

At Eighty Years of Age, Triathlons Still Spark Competitive Spirit

by Lynn Kuhns

“Live well, laugh often, and love much with all of your heart,”
[Answering-machine message at Jim and Mary Jordal’s home.]

When I phoned to congratulate 79-year-old Jim Jordal for signing up for the Chisago Lakes Triathlon, the Minnesota resident answered with what I heard as a smile in his voice. “Perhaps you should be offering condolences.”

The retired high school economics teacher now has tendonitis in the hip, a painful condition typically aggravated by running. But that’s not stopping him. “I plan on alternating running and walking for the last segment of Chisago. I still can bike and swim.”

Jordal’s entry into the Chisago Lakes Triathlon, his way of honoring his 80th birthday, will be only his second triathlon since 1991. In 2007, he completed the ¼-mile swim, 20-mile bike race and 3.1-mile run of the Chisago triathlon in 2 hours, 23-minute and 4 seconds (2:23:04), earning first in his age group.

Over more than a quarter of a century, Jordal has given much to the sport of triathlons, and taken much from it. And, for about half of his tri-racing career, he hasn’t been alone. His wife, Mary, has competed in about 50 triathlons. For years, they followed the professional circuit together, traveling in a van that could also transport their bicycles and other gear.

So why did Jim Jordal suggest condolences? Sometimes a lot of a good thing just becomes ... a *lot*. And over many decades, it begins to hurt. “We were kind of active in the early days. I did it big time – about 90 triathlons, all over the country,” Jordal said. “But about 10 years ago, I got injured. I think it was from too much running.”

It may not have been advancing age that slowed Jordal down. “What did us in was becoming world travelers. We took a

trekking trip to Nepal in '92, and after that, I couldn't workout for about a month. So we decided to cut back on the tris."

How did it all start, 28 years ago? "I was standing around with a bunch of runners, and one of them had an entry to the Menomonee, Wisconsin Tinman. She wanted to give her entry away, and that was my start. It was a 1-mile swim, 55-mile bike and 12-mile run over very hilly terrain. "

He added, "For me, swimming, running and bicycling, was kind of natural. I had a lot of secrets. One is that you can't waste time in the transition area. Seconds count. I used to tape my pedals in proper position to get my sole in quickly."

People who are close to others with similar interests and talents tend to talk in the collective-plural. Jim does, united with Mary. "We did pretty well. We both were All-American triathletes," he said. "We finished third in World Championships, in 1990 in our International distance."

What has kept the Jordals interested in the multi-sport? "It's the cross training – and the fact that that cross training does help prevent injuries. It seems all the runners I knew were injured in one way or another. It's also more and more challenging and fun. We tend to have triathlete-friends who are 10 or 20 years younger than we are," he said.

Jim Jordal's bike has most of his training time. "I don't have any trouble swimming, but the time is significant on the bike." He finds training with Mary to be helpful. "She's a strong biker. She can keep up with me."

While Jordal has competed in half-ironman and International-distance tris, he now focuses on sprint distances. "You can get pretty competitive. I don't like to lose. If I can't compete at a fairly decent level, I didn't want to compete at all. Now, though, I'm okay with the fact that I may have the longest time in my age group."

Mary and Jim Jordal have trophies, medals, and photo albums — "a lot of them"— to share with friends, family and hopeful triathletes of all ages.

Jim noted that soon after triathlon's early heydays, things began tapering down. "I thought Triathlons were going die out, due to the high cost of insurance for races, but somehow they've gotten around that. Now, it's growing again," he said, adding. "And that's a good thing. Being a triathlete is good for your confidence and for your all-around conditioning."

And it's also good, for us to learn from people like Jim and Mary Jordal that male or female, young or older, triathlons can keep us healthy and richly connected with our efforts, new friends and special places over time. Over a lot of time,

--Lynn Kuhns, free-lance writer, Winneconne, WI.

The Chisago Lakes Triathlon is scheduled for 7 a.m. Sunday, July 25, 2010 with its start in Paradise Park and a kick off with several pre-event activities that include sprint distance, half ironman distance, and kids' triathlon. To register for or for more information, visit www.midwestsportsevents.com or call Midwest Sports Events at 1-800-429-8044.