

35TH ANNUAL GREENFIELD TRIATHLON



FILE PHOTOS

The Green River will be full of swimmers at the start of Sunday's Greenfield Lightlife Triathlon at the Green River Swimming & Recreation Area on Nash's Mill Road in Greenfield. The race not only will draw over 300 competitors, it will also bring in a large contingent of well-wishers and onlookers.

Familiar faces highlight 35th Greenfield Lightlife Triathlon

By JASON BUTYNSKI
Staff writer

Participants in the field for the 35th running of the Greenfield Lightlife Triathlon are going to get an opportunity to challenge themselves Sunday morning when competitors take off swimming at the sound of the air horn at the Green River Swimming & Recreation Area on Nash's Mill Road in Greenfield.

As was the case one year ago, this year's field includes many returning champions that other triathletes will get an opportunity to compete against in one of the two courses. Three of the four individual champions from a year ago return to try and tackle the course that has made the first Sunday in August a Mecca for triathletes for three and a half decades.

"This is the longest-running triathlon in New England and we are proud to have it in Greenfield," said race director Christy Moore.

The triathlon features two races. The smaller course is called the Sprint Division and features a .31-mile swim, a 15.14-mile bike and a 3.09 run, while the longer course — known as the International course — features a .63-mile swim, a 30.28-mile bike



and a 7.09-mile run.

Both the men's and women's Sprint welcome back last year's winners. The women's race was won by South Deerfield's JoEllen Reino, who captured her third consecutive and fourth overall women's title last year when she sprinted across the finish line in 1 hour, 18 minutes, 8.4 seconds to beat Northampton's Tara Strassburg, who was second in 1:19:51.

Both Reino and Strassburg return this season to lead the women's field. Reino became the first-ever woman to win three consecutive titles in the race, and she tied a record set by Don Dwight for the most all-time wins in race history with four. She will be looking to break that mark on Sunday.

On the men's side, Conway's Jay Gump unseated two-time de-

fending champion Dan Bensen of Greenfield last season when he raced across the finish line in 1:04:52. Gump made a little history of his own last season when he won the Sprint as he also captured the International title in 2010, giving him wins in both courses. He returns for another shot at a title.

SEE TRIATHLON D3



FILE PHOTO

Athletes compete in the bike portion of last year's Greenfield Triathlon.

Triathlon

FROM D1

Bensen, a University of Vermont graduate who competed on the triathlon team at the school is a three-time champion with wins in 2012, 2015 and 2016. He was relegated to third place last season with a time of 1:10:39 and returns this season to try and win his fourth crown.

Another person who will join Reino in trying to break the all-time wins record is Hatfield's Madeline Nagy, who earned her fourth International women's crown last year when she finished in 2:42:56. Nagy won her first title in 2002 and then won in 2013 and 2015. Nagy was nearly four minutes faster than any other woman last summer and actually finished eighth overall.

The only division without the defending champ returning is the men's International Division, which was won by Eric Kirouac of Williamsburg, who cruised to a first-place finish in 2:18:33 to best the rest of the field by more than three minutes. Kirouac was not registered as of Friday evening, leaving the seat vacant. Carson Poe, of Northampton, has been a mainstay in the International competition as he has used the Greenfield Tri to warm up for an Ironman Competition. Poe was the two-time winner going into last year's race but was unseated by Kirouac and finished third. He also had not yet registered for the race.

The race does include some other interesting storylines. Northampton's Win Whitcomb is a two-time champ in the Sprint in 2002 and 2004 and last year competed in the International where he took fifth. He returns

to the Sprint Division this season. Graham Rigby of Keene, N.H. is back this season after finishing fourth in the men's Sprint last year. Rigby won the Sprint in 2005 and was the quickest swimmer in the field last season. Jennie Hansen of Rochester, N.Y. set the all-time women's Sprint mark with her time of 1:08:31 to win the 2014 race, marking her second Sprint title as she won her first crown in 2010. Her husband David Hansen captured the men's Sprint crown that season as well. Both are registered this year although each is going to tackle the International course.

As of Friday evening, the results of bacteria testing in the Green River was all clear, and organizers are optimistic that the swimming portion of the race will get the green light.

The event was also celebrating some of its biggest numbers ever. As of Friday, 332 competitors were registered. Online registration is now closed, but anyone interested in still registering can do so today from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Swimming & Recreation Area when race bags are handed out. Last year's event drew 318 competitors, so that number has already been eclipsed.

Last summer, the triathlon was preparing to deal with potential bridge work on Nash's Mill Road, but the good news for the race is that no construction has begun, meaning the original course is intact. Now in the fourth year since the return of the covered bridge on Eunice Williams Drive, the course looks like this. Competitors begin near the dam and swim against the current. Swimmers emerge from the water on the western side of the playground and head to the bicycle transition area. Competitors exit the

area and take a left onto Nash's Mill Road. Riders head up the hill and take a left onto Leyden Road where they set out for a long trip out to Eunice Williams Drive, which they turn left onto and cross over the covered bridge. After climbing the winding hill, riders head out onto Green River Road and down to Plain Road before heading left back onto Nash's Mill Road. The Sprint riders do two laps, while the International riders do four laps.

After jumping off their bikes, competitors gear up for the final third of the race, the run. The running course differs. The International competitors run one lap of the same course used for the bike, but the Sprint runners exit from the transition area and take a right onto Nash's Mill and then right onto Colrain Road. Runners go right at the fork to merge onto Plain Road, then take a left onto Meadow Lane, and another left onto Colrain Road, which leads them back to Nash's Mill and the finish line.

Organizers ask that anyone living along any of the courses please make sure to have dogs on leashes as to not interfere with the race. Both Nash's Mill Road and Eunice Williams Drive will be closed from 8 a.m. until noon on the day of the race as they always are. Spectators who arrive before the race begins will be able to park at the Swimming & Recreation Area, but will not be allowed to leave until the conclusion of the race. Spectator parking is also available at Murphy Park on Leyden Road, as well as at the Academy of Early Learning and Valley Medical Center.

For a map of parking or for more information on the event go to www.greenfield-triathlon.com.