

RACE DAY: SANTA CRUZ TRIATHLON

1,200 racers swim, bike, run for county sports programs



Swimmers fill the Monterey Bay waters off of Cowell Beach as a wave crashes around a triathlete as he nears the shore on Sunday. SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

S.F. MAN AND PALO ALTO WOMAN TAKE TOP HONORS AS ATHLETES COMPETE UNDER BLISSFULLY FOGGY SKIES

Triathlon - Santa Cruz Sentinel 9/21/09

By RAMONA TURNER

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MORE RACE COVERAGE INSIDE AND ONLINE

THE WINNERS

Clarkson, Sunn are top locals

Santa Cruz's Eric Clarkson decided at the last moment to race. He nearly pulled a big upset, **PAGE B6**

MULTI-MEDIA

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SANTA CRUZ — Foggy weather can make for dreary times — except when it's race day for the Santa Cruz Triathlon.

Instead of having to worry about athletes fainting from heat exhaustion, Sunday's mid-50s temperatures and gray skies meant race medics only needed to treat participants who suffered blisters and the occasional scrape. The sunny skies and 70-degree temperatures arrived in the afternoon — after the race.

"Everyone left on their own power," said Rayette Andrews, the Dominican Hospital nurse who coordinated medical services at the event. "No ambulances were needed today."

Unfortunately, the local favorite, Tommy Zafares, was among those who needed attention from Andrews' crew after a nasty bike spill



Competitors go through their pre-race rituals on Main Beach as the start of the Santa Cruz Triathlon nears on Sunday morning. SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

knocked him out of first place — and the race. After tackling the first leg of the event, the 1.5k swim around the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf, in a blazing 18 minutes, the 23-year-old from Aptos was knocked out of the event just minutes out of the transition area after he struck the back

of the official race van.

"I looked down for a second and when I looked up, the van was braking," he said after receiving treatment.

He tried to avoid the van, but the back wheel of Zafares' bike caught the van's rear

SEE TRIATHLON ON A2

'Exercise improves everything in my life. I don't do it to compete against other guys in my age group, I do it to compete against myself.'

BRAD STEGGE, Concord



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Cabrillo College culinary arts students Lauren Linkemyer, Sam Beeson and Tico Andrea stand by at the finish line with post-race nutrition for Santa Cruz Triathlon finishers.

TRIATHLON

Continued from A1

bumper.

"The next thing I know, I'm on the ground," he said.

Delaware Avenue was apparently still open to cross traffic and the race van had to brake hard to allow a vehicle the right of way, something Zaferes wasn't expecting, he said.

Zaferes suffered cuts and severe bruises to his hands, elbow, back and calf, but he and his parents stayed to cheer on other participants.

"I want to watch the race," he said. "I want to cheer everyone on. That's what it's all about, right?"

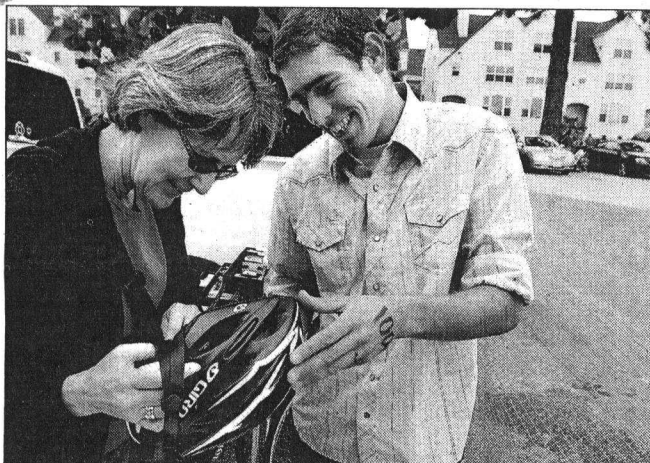
The Zaferes family joined thousands of others who descended on Santa Cruz's Westside to either watch or participate in the 27th annual event — formerly the Sentinel Triathlon — that raises money for local high school and college sports programs, Long Marine Lab, the Santa Cruz Track Club and the Santa Cruz Triathlon Association.

Rich Larson, in his first year as race director, estimated more than \$50,000 was raised for the organizations this year. An official total will be released in a few weeks.

Roughly 1,200 people entered the triathlon, more than 400 volunteers helped carry it out, and thousands watched, Larson said.

The race was won by Sam Inkinen, 34, of San Francisco, in 1 hour, 56 minutes and 11 seconds. The top female finisher was Rosalinda Castaneda, 26, of Palo Alto, who clocked at 2:13:11.

The task of food preparation was the charge for members of the Scotts Valley High School cross coun-



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Race leader before his crash into a race vehicle, Tommy Zaferes has a smile on his face as he looks for damage to his helmet with his mother Nancy after changing back into his street clothes on Sunday.

try team.

"This event pays for our sport," said Matt Abraham, team captain, as he sorted grapes for event finishers on Beach Street at Bay Street around 8 a.m. "We need uniforms and this event supplies most of the money we need to do cross country."

The teens also laid out oranges, bananas, bagels and mini-doughnuts for athletes taking part in the race.

At Bay and Laguna streets, three teens from San Lorenzo Valley High School's cross country team were cheering and pointing the way for cyclists as they headed out on, and returned from, the 40k ride to Davenport.

"Go this way, go that way, go, go, go that way," yelled seniors Alejandro Torres and Stephen Cooper and sophomore Landis MacMillan as they danced in the intersection.

Their efforts brought smiles to many of the cyclists, and earned a few return cheers.

"Good job guys," yelled one cyclist as he left the

area. "You're rocking the cheering."

"They know how important it is to cheer everyone on," said Claudia Williams, parent of another teen on the SLV team. "They are athletes, too. They like it when people cheer for them, too."

Sitting on the sidelines with her camera and official USA Triathlon cow bell was Mary Bitondo of Los Altos. She was reading a book and taking in the triathlon's sights and sounds until her 56-year-old husband, Steve, and a group of eight others from the El Camino YMCA came riding toward the transition area on their bicycles.

"This is his second year," she said.

Mary Bitondo trained all last year for the 2008 event, but was unable to compete after she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"I argued with my doctor to let me participate," she said.

But the treatments could not wait, she added.

"It's hard to sit on the side," she said, noting she hopes to race next year.

Brad Stegoff of Concord

doesn't plan to wait until next year to compete in another Santa Cruz event. He's signed up for the Oct. 25 Big Kahuna Triathlon, which features a 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike and a 13.1 mile run.

The Half-Ironman race will be the 36-year-old's fourth triathlon, a sport he entered as a way to help himself focus on the important things in life.

"Exercise improves everything in my life," he said. "I don't do it to compete against other guys in my age group, I do it to compete against myself."

Santa Cruz Triathlon organizers say they plan to launch their own self-improvement campaign. Soon, they'll be sitting down to discuss the things that went right Sunday and the things that can be improved upon for next year.

While most racers praised the event, Larson said he'd like to see some security improvements made to the transition area. He'd also like to figure out how to best accommodate out-of-town participants who want to register and pick up their triathlon packets the morning of the event as opposed to the previous day.

That can't be done online because of race rules, Larson said.

"The sanctioning body, which is the USA Triathlon, requires in-person registration for insurance coverage purposes," he said.

Race officials had also run out of food by the time the last racers were trickling in, Larson said. While enough snacks had been prepared for the athletes, apparently some spectators also had their fill, Larson said.

"But there was food along the race route, so no one went hungry," Larson said.