

Triathletes run down the blues

By Bill Shaw

The Facts

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FREEPORT — The inaugural Summertime Blues Sprint Triathlon drew more than 200 participants and relay teams to the banks of the Old Brazos for a 500-yard swim in the river, a 15-mile bike ride and a three-mile run around the river.

The bicycle ride took racers on a scenic route out of Municipal Park, down to the Quintana County Park and back via the Intracoastal Waterway bridge.

Houstonian Trent Stephens, 34, crossed the levee finish line next to RiverPlace in Municipal Park first, with transitions in 1:08.38. Stephens swam the 500 yards in 8:16 and he rode the bike route in 39:21, for an average of 22.9 mph. He made the run route in 19:50 for a mile pace of 6:37, with respective transitions of 31 seconds and 38 seconds between the swim and the bike and the bike and the run.

“The routes were perfect,” Stephens said. “The water temperature was great, the bike route was awesome and the bridge broke it up for everybody. We flatlanders were praying that the bridge was not too long. The race was tough. There weren’t going to be any gifts today.”

Flatlanders also faced some hills on the run, which included running over the Velasco

Bridge and the levee at the boat ramp adjacent to the Community House.

Finishing seventh overall in the male competition was Gerhard Van Niekerk, 48, a native South African now living in Sugar Land, with a time of 1:11:53 to win first place in the master (40-plus) competition. Niekerk finished the swim in 9:30, the bike route in 40:28, an average of 22.2 mph, and the run in 19:33, a 6:31-mile pace, with respective transitions of 1:05 and 1:14.

Bridget Jensen, 43, of Houston, finished 22nd overall and first in the overall female competition in 1:15:50, with a 10:59 swim, a 41:37 bike ride — with an average of 21.6 mph — and a run of 21:41, a 7:14-mile pace. Her transitions were 49 seconds and 41 seconds.

Finishing 27th overall and first in the female masters (40-plus) competition, Lisa Tilton-McCarthy finished the contest in 1:17:07 with a 9:33 swim, a 46:31 bike ride at 19.3 mph and 18:58 run for a 6:19 mile pace. Her transitions were one minute and 1:03.

Tilton-McCarthy came



Trent Stephens of Houston finishes the Summertime Blues Sprint Triathlon first on the Old Brazos levee. Photo by Bill Shaw.

out of the water first but fell behind on the bike.

“I passed Lisa on the bike,” Jensen said. “The bridge was a good challenge (on the bike), and thank God there was a guy on the run ahead of me that helped me pace myself in on the run.”

“I saw Bridget on the bike ahead of me for about five miles, and then I lost sight of her,” said Tilton-McCarthy, who overall winner Stephens called a “phenomenal runner.”

Tilton-McCarthy finished the run route 2:43 faster than Jensen, but still remained 1:17 behind Jensen at the finish line.

In the Clydsdale competition for males 200 pounds and heavier, Douglas



Overall female winner Bridget Jensen begins the anchor leg of the Summertime Blues Sprint Triathlon. Photo by Bill Shaw.

Paddon-Jones, 37, a native Australian who lives in Galveston, finished first in 1:18:32 with a 9:56 swim, a 43:36 bike ride at 20.6 mph and a 22:56 run at a 7:39-mile pace with transitions of 55 seconds and 1:07.

“I was pleasantly surprised at this race,” Paddon-Jones said. “This (race venue) is a fantastic facility.”

Sarah Graybeal, 28, finished first in the Athena competition for females 160 pounds and heavier in 1:41:42 with a 10:54 swim, a 53:01 bike ride at 17 mph and a 33:40 run at an 11:15-mile pace, with transitions of 2:12 and 1:48.

Local triathletes did well in the competition.

Susan Lorms, 59, of Lake Jackson finished 141 overall and second in the female 55-59 competition in 1:41:51. Lorms

swam in 13:40, biked in 55:06 with a 16.3-mph average and ran in 29:20 for a 9:47-mile pace, with transitions of 1:33 and 2:10.

“This was an impressive first race for Freeport,” Lorms said. “The T-shirts and the courses and food were great.”

Lorms referred to the full breakfast buffet for participants in Riverplace after the race.

Cliff Wilson, 71, of Lake Jackson finished 151st overall and third in the male 70-74 competition in 1:48:47 with a 12:56 swim, a 56:46 bike ride at 15.9 mph and a run at 35:26 for an 11:49-mile pace. He transitioned in 1:51 and 1:47.

“It was one of the better triathlons,” said Wilson, a veteran of more than 40 triathlons. “You think of this area as flat and boring, but we had hills on both the bike and the run. We had good traffic control on both.”

Janice Moody, 46, of Freeport won second place in the Athena competition in 1:45:05 with a 12:22 swim, a 56:21 bike ride at 16 mph and a 31:16 run at a 10:25-mile pace and transitions of 2:44 and 2:19.

“I liked the open water swim; it was my favorite (of the segments),” Moody said. “There were tons of help and volunteers, people everywhere and excellent police protection. This is a perfect place for a triathlon. I heard a lot of people who liked it out here.”

The top participants in the inaugural Freeport triathlon agreed with Moody.

“I will definitely come back next year,” Jensen said.

“I will come back next year,” Tilton-McCarthy said. “This is a safe and well-organized race.”

Mary Lee Stotler, Freeport Main Street director, came up with the idea for the triathlon in Freeport and contacted race organizers Jana and Kevin Landry of Tri On the Run of Houston and Jay Lee of On the Run in Houston to organize and supervise the event.

“Everybody from parks to the police and fire department, streets and works and the Coast Guard and all the volunteers went above and beyond this weekend to put on the event,” Stotler said. “Everyone pulled together. People are already asking us about next year. We have great assets in Freeport and a great venue that people don’t really know about.”

“We were pleased with the success of the race and believe



Summertime Blues Sprint Triathlon winners, from left to right, Trent Stephens, first overall male; Bridget Jensen, first overall woman; first overall masters male, Gerhard Van Niekerk; Lisa Tilton-McCarthy, first overall female masters. Pictured in back, Douglas Paddon-Jones, top Clydsdale finisher. Not pictured, Sarah Graybeal, top Athena finisher. Photo by Bill Shaw.

it will grow,” Jana Landry said. “This is a great venue, and the race went so well because we had the support of so many key people from the City of Freeport.”

Freeport City Manager Ron Bottoms said, “I’ve talked to several people, and they are positive about the event. They all agree that the view from the bridge is spectacular, but better, of course, on the way back. I’ve been impressed. People say they are coming back.”

“This was an excellent first race,” said Anna Keniston, USA Triathlon official. “Kevin

and Jana know what they are doing, and they had good support from the community. The only way to improve the race is more participation.”

Major sponsors for the contest were Main Street Freeport, American Rice Inc., BASF, Tri on the Run, On the Run and the City of Freeport. B&B Seafood and Windswept were major food providers with other contributions from Baytown Seafood, Baywood Grocery, Shipley’s Donuts, Billy’s Donuts, Texas Burrito Factory, On the River, Captain Ken’s and Talk-about-Good. The Freeport

Lions Club, The Freeport Rotary Club, the Freeport League and the Brazosport Area Road Runners Association provided key volunteer efforts.