that the key to being a successful triathlete is achieving balance.

"If you're not balanced in all three components," he states, "your weaknesses are going to be seen right away." "I break up my training into percentages, much like the percentages in the race. "Fifty percent of the time you're on the bicycle, approximately thirty-two percent you're in the run, and about fifteen percent of the time you're swimming. Anything under 12 hours is a good time for an amateur, so I divide up that time into the percentages for each leg of the race and train accordingly."

In addition to doing strength training and practicing each segment of the race, Smallin says part of the building process involves laying bricks, or blocks of training.

"This whole competition is more mind over body," explains Smallin. "If mentally you're tough enough and you've trained your mind to do this, then physically you can do it. I train on the actual course to get familiar with every bump in the road. One day I'll run and the next day I'll cycle. I alternate training each leg of the course with rest days in between. I do a series of bricks working on my transitions from bike to run. This gives me a feel for what it's like to get off the bike, after 112 miles, and start to run. You become accustomed and get your legs and body assimilated to what that feeling is going to be."

Another key ingredient of your training regimen, according to Smallin, involves refining your nutritional needs.

"When you're on that bike for six hours or more, you need to replenish what you're losing in fluids and nutrition. You have to experiment with what's going to work — how you're going to digest and refuel your body." "The challenge," he says, "is finding, fine-tuning, and changing your training based on what works from one year to the next."

Three years ago, Smallin faced a new challenge when he was diagnosed with throat and tonsillar cancer.

"I never smoked a day in my life. It was a very rare thing that came out of nowhere. I went through surgery, radiation, and treatment at Northwestern University and worked with a homeopathic doctor. It set me back and I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't know if I'd be able to exercise again or do much of anything. There were a lot of days that I couldn't even get out of bed. I did the stationary bike at home and I did one leg at a time when I didn't have the strength to do it with both. After my treatments I swam a 5.5-mile swim across Saratoga Lake. Then, one thing led to another and I continued to train and tackled Montreal that September.

Because of the increasing number of participants, and the growing popularity of the sport, qualifying for the World Championships in Hawaii is no longer and "easy" thing. There are limited numbers of qualifying races, and slots are divvied up between gender and age groups with only the top one or two finishers progressing to the finals. Smallin describes Hawaii as the Superbowl of

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triathlons. But even though it boasted his best time, ten hours and twenty-five minutes in 1991, returning to that course is the farthest thing from his mind.

"I don't think I'll do Hawaii again," Smallin muses, "unless I'm old enough to compete in an age group where there's no one else competing against me!"

"Because of what I've gone through and what my body has gone through, I'm just happy that I'm doing it," says Smallin. "I put no expectations on what I do. I'm going to go out, smile and wave to everybody, and just enjoy it. I'm not worried about whether I finish in 12 hours or 14 hours. I'm hoping that my students and all the folks I've trained are going to be able to ride with me on the bike course, and run alongside me, and that's my big reward."

The Lake Placid course provides the competitive and challenging nature that Smallin aspires to.


"I enjoyed Hawaii because it was the World Championships and was one of my better races. But, if you take away the elements of Hawaii — specifically the wind and heat — Lake Placid provides the more challenging course because of the hills on the bike and run."

"You really don't 'enjoy' an Ironman course," laughs Smallin. "I like the swim and the bike the most. The run? Well, you have to do that. Lake Placid is a lot like Montreal in that it's a fan-friendly Ironman. On the Montreal course, you ride past the fans 41 times! Lake Placid's course is more spread out, but the community comes out in force and you're well received."

Competing in triathlons is not an inexpensive sport. Competitive bikes range in the thousands of dollars: entrance fees cost hundreds more; and meals, transportation, and lodging range from \$1,500-4,000 depending on the location of the event. When you consider the monetary and physical payout, what exactly is the draw to this rapidly expanding sport?

"I do this because I enjoy the journey — the experience of going out there on a daily basis, training people, and giving back to the sport what I've gotten during my prior 13 years of doing this. If I can share, motivate, and become somebody's teacher, then the ride has been worthwhile."

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