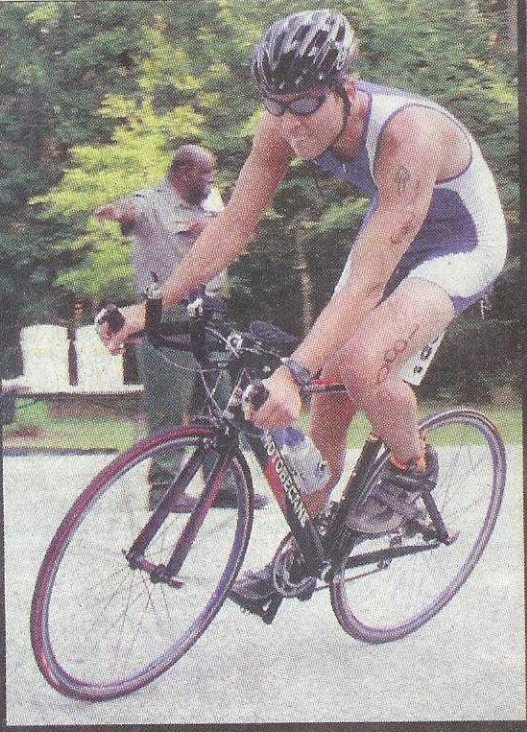


FESTIVAL OF FLOWERS TRIATHLON



Staff photo

Nearly 245 athletes competed in the Wachovia Triathlon Sunday at Lake Greenwood State Park. Here, Daphne Williams, of Simpsonville, competes in the women's swimming portion. Contestants in different age groups began swimming .9 miles, then biked 40 kilometers and finished running 10 miles. **left:** Twelve-year-old Jack McAlhany, of Hodges, was the youngest athlete to compete in the triathlon. McAlhany and father Johnny compete and train together. **Inset right:** Micah Suhl, of Columbia, races to finish second in the men's age 25-29 group. The triathlon is part of the Festival of Flowers.

THE AGONY OF THE FEET • Shoeless Heidi's toe snags on pavement but her spirit can't be broken

By JOANIE BAKER
Index-Journal staff writer

Heidi Prado will probably never let her 2-year-old child run barefoot on the highway in the blistering sun. But, then again, if it means not quitting a race, Prado might just tell her child to go for it. At least that's what Prado did during Sunday's Wachovia Triathlon at Lake Greenwood State Park. Baseball legend Joe Jackson once played a game in

his stockings because of blisters caused by a pair of new spikes. That earned him the nickname "Shoeless Joe." But unlike Jackson, Prado didn't have warm grass and dirt beneath her feet. Just minutes before the horn sounded to send 245 athletes into Lake Greenwood for the event, Prado stubbed her toe on the wall of the entry steps. After completing the .9-mile swim and 40-kilometer bike ride around Lake Greenwood State Park with a

throbbing foot, Prado knew there was no way she could finish the 10-kilometer race on her feet. For three miles, Prado answered to the question one was asking as her feet smacked the pavement with the same grace as a duck. "I ... *breath* ... broke... *breath* ... m... she said before pulling over into the parking lot with her burning feet. See **FEET**, page 4B



Staff photos by Joanie Baker

Nearly 245 athletes competed in the Wachovia Triathlon Sunday at Lake Greenwood State Park. Here, Daphne Williams, of Simpsonville, watches the men's swimming portion. Contestants in different age groups began swimming .9 miles, then biked 40 kilometers and finished running 10 kilometers. Inset left: Twelve-year-old Jack McAlhany, of Hodges, was the youngest athlete to compete in the triathlon. McAlhany and father Johnny competed and regularly train together. Inset right: Micah Suhl, of Columbia, races to finish second in the men's age 25-29 group. The triathlon is part of the Festival of Flowers.

THE AGONY OF THE FEET • *Shoeless Heidi's toe snaps, but her spirit can't be broken*

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But, then again, if it means not quitting a race, Prado might just tell her child to go for it.

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his stockings because of blisters caused by a pair of new spikes. That earned him the nickname "Shoeless Joe."

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After completing the .9-mile swim and 40-kilometer bike ride around Lake Greenwood State Park with a

throbbing foot, Prado knew there was only one way she could finish the 10-kilometer race on foot: in her bare feet.

For three miles, Prado answered the question everyone was asking as her feet smacked the 100-plus-degree pavement with the same grace as a duck's webbed feet.

"I ... *breath* ... broke... *breath* ... my... *breath* ... toe," she said before pulling over into the grass to relieve her burning feet.

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FEET

Continued from 1B

And Prado kept running. But with only three miles to go, Jim Grant, corporal for the South Carolina Highway Patrol, stopped to pick up the determined athlete, who could barely move her legs.

"She was heartbroken," Grant said. "She was trying to find a way to make it the rest of the way."

Coming home, bringing friends, taking prizes

Though he has moved to Manitou Springs, Colo., Greenwood native Derick Williamson graced the afternoon as though it were an after-school practice at his alma mater, Emerald High School. Williamson took first place in the top male division, finishing the race in 1 hour, 58 minutes and 1 second, almost five minutes faster than Gregg Cromer, of Summerville, who placed second at 2:01.49.

But Williamson brought more than luck home with him when he came to visit his parents. The 25-year-old brought his girlfriend, Kelly Handel, of Manitou Springs, Colo., who also finished first in the women's division at 2:07.20. The race, which was part of the Festival of Flowers, was the second race Handel has competed in since she broke her arm last year training for a triathlon. Though she sometimes competes at the professional level, Handel said she enjoyed the low-key race and the friendly people who are supportive.

"Oddly enough, the heat wasn't too bad and there was good support," Handel said.

Handel said she wasn't sure that she would win but felt confident toward the end when she hadn't seen any women pass.

"I hoped to win, but you never know. Nothing is ever assured," she said.

Though he never looked for anyone to pass him, Jack McAlhany also felt confident he

would win his age division. The 13-year-old from Hodges, who trains regularly with his father, Johnny McAlhany, was the only athlete to compete in the male 10-13 age group and was the youngest to compete overall.

At 2:53.56, Jack finished a little more than 30 minutes after his dad and said his goal is to one day beat his father's time.

"Once I beat him, I get a new bike," said Jack, whose eyes excitedly opened to the size of half dollars.

"That's not going to happen for a while," Johnny said. "Hopefully."

Jack said his favorite part of racing is passing the adults who "cheer him on and make him not want to stop."

"I get lots of cheers. One guy was like, 'Hey, somebody trip that kid,'" Jack said.

The two occasionally practice together and even share a ritual chicken alfredo dinner the night before races. But Johnny, who began running as a way to lose

weight, said he doesn't want to push his son, rather he just enjoys spending time with him.

"I want him to be fit and participate in sports, but it doesn't matter to me if he's successful or not," Johnny said. "I just want him to participate, be healthy and enjoy it."

Co-race Director Josh Ferrell said that other than Prado's toe, only one woman received medical attention for dehydration. Ferrell said that everyone seemed extremely pleased with the race.

"The only thing I would have changed would be the heat," Ferrell said.

TOP FINISHERS

Top results of Sunday's Festival of Flowers Triathlon at Lake Greenwood State Park, with finishing place, name, hometown and time.

OVERALL MEN

1. Derick Williamson, Manitou Springs, Colo., 1:58:01.; 2. Gregg Cromer, Summerville, 2:01.49; 3. Richard Klepacz, Atlanta, 2:03.37.

OVERALL WOMEN

1. Kelly Handel, Manitou Springs, Colo., 2:07:20; 2. Tracy McKee, Charleston, 2:18:12; 3. Julie Murphy, Greer, 2:19:01.

TOP MASTERS MEN

1. Dawson Cherry, Mt. Pleasant, 2:05:35; 2.