

GREAT DAY FOR A RACE



Competitors gather on Santa Cruz's Main Beach before the Sentinel Triathlon gets under way on Sunday. Nearly 1,000 athletes competed Sunday, one of the larger fields of the past few years.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

The ocean was frigid, but the sun warmed 1,000 racers

By ALIA WILSON

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Nearly 1,000 racers wearing wetsuits and smiles congregated on Main Beach early Sunday, bracing themselves for the 58-degree Pacific Ocean that awaited them just a few steps from the starting line of the 26th annual Sentinel Triathlon.

The frigid temperature didn't appear to scare any athletes off, though. Veterans and newcomers crowded the shore, as did cheering family members and hundreds of spectators who once again turned out for the race, an annual fundraiser for local schools that is now more than a quarter-century old.

Carl Bitondo dressed in pirate gear and waved a skull and crossbones flag before his dad Steve, racing with the YMCA of Palo Alto, took to the waters.

"Talk like a Pirate Day was Friday so I decided why not make a weekend of it," Bitondo said.

Bitondo and his two brothers, armed with a cowbell, were vocal supporters for their 56-year-old father, a first-time Sentinel competitor.

"I knew he was crazy, but not this crazy," Bitondo said.

Sanity issues aside, Steve



Bitondo has a lot more local racing to do if he wants to match the feat of the race's most prolific participant.

Paul Stephens has raced the Sentinel every year since it kicked off in 1982.

"Twenty-six and counting," said Stephens, who recently

turned 65.

"We're so proud of him," said competitor Bryony Cohelan, who has been following Stephens' example for the past five years.

Racer Lori Langona of Aptos had a noble goal: Do as well as possible, then get

A trio of Sentinel triathletes leaves the bike transition area to begin the run on West Cliff Drive.

26th annual Sentinel Triathlon

NUMBER OF RACERS: 996.

MEN'S WINNER: Shaun Guest of San Diego, 1 hour, 55 minutes, 9 seconds.

WOMEN'S WINNER: Santa Cruz's Katrin Tobin, 2 hours, 16 minutes, 7 seconds.

CLUB RACERS: More than 300.

Complete coverage

■ Check out our complete race report, with full list of finishers.

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■ Go online to our Web site and check out more photos and race-day video.

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a burrito after the race.

"We're just hoping to have a good time and get a good time," Langona said.

The triathlon, as usual, began with a roughly mile-long swim around the Municipal Wharf. Swimmers exited the water at Cowell Beach, ambled up West Cliff Drive to the corner of Bay Street,

SENTINEL TRIATHLON

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PACIFIC COLLEGIATE SCHOOL SENIOR ALEC EXTON, RACE VOLUNTEER

Race

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where a 40-kilometer bike ride out-and-back to Daventport began and finished. Racers then took off on an out-and-back 10k run on the West Cliff Drive bike path to the entrance of Natural Bridges State Beach.

Santa Cruz Track Club members cheered their friends from the sidelines.

"It's so exciting to see the transition of swimmers jumping from their wetsuits onto their bikes," said club member Katherine Beiers of Santa Cruz.

A runner herself, the former mayor plans on running the Big Sur Half Marathon in November.

"To have an event like this is great for sports in the community," volunteer Diane Delucchi of Aptos said as she cheered on her husband Dave.

The Sentinel donates proceeds from the event, one of the oldest triathlons in Northern California, to Santa Cruz County high school athletic programs, the UC Santa Cruz swim program, Cabrillo College athletic program, Santa Cruz Track Club, Santa Cruz Triathlon Association and Long Marine Lab. Over the history of the event, the race has raised more than \$750,000 for the programs.

On Sunday, students from UCSC's swim team and Pacific Collegiate School volunteered during the event, manning aid stations during the race and snack and drink tables at the finish line.

"This event paid for my athletic gear so it's time to pay my dues," said Pacific Collegiate School senior Alec Exton. "It's the first time I've had to get up at 6:30 in the morning but it's cool."

Jeff Arnnert, Pacific Collegiate athletic director, said he hopes the students are inspired by the athletes — enough to consider entering a triathlon or other race one day.

He might have a taker in PCS 10th-grader Gus Samios: "A lot of people from PCS do the Big Sur Marathon so I've been thinking about doing it a lot."

On Sunday, top honors went to San Diego resident Shaun Guest, a 26-year-old former UCSC swimmer who set the third-fastest time ever on the newer course, which was made a standardized Olympic-distance course a few years ago. He clocked in at 1 hour, 55 minutes, 9 seconds. In the women's race, Katrin Tobin of Santa Cruz, 46, once again ruled the day, taking her race-record fourth title in 2 hours, 16 minutes, 7 seconds.

"It went so smooth this year," said race director Kem Akol. "The weather was the best we've had in years and our numbers were up with 996 racers. Because of the experience of the volunteers, it went smoothly, and nobody had to be transported because of injury."

Competitor Julia van der Wyk of Aptos, who will be racing the granddaddy of all triathlons come October, Hawaii's Ironman World Championship, called the event a must-do for local racers.

"When you're local this is something you kind of have to do," van der Wyk said. "It's just great to see people who have done the race before, too."



ABOVE: The first women's wave of Sunday's Sentinel Triathlon is slammed by the surf as the racers enter the water at Main Beach.



LEFT: Female racers sprint toward the ocean Sunday, the first stop in their two-plus hour athletic adventure called the Sentinel Triathlon.

Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos