

Triathlon

Another overview about the extremely quick development of triathlon, starting with the famous bet, that created the Ironman in 1978, to the Olympic debut in Sydney 2000? NO! The following lines should demonstrate that modern "Multisport" is not "that" young as generally believed! And that "triathlon" existed long before clubs and federations existed!

Triathlon is not an American phenomenon! Triathlon appears in the **beginnings of the 20th century** (app.1920) in France and is called **Les trois sports** (=the 3 sports), „La Course des Débrouillards“ (= the race of the experts) and „La course des Touche à Tout“ (=the race that touches everything). Races are staged every year at Joinville le Pont, in Meulan and Poissy. The "hobby-event" remains in anonymity though there are several races known, like the one in Marseille (1927). The French newspaper "L'Auto" reports that from **1920** on, a race was staged every



year which was known as "Les Trois Sports". It consisted of a 3km run, a 12km bike ride and the crossing of river Marne. All 3 disciplines were staged consecutively and without a break. 1934 witnessed "Les Trois Sports" in Rochelle, with a canal crossing (app. 200m), a 12km bike event in the harbour of Rochelle and the adjacent park Laleu and a 1200m run in the stadium André-Barbeau.

A license issued 1927 for Rene Taqué recalls this early years of triathlon!

A quiet time for triathlon follows until it is reinvented in America, in **Mission Bay**/San Diego in **1974**. 4 years before the famous Ironman is staged for the first time, triathlon evolves from the „Dave Pain Birthday Biathlon“ (4,5 miles run, 200-300 yards swim). The idea make the event bigger and to balance the run and swim portion led to the inclusion of cycling. Triathlon was born for the second time and celebrated its birthday on Wednesday, September 25, 1974. It was a 6 miles run, 5 miles bike and 500 yards swimming event – in this order! The race announcement included the hint that everyone had to bring his/her own bike! 46 participants took the challenge and first to cross the finish line was Bill Philipps. Place 35 in the ranking showed a certain John Collins, who did his first triathlon.....

.....and admitted, that a dose of "beer muscles" played a role in the creation of the Ironman Triathlon. One night while attending a running race's awards ceremony, Collins got involved in a lively debate. The argument turned around the question who was in better shape - runners or swimmers. Collins had read in Sports Illustrated that Eddie Merckx was the fittest athlete in the world. He therefore proposed that cyclists were the fittest. The rest is history. A well-known local swim event called the Waikiki Rough Water Swim was tied to a perimeter bike ride of the island and concluded with a run of the Honolulu Marathon course. The full race was to be a little over 140 miles. Ironman was born. On February 18, **1978**, 15 competitors, including Collins, came to the shores of Waikiki to take the Ironman challenge. Collins and 11 others finished the entire course. Gordon Haller crossed the finish line first in 11 hours, 46 minutes and 58 seconds to become the "original" Ironman. The event was organised again in **1979**. Among the 15 athletes who did compete was Lyn Lemaire, a cyclist from Boston. She became the first "**Ironwoman**". The international break-through came with the broadcast of the **1981** event and Julie Moss' finish, which ABC's Jim McKay, among the most experienced sports broadcasters in history, called the most inspiring sports moment he had ever witnessed. Her achievement ignited an explosion of interest in the Ironman Triathlon around the world. Thousands of smaller triathlons sprang up.

Triathlon came in **1981** to the “old continent” and first conquered the north (The Netherlands, Belgium, East-Germany). Almere/NED was one of the first races in Europe, but also the Czech Republic had very early “Ironmen”! The “come-back” to France happened in **1982** with the race in Nice. TV images helped a lot to spread the sport – the “crazy guys” and their “crazy sport” came into people’s minds.

More and more races were organised from **1983** on, and „1/2“, „1/4“ and „1/8“ triathlons were added to the “Hawaii-distance” (3,8km swim, 180km bike, 42,195km run). The latter is now simply the “Ironman” or “long-distance” (if not an Ironman licensee), while 1/2 became “middle distance”, 1/4 “Olympic distance” and 1/8 “sprint distance”



In this environment the first national, continental and international federations formed. The European Triathlon Union (**ETU**) was founded August 8, **1984** in **Almere/NED** with 10 National Federations as founding members: AUT, BEL, CZE, DEN, GER (west), FRA, GBR, IRE, NED, SWE. ETU was a highly successful non-profit making organisation registered in Luxembourg until a constitutional change in **2002** formed the ETU to a **regional representation** of the International

Triathlon Union (ITU) in Europe. In this form a sub-committee of the ITU.

The ITU was formed April 1, 1989 in **Avignon/FRA**. The first World Championships were staged in the same year, also in Avignon.

Before the ITU came into being, 2 organisations – FIT and TFI – existed, but both failed due difference of opinion between Europe and USA/Canada/Australia/New Zealand and some South American countries.

Continental organisations for America, Asia and Africa formed in the 1990ies, are completely linked to the ITU, and they organise „ITU Regional Championships“ for triathlon. (and related multisports)

„The Triathlon“ (1,5km/40km/10km), æ denominated by the ITU, had its debut as Olympic sport in Sydney 2000.

Triathlon as known in the world to the man in the street is the Ironman. Its fascination is undiminished, which is underlined by the number of participants in the various “IM” races. Many of them are sold out a year in advance! The Ironman Corporation, the rights-holder of the Ironman trademark is one of the biggest licensor in America!

The „crazy“ sport has grown up, without getting „old“ or loosing its fascination!