

UWA Triathlon Club

My brief recollections of the early history of UWA Triathlon Club.

I joined the Tri Club in 1994. I joined a friend who was a member of the Club in her first year of University; Amy Thomson for the Wednesday night handicapped Aquathons. Incidentally she went on to win the 1997 World Triathlon Championships for Female 20 - 24. My early memories of the Club were a small but hardy group of individuals, all a little quirky and even slightly eccentric. I don't think much has changed, because as triathletes we are all a little alternate. But in those days it was definitely seen as a fringe sport, rather than the mainstream popularity of the weekend warrior. Some people even now make a career from it.

People that had influence on the Club, and were vital for the position the Club is in now, would include David Redfern, Nigel Calver, Graham & Yael Gardner, Chris & Michelle Dohnt, Mike Abdo, Jim Laury, Graham & Scotty Thompson. These people are some of the few who passionately believed in the Club, they were not only volunteers for committee but also were the few you could rely on when things were tough, to put their hand up and volunteer some of their time. When a training session was on, they would make an appearance, just to get numbers up. They volunteered for marshalling. They proudly wore the Club clothing. It is "heart and soul" that makes a Club succeed.

This is not forgetting that of these passionate Club members, 4 of them worked towards a PhD. I don't think many Clubs anywhere in the world has the proud distinction of so many members who have PhD's or are the leaders in their chosen fields. My understanding is we have Doctors, Scientists, Psychologists, Teachers, Physiotherapists, Administrators, Executives, Business owners, and of course we have lots of students. I am sure I have missed substantial careers that our member's have had, it would be interesting if ever a directory was created to see where we have all gone in life.

Originally the Club was created for a social group who enjoyed triathlon. Wednesday afternoons were the famous "handicapped aquathon". The winner won a can of soft drink! There was also a Saturday social bike ride. I am so proud to see the Saturday Social bunch is still happening. However it was the influence of Dave Redfern and Graham Gardner to get a coached swim session up and running. I volunteered my services as the inaugural coach. Sessions on Saturday afternoon were held where we swim today, but I think the squad swims a bit further than we did way back then. Amazingly I think Dave Redfern would still have given any of the Club/Squad records a good crack. This is the same guy who would run a lap of the river with 5-10kg on his back for Ironman training. I also remember the Monday night runs. Easy chatting speed down to the Old Claremont Hospital, and then race back to the boatshed.

By 2004, the Club had a serious squad. We had training on Mon, Wed, and Fri mornings for swimming, track running on Wed evenings, and the good old trusty Sat morning bunch ride. Most importantly coffee, and YES I do believe coffee is an important part of training for any serious triathlete. What the Club offers now is amazing. All credit to those involved, I believe it is a great position that many Tri Clubs in Australia must envy.

As a Club we have managed and conducted our own Triathlon at Matilda Bay. It's a shame it ended but with rising costs, and competition against professional event management companies, it was perhaps wise. I always remember it was the Sunday before Rotto, it was always cold and windy, but we had mass starts, and everybody who entered received a Tshirt, plus I honestly believe we had the best sport prizes at the time. The Club then was part of organising Australia's first off-road triathlon at Lake Leschenaultia. I remember this more for the Saturday night camping, and the fun times watching entrants question whether the course we had was for the soldiers or athletes. When I think about it, the person who best completed this course ever was a female soldier, a Club member... Anna (unfortunately cannot remember her surname).

Relationships of note would include two marriages of Club members, Graham and Yael Gardner, and Scott and Sarah Thompson. Perhaps there are more. Not forgetting the number of husband and wife memberships, and as the Club matured we gained parents and their kids for membership. However I am not sure, but have we had any previous members who have had children, who are old enough to join?

The Club Championships has always been something the Club has strived to win. I do remember when we first made an appearance at the Club Champs, I think there was only 10 of us who gave it go. I think we came last, I remember being envious of the big Clubs, they had the uniform, they had lots of members, they had members with flash/fast bikes! But I was proud to think we had passion, we had soul, we had heart. We had people who believed in the Club.

Look at us now!!! We have the uniform, we have the members, we have athletes who are some of the best in Australia, we have won the Club Champs several times, but best of all we have members who are still part of this great Club, that give the Club its identity. It is a Club's identity that will allow it to become exactly that a CLUB. A Club where we join as novice individuals, but with open arms we are accepted, become triathletes, ironmen and remain as friends.

I am proud of my time with this Club.

I wish the Club, all the best for the coming years.

Hamish Johnston (written for UWA Triathlon Club 15 year Reunion)