

Managing Risks at Multi-Sport Events

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Multi-sport sports event involving the completion of three continuous and sequential endurance events is often referred as a triathlon (Garrett & Kirkendall, 2000). Although there are a number of variations in the order in which triathlons are conducted the most popular form involves swimming, cycling, and running (United States Olympic Committee, 2010). According to the national triathlon governing body, USA Triathlon, races may be categorized as sprint, Standard/Olympic, long, and ultra distance (USA Triathlon, 2011). In the sprint distance the competitors typically swim 750 meters, bike 20 kilometers, and run 5 kilometers. In the Standard or Olympic distance the competitors generally swim 1.5 km, bike 40 km, and run 10 km. The most recognized long distance event is the Ironman branded event in which the participants swim 3.8 km, bike 180 km, and run a marathon distance of 42.2 km (United States Olympic Committee, 2010).

Arguably, multi-sport events such as triathlon competitions have become some of the most popular participant activities in the United States (United States Olympic Committee, 2010). The sport has become so popular that it made its debut in the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (United States Olympic Committee, 2010). Due to increased participation, managers of such events must be constantly vigilant of providing a reasonably safe environment for the competitors. To provide such an environment, an event risk management should be developed. An event risk management plan is designed to identify, evaluate the likelihood, plan and deal with foreseeable risks in conducting a multi-sport event. Very little research has been conducted in identifying how triathlon event managers deal with managing potential risks. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify the risk management protocols that multi-sport event managers employ.

Sixty-three multi-sport event managers responded to an online questionnaire that was distributed through Survey Monkey. All of the respondents indicated that they were in charge of multi-sport events. It was apparent that the majority (64%) of respondents were responsible for more than triathlon events as 48 indicated that they were in charge of sprint distance triathlons, 31 had been event directors for Olympic triathlon competitions, and eight had been involved in managing long distance competitions. Seventy-three percent reported that the participants in their events were organized by gender and age and 94% were sanctioned by a nationally governing body. More than half of the respondents indicated that they had held their position for 1-6 years, while 20% had been in the position for 11 or more years. Interestingly, more than half of the respondents revealed that the multi-sport events had been conducted at the same location for 1-6 years. Thus, while it would appear that the majority of event managers were relatively inexperienced in years, they gained additional experience by hosting multiple events per year and were fairly stable in maintaining their positions.

In support of the popularity of multi-sport events, nearly 64% indicated that the number of participants have increased over the past three years. Regarding safety protocols, nearly 80% of the respondents reported that all participants were required to attend a pre-race meeting prior to competing in the event. Additionally, all of the respondents required participants to complete a waiver prior to competing in the event to protect against potential litigation. However, 77% did not require the participants to complete and turn in a fitness/medical assessment form prior to competing in the event. This result takes on greater significance as 17% revealed that participants have died while competing in the event since its inception. Additionally, 57% reported that participants had incurred between 1-5 injuries and 5% had incurred between 11 to more than 20 injuries to participants that required emergency medical service or hospitalization as a result of participating in the event in the past 3 years. The most common types of injuries identified were: broken bones (34%), bites and stings (26%), heat exhaustion (24%), and dehydration (20%). Although, it was further revealed that the swimming portion of a multi-sport event required the most medical attention, only 66% required their water safety staff members to possess a current lifeguard training certification.

In regards to event personnel, 87% revealed that they were volunteers. All of the respondents indicated that they possessed an emergency action plan. However, more than 30% did not require any training of the emergency action plan before event safety personnel were allowed to work at an event. Despite 83% reporting that event risk management policies followed by the event were set by a national governing agency, the results also indicated that 39% did not require all volunteer personnel to participate in an orientation that contained risk management information for each of the segments of the event. Of concern was that 30% did not require volunteer safety personnel to have a current First Aid/CPR certification to work at the event. Additionally, 54% did not require volunteer event staff members to participate in a training sessions, conducted prior to the event, which focused on medical emergencies. These results may be because 64% indicated that event medical staff workers were volunteers. Event medical staff members were further delineated as 98% were emergency medical technicians, 83% had physicians on site, and 66% were certified nurses.

Despite the overwhelming majority being sanctioned by a nationally governing body as well as requiring all participants to complete a waiver prior to competing in the event it appears that multi-sport event managers are not sufficiently managing foreseeable risks. This becomes especially pronounced when the past occurrences of participant injury and death while competing in events such as triathlons are considered. The implications of this study will be discussed further in this presentation as they pertain to the need for multi-sport event managers to provide a reasonably safe environment for the competitors.

References

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