

Success on the second 'tri'

Ex-competitive swimmer finds niche in triathlon

Wednesday, May 4th, 2005

By Martin Zeilig

Her injury was a blessing in disguise.

When Jill Dobrinsky developed tendinitis in her shoulder from too much training as a competitive swimmer, she felt compelled to change sports.

Such an energetic person just couldn't remain inactive.

"I was searching on the Internet and located Triathlon Manitoba. Then, I contacted Sport Manitoba, who put me in touch with them," says Dobrinsky, 19, a first-year student in kinesiology at the University of Manitoba, who swam with the Manitoba Marlins from 1996-99 and won a couple of age group provincial championships with the club.

Today, she is a top junior level triathlete, according to Gary Pallett.

"She's a very good athlete. She's strong and committed," said Pallett, the head coach of the Manitoba National Triathlon Centre at the University of Manitoba.

With her swimming background, Pallett maintains that Dobrinsky -- a graduate of Garden City Collegiate -- has a chance of making Canada's national junior team this year.

"She wants to succeed at the highest level. I've never seen someone train as hard," adds Tim Volk, Dobrinsky's teammate on a co-ed indoor soccer team this winter, who runs with her occasionally.

Dobrinsky notes that she had to borrow her first bike from Triathlon Manitoba before she had money to buy her own.

She entered her first triathlon race in 2000 -- and later that season won Manitoba Triathlon's rookie of the year award.

That initial competition just happened to be the junior women's national championships held at Bird's Hill Park over an Olympic distance -- 1.5-kilometre swim, 40-kilometre bike and 10-kilometre run.

"I was competing against 19 and 20 year olds who were more experienced than me. I only had two months of preparation. It was a very hot day. But it was an exciting experience because I was up against the best competitors in Canada," says Dobrinsky, who also coaches an indoor seven- and eight-year-old mixed soccer team at Garden City Community Centre.

She placed 13th in the competition, a pretty fair showing for a novice.

"After that, I started doing the sprint distance, which is half the length of the Olympic distances," says Dobrinsky, who -- as a runner -- won the female 3,000 metres at the 2000 Manitoba Summer Games in Virden.

In 2003, she broke the fibula in her right leg and couldn't compete in the triathlon. Instead, Dobrinsky - - who won the \$500 Woman to Watch Scholarship from Sport Manitoba in April -- entered the Canadian Cycling Championships and placed 15th overall in her category. Last season at the National Junior Triathlon Championships in Kelowna, B.C., she placed seventh.

"It was a very good race for me, the best I've ever done," says Dobrinsky, adding that her goal for this year is to qualify for the World Junior Triathlon Championships in Gamagori, Japan on Sept. 11.

Her first race this season is in Thief River Falls, Minn., on May 21.

"I'm going to be doing several races across Canada too this year," says Dobrinsky, noting that she trains a total of about 20 hours per week.

"My long-term goal is to compete internationally for Canada."

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