

Athletes need training, problem solving to win triathlons

BY JOEL DANOY

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Professional or amateur, training is the essential component in any athlete's preparation for competing in a triathlon. But training will only take the athlete up to race day itself.

During a phone interview July 29, professional triathlete Mike Caiazzo offered his knowledge on how to negotiate the MedExpress Spirit of Morgantown, to give beginner racers a sense of what to expect when the starting gun is fired.

A runner in high school, Caiazzo also ran four years of cross-country and track at Duke University. He has competed in duathlons since 2002 and triathlons since 2003 before turning pro at the end of the 2005 season.

Caiazzo has also raced in the Spirit of Morgantown twice. His first race, in 2007, Caiazzo was forced to withdraw due to equipment failure. Last year, he finished in second place. He will not be returning this year due to a busy triathlon schedule.

With race day arriving, Caiazzo said preparation begins the night before.

"The night before, I have the pasta dinner to try and carbo-load," he said. "The morning of the race, I eat light, usually a bagel and a sports drink."

Although Caiazzo said he does not follow a strict diet leading up to race day, he does have his own routine.

"What I eat works for me, but of course everyone is different," he said. "You just need to find what foods work best with your stomach."

After a balanced diet, proper equipment is the next important item on a racer's checklist.

For the swim, Caiazzo said swimwear is critical, recommending a full-body wet suit.

"Having a wet suit is absolutely essential, not really to keep you warm in a race like this, but keeping buoyancy is a huge factor to keep you afloat in the water," he said. "You want it to fit really tight so there is



Bob Gay/The Dominion Post file photo

Triathletes dive into the Monongahela River to start the swimming portion of last year's race.

no bunching in the arms or the legs."

When choosing a bike, Caiazzo said it's a matter of "comfort over price tag." He recommends going to a bike shop and getting properly fitted on the bike before making any purchases.

"If you're riding much faster on a fitted bike that costs \$1,000 than a \$10,000 bike that might be better but is too big for you, then you know, that's not going to be beneficial," Caiazzo said.

Caiazzo said the most important pieces of equipment are well-fitted running shoes. He said "you want a

little bit of room in the toes," recommending a new pair after 400-500 miles of use.

"You want to get a shoe that works with your foot so that you can stay healthy and be consistent in your training," he said.

After eating properly and carefully choosing equipment, the only thing left is to run the race.

The first leg begins on the shores of the Monongahela River. With no current pulling swimmers in different directions, Caiazzo said the only concern for beginners can be swimming in a large group of people.

"In the beginning it's real chaotic, so maybe you want to start further on the outside and try to swim in toward the buoy," he said. "Basically you try to get out and get in front of some people in the beginning; after two hundred to five hundred yards it starts to settle down and you can get into more of a swimming type of rhythm."

As racers reach the first transition into the bike portion of the race, Caiazzo said to "keep it as simple as possible."

"One of the things I try and do is remove anything I don't need in my

transition area," he said. "When I show up to a transition point I don't have to think much — everything I need is there for me."

Going into the bike stage, Caiazzo cautions racers to pay close attention to the road conditions.

"The tough part is the early part of the bike when you are going along the river in that really tough section of road — it's really tough trying to keep the bike upright," he said.

His words come from experience, as Caiazzo was forced to withdraw from the 2007 race as a result of flat tires caused by Morgantown's rough

road conditions.

"That's the one thing about this course. The potholes are murder."

For the final leg of the race, the run, Caiazzo advises racers to work with the hills rather than against them.

"Say you lose 10 seconds to someone going up [a hill], if you're able to pick up 30 seconds going downhill, that's what makes the difference," he said.

According to Jay Redmond, race coordinator, the difficulty level of the run has been greatly reduced this year.

"With having a hard run, which is last when athletes are at their lowest energy levels, we reduced that portion which I believe dramatically reduces the difficulty of the overall race," Redmond said. "The sport is difficult enough without us making the course crazy hard."

The running will take place along the rail-trail this year. In the past, racers had to ascend the steep hill of Sixth Street, which came to be known as "Devil's Hill" by the racers.

"To put it in perspective, I think that's the only time I've walked in my whole triathlon career," Caiazzo said.

With an easier run, Redmond said the remainder of the race remains relatively unchanged.

"The swim course is exactly the same," he said. "The most challenging part of the bike ride is after leaving Route 100 turning toward Mount Morris."

"That's when racers will be going away from the river and that's where they're going to find most of the hills."

Overall, Caiazzo recommends that runners of all levels need to "just run your race."

"Just pace yourself. It's a long day and a race like Morgantown can take a lot out of you," he said. "You see a lot of people sprinting out of the gate but then they slow down after five miles or so. Pacing yourself is the key."