

SPORTS



JAY BUTYNSKI
JAYWALKING

Talk about full circle

Hank Lange remembers it well — Greenfield Triathlon, Aug. 4, 1991, he the 37-year-old overall runner-up and men's 30-39 division champion.

Although it would be no stretch to assume that his grueling accomplishment that day could not have been topped by anyone in his immediate family at that time a quarter-century ago, such a logical assumption about his grueling ordeal would be inaccurate indeed. In fact, dead wrong. Because, you see, just 20 hours before the starting gun had sounded, Lange's wife, Diana, had given birth to their first child, a daughter. Now, 25 years after the birth of Sarah Wellington Lange, she and her dad will return to Greenfield to participate in the 33rd annual triathlon Sunday morning at the Green River Swimming and Recreation Area.

The Brattleboro residents had not returned to the race until last summer, when the Langes attended the 32nd running of the event as spectators. While cheering competitors, father and daughter could feel their competitive juices begin to flow and then and there a challenge was issued for the following summer.

"The idea was hatched while we watched that day," Hank said. "She's out for blood, I'm afraid."

Running a triathlon is old hat for Hank, who has been coaching athletes for 40 years. In his early years of coaching, Lange coached swimmers, two Division I collegiate ski teams, and U.S. Skiing's Youth Development Program for Nordic Skiers. He was with U.S. Skiing during the 1980 Winter Olympics at Lake Placid, N.Y., and remained with the national program until 1984.

He also began competing in triathlons in the early 1980s, breaking into the sport in 1980 and earning a top-20 finish in the Hawaii Ironman in 1982, which led to him competing professionally in the sport. He began coaching triathletes in 1984 and has remained in coaching ever since. That included beginning his company, "Personal Best," which has made him one of the first individuals to make a living by coaching triathletes, including Olympians and world champions. He has twice been named Triathlon Coach of the Year by the U.S. Olympic Committee.

"I used to work more with competitive athletes, but now I help more amateurs," Lange explained. "I try to help people find balance in their lives."

Lange also became the race director for the Spofford (N.H.) Triathlon in 1982, and as he began to coach triathletes during this time, he began learning about other triathlons in the area, such as Keene and Greenfield, which he said are both great launching pads for people newcomers.

That takes us back to Aug. 1, 1991, when Lange's wife Diana went into labor and was admitted to Franklin Medical Center in Greenfield. All the Ironmans, triathlons and other races that Lange has ever run could not compare to what his wife was about to endure, as she spent the next 48 hours in labor. Lange said that at one point the doctor attending Diana's labor told the couple that when he returned he would check on them and the baby, but he returned for his next shift and Diana was still in labor.

"Lo and behold he came back on and she still hadn't delivered," Hank recalled. "She was really the endurance athlete. She endured far more than anybody would on the course."

His wife's marathon finally ended around midday Saturday, Aug. 3 when Sarah came into the world. The next morning, just 20 hours after the birth, Lange was heading to the Greenfield

SEE JAYWALKING D3



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Hank and Diana Lange are proud parents of newborn Sarah Wellington Lange on Aug. 3, 1991 at Baystate Franklin Hospital in Greenfield.

Jaywalking

FROM D1

Swimming Area to take part in the eighth Greenfield Triathlon.

"I had my bike in the car and that morning Diana looked pretty exhausted and told me, 'Get out of here,' Lange recalled.

When the triathlon was over, Lange celebrated by handing out Powerbars with pink ribbons tied around them.

Over the past 25 years, Sarah Lange has become quite a runner herself. She was the Vermont state cross-country runner in high school, and then went to Middlebury College to run, before transferring to Division II Adams State College in Colorado, where she rose to All-American status.

Over the past few years, she has been competing in triathlons, including winning her age group in the Give Peace a Tri Triathlon in Surry, N.H.

So who is the favorite in Sunday's Sprint Division? Well, both have their strengths. Sarah is a lot faster on the run, according to her dad, while Hank is a little better on the bike. They're close in the swim.

Because the start of the race features different heats, father and daughter will not be competing directly against each other. Hank will begin in the seventh heat and get a three-minute head start on his daughter, who is starting in the eighth heat. He can only hope to finish three minutes ahead of his daughter

or else lose the bet.

"I'm sure she is looking to bring her old man down," joked Lange.

As for the event itself, Lange said he is not surprised that the Greenfield Triathlon is still around after all these years.

"The Rec Department does such a great job putting this event on," he said. "It's a chance for people to try something. Some people barely swim, other people hardly run, but it's a chance for people to get out and try something different."

And it's not too late to sign up for anyone procrastinating down the stretch. People can still register online at www.greenfield-triathlon.com until Friday evening at 5, and you can register Saturday evening from 4-6 p.m. at the Greenfield Swimming Area.

"For those folks who do the triathlon, they are really doing something that goes far beyond just the accomplishment of an athletic event. They are doing something that will help them live a healthy lifestyle," Lange said. "A lot of folks sacrifice health and well-being to meet demands of a job or family, and they eventually decide to get healthy again. Triathlons are great for that because there is a size pond that is right for everybody."

Jason Butynski is a Greenfield native and Recorder sportswriter. His email address is jbutynski@recorder.com. Like him on Facebook and leave your feedback at www.facebook.com/jaybutynski.