

MARK ALLEN: THE TOP 10 TRAINING MISTAKES

Triathlete[®]

N° 265/MAY 2006

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L.A. story

Making the L.A. Triathlon a reality was an accomplishment on its own, but the goal Jack Caress is chasing is to make it the ultimate destination event in multisport

By T.J. Murphy • Photos by Rich Cruse



"What a weekend! We have sun, earth and atmosphere, so we have weather! Not weather, sun, sun, sun, sun, sun!"

— Steve Martin's *L.A. Story*

THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES WAS FOUNDED IN 1781, FACING IMPOSSIBILITY RIGHT OFF THE BAT. WATER WAS THE PROBLEM, AS THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED SETTLEMENT COLLECTED JUST A PALTRY AVERAGE OF 15 INCHES OF RAIN A YEAR. The 11 families comprising the small community dammed the Los Angeles river and used canals to irrigate fields. This would not be enough to sustain growth, but soon the dreamers came, and L.A. was destined to become one of the largest and, perhaps more notably, most audacious cities in the world.

In 1913, construction of the first aqueduct was completed. Engineering maverick William Mulholland offered up the water to the city, channeled from 200 miles away, with the enchanting words, "There it is. Take it."



Framed by the L.A. skyline, athletes swim, ride and run past many of the city's iconic landmarks.



The City of Angels now has a population nearing four million living in the sun-basted 4000 square miles known commonly by the acronym of acronyms: L.A. Mention L.A. to most people, and they generally associate the town with Hollywood glitz, urban sprawl and another notorious acronym: O.J.

L.A. may indeed harbor all that. But it's a city that giddily bulldozes through all of the obstacles outsiders routinely point to as insurmountable. At one time, there wasn't enough water to build a city. Then, in 1984, L.A. hosted a successful—and profitable—Summer Olympics, despite rampant speculation that doing so would be logistically and financially impossible in the car-clogged, smog-choked region.

Triathlon challenge

And now, against all odds, the L.A. Triathlon is up and running into its fifth year with a course that connects iconic hotspots like Venice Beach, the Miracle Mile, Hollywood Boulevard, the Walk of Fame, Sunset Boulevard, the Disney Concert Hall, Little Tokyo and the Staples Center.

Putting on a triathlon is not for the weak of heart. A 5K run is one thing; a swim-bike-run is another. Even in small towns, the logistics, red tape and insurance concerns associated with staging triathlons conjoin to rattle race directors. So what about a big-city triathlon? Like Chicago, New York, Philadel-

phia, Cleveland? The headaches and the problems stack up. Just ask the man who, in the mid-1990s, set out to establish an Olympic-distance race in the heart of L.A.

"Anyone who has ever got into directing a triathlon for the first time had no idea what they were getting themselves into," says Jack Caress, president of Pacific Sports LLC and the founder and director of the L.A. Triathlon. "There's a degree of naiveté that's almost a good thing. If you knew what race directing was really like, you probably wouldn't do it in the first place."

Caress recalls his start in event directing with a shake of the head. "It wasn't by design," he relates. "I volunteered, or was volunteered, to help out with the Newport Beach Triathlon." This was in the early 1980s, when the Ancient Mariner & Rusty Pelican Triathlon, created in 1978, was going through a name change, and Caress—then at the University of California-Irvine and destined to become an economics professor at Chapman



The man with the plan: race director Jack Caress makes the impossible a reality in Los Angeles.

University, south of L.A., for 13 years—caught the race-directing bug. He has since directed some 250 multisport events. Symbolic of his founding role as one of triathlon's preeminent race directors, Caress will direct the 28th edition of the Newport Beach triathlon this year, the sport's longest-running event.

Loving L.A.

Caress has piloted 12 U.S. championship events plus the 1996 ITU short-course world championships, in Cleveland, Ohio. Now, in addition to L.A. and Newport, he directs



the Catalina Triathlon, the Long Beach Triathlon and the Cleveland Triathlon. But L.A. seems closest to his heart. "Putting on the world championships in Cleveland in 1996 was a big thing for me," he says. "But I'm from Los Angeles. I thought to myself, 'Sooner or later, somebody is going to put on a race in L.A., and I'm going to be disappointed if it's not me.'"

Still, it wasn't easy. From the get-go Caress was adamant that the course wouldn't be pushed off into an obscure, low-traffic zone of the city for the sake of convenience. "I wanted the L.A. Triathlon to be the ultimate destination race," he explains. "It wouldn't be an L.A. event if a triathlete comes from out of town and doesn't get to see Hollywood Boulevard, Sunset Boulevard or the Staples Center."

Indeed, Caress talks proudly of how much there is to see. "L.A. is more of a country than a city," he states. And it would not be prudent to argue with him. Los Angeles is home to people from more than 140 countries, and the city's residents speak more than 200 different languages and form dozens of unique neighborhoods that make L.A. such a spectacular melting pot for people from around the world.

To get the city's blessing for his triathlon, Caress had to persuade 15 distinct city councils to agree to his plan for the race: a plan that took three years just to formulate. "The L.A. Sports Council [a non-profit agency that works to foster economic development by promoting sport] helped me navigate the political quagmire of it," says Caress. Although willing to compromise in some areas, Caress refused to compromise on the course, per-

L.A. TRIATHLON FAST FACTS

When: September 10, 2006

Distances: 1.5km swim, 40km bike, 10km run;
.4-mile swim, 20km bike, 5km run

Entry fee: \$135 for an individual entry in the Olympic-distance event; \$125 for the sprint

Course: Olympic-distance race starts at Venice Beach, with the swim in the Pacific. The bike rolls through Hollywood, and the run finishes downtown at the Staples Center.

Web site: www.latriathlon.com



Short-course star Barb Lindquist takes a moment to pose with a couple of the many spectators lining the route at the L.A. Triathlon.

haps the most difficult area of negotiation. "You're talking about closing down 30 miles of roadway," Caress says. "It disrupts people from their routine."

But Caress knew he was right to fight for the course when members of the L.A. Tri Club gave him the thumbs up in a test trial. "They wanted to see what the course was like," Caress recalls. "One said, 'I felt like I just traveled through 100 countries.'"

Work in progress

Although Caress believes he is achieving a good connection with the residents in creating an event that becomes a part of the city fabric, like the L.A. Marathon, he says that the work is never done. "Most people have no idea how far in advance you need to work with an event like this," he explains. "For

instance, we began working on the 2007 L.A. Triathlon before the 2006 race was planned."

"Event promotion is a service business," Caress adds. "The expectations are high. The L.A. Triathlon has been the most challenging event I've ever been involved with. Much harder than putting on the worlds in Cleveland. And we're still striving toward

our two goals: to make the L.A. Triathlon a must-do event, and to make it the ultimate destination event."

Considering the many obstacles, it might be natural to doubt such a vision. But considering the kind of dreams that come true in the land of Hollywood, the L.A. Triathlon may indeed become the must-do event of the season. ▲