



Say hello, Chicago, to the next step in the evolution of the sport of triathlon – the elite triathlon team.

CHICAGO, Ill. – A sport long known for its rugged individualism and as a test of human endurance, triathlon has gained tremendous popularity in recent years. With popularity comes an abundance of training programs for the amateur athlete, populated largely by first-timers and novices. However, group training options are few and far between for top athletes. Thus, the concept of the Elite Triathlon Team was born.

Sharone Aharon, an internationally known coach of world-class triathletes and founder of the Well-Fit Triathlon and Training company, recently served as an assistant coach with the U.S. National Team, where he experienced the value of the team concept firsthand. This led him to replicate the same framework in Chicago.

"The National Team program trains the members of its resident team as a group, and that gives the individual athletes a tremendous advantage over most athletes who train alone," Aharon said. "Although triathlon is an individual sport, there is so much that can be improved by the group concept, including athletes pushing one another, consistent coaching, threshold testing, sports psychology, nutrition and overall support. We are already seeing impressive gains for the individual Well-Fit Elite Team members."

The Well-Fit Elite Team was formed in February 2008 and is uniquely focused on training. The Elite Team trains together six times each week, and each workout is managed either by Aharon or an assistant Well-Fit coach. "There are a lot of clubs that focus on bringing athletes together for the social aspects and to share information, and that's great," Aharon said. "But, the Elite Team is focused on bringing the elite athletes together to train alongside one another – to push one another, to learn from one another and make one another better."

Well-Fit received more than 50 responses to the initial announcement that it intended to form the Elite Team. Aharon narrowed the field

to 16 members by reviewing the candidates' athletic resumes and by holding tryouts. "We wanted the best athletes, but we also wanted athletes who were interested in the group concept," Aharon said. "The Elite Team is a dynamic group. We have several young future professionals, as well as older, former professionals and top age group athletes. The common thread is the desire to improve alongside like-minded individuals."

Chris Riekert and Brian Fort are the young guard of the Elite Team. Chris is a student at DePaul University. He won the Los Angeles Triathlon last year finishing the Olympic distance race in 2:04:26. Riekert has his sights set on the London Olympic Games in 2012. Fort is studying to become an anesthesiologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, but has decided to take next year off from school to focus on triathlon. His goal this year is to excel at Ironman Florida and to race the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii in 2009.

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All 16 members of Well-Fit Elite Team are qualified for the elite wave of the Accenture Chicago Olympic distance triathlon, and Aharon expects that as many as ten members of the team will qualify and compete in the USAT Age Group Nationals in Portland, Ore., in September, where they will have a chance to earn a spot on Team USA and race in the 2009 World Championship. Many members of the team also competed in the Galena sprint distance triathlon in May, the Bigfoot sprint and Olympic distance triathlons in June, and plan to compete in several long course races, including Steelhead 70.3, Ironmans Coeur d'Alene, Florida and Wisconsin, and the Ironman 70.3 World Championships in Clearwater, Fla.

The initial response from sponsors has been positive, and the team is currently considering partnerships with several triathlon-specific suppliers, including a deal with Get A Grip Cycles, and is in discussions with several



Another member of the Elite Team is Mandy McCarthy. A former marathoner and presently the Brand Manager for AXE at Unilever, McCarthy placed in the top 3 overall in the first triathlon she entered in 2005. Last year, she won her age group at the Accenture Chicago Triathlon and was the top overall female at the Lake Geneva Triathlon. This year, McCarthy will compete in both Olympic and half-Ironman distance national championship competitions, with her sights set on representing Team USA at the 2009 ITU World Championships in Gold Coast, Australia.

McCarthy's husband Kevin is also a member of the team. Now 35, Kevin is a seven-time USA Triathlon All-American and is a vice president, specializing in commercial real estate, with the Staubach Company. "I don't have 20 hours each week to dedicate to the sport anymore. It's more of a hobby now, but that doesn't mean that I have to stop improving and competing." In 2007, Kevin won the Culver City Triathlon by nearly 10 minutes and finished among the top 10 amateurs at the Accenture Chicago Triathlon. Like Mandy, Kevin aims to qualify for

major companies interested in affiliating their business with the sport of triathlon.

"Our goal is to be able to offer the coaching and training services at no charge to the Elite Team members, as well as provide them with the things that they need to compete, including bikes, nutrition and entry fees," Aharon said. "It's an expensive sport, but I believe that businesses will appreciate the benefits of being affiliated with a team of age group elite triathletes, as compared to a solo professional. We are still looking for the right business to step up and be to the Elite Team what the U.S. Postal Service was to Lance Armstrong's Tour de France team."

Sharone Aharon is a native of Israel who ran his first triathlon in 1989 and first Ironman in 1998. The Elite Team is also coached by Well-Fit coach and Elite Team member Lara Batalini and Keith Klebacha. Membership on the Well-Fit Elite Team is still open, and Sharone continues to seek qualified candidates. Contact Well-Fit at sharone@wellfitinc.com for more information. ■