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Dog Eat Dog: Companies Field Athletic Teams

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Corporate sport is becoming serious business.

Far from just encouraging employee fitness, companies now dispatch armies of the fit against one another. They clash at track meets, skiing, triathlons and the like. And even intrinsically funny "trash" sports, such as hula-hoop racing and bacon-and-eggs relays, are approached in earnest.

"Corporate fitness was started to relieve the stress of the corporate jungle," says Marc Bloom, the editor of Runner magazine. "Then it became dog-eat-dog."

Outspending GE

For instance, American Telephone & Telegraph Co. was so determined to win the two-day Corporate Cup track meet in Los Angeles last July that it spent $25,000 to fly in about 80 employees from work sites all over the U.S. The result: AT&T defeated 37 rivals, including defending champion General Electric Co., which had spent less than $20,000 on its running team.

AT&T's program manager for employee-health promotion, Rebecca Parkinson, says its team fosters "excellence and the life style of going for the gold." Also, she says, athletics builds team spirit that helps the company evolve as a business.

Empty words? Not according to students of corporate behavior. "The best way to solidify your corporate culture is to have your own team competing against others," says Hal Leavitt, a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford University's business school. The more clearly defined a corporation's adversaries are, Mr. Leavitt adds, "the better and stronger the corporation is."

Nobody seems to know exactly how many companies field teams, but there's general agreement that the number must be rising. One sign: In two years the National Battle of the Corporate Stars, a trash-sports contest, has grown from 10 teams competing in three cities to 20 teams competing in 13 cities. Although Corporate Cup participation dropped this year because of scheduling uncertainties, it is expected to resurge.

Impetus From on High

At many companies with teams, no less than the chief executive officer is the driving force. Says Jack Singer of Runner's World magazine, which was the original sponsor of the Corporate Cup games: "It's the Little League syndrome—parents badgering and pushing their kids."

After GE topped a field of 60 in the 1984 Corporate Cup meet in San Jose, Calif., the company threw a party attended by its chairman, John F. Welch Jr. A co-captain of the GE running team, Chet Bieganski, says the victory was possible in part because Mr. Welch is "a strong supporter of a lean, mean, agile philosophy."

The lean, mean and agile everywhere go to great lengths to win. FMC Corp. had tryouts—complete with judges and timers—to pick its trash-sports competitors for this year's National Battle of the Corporate Stars, at South Padre Island, Texas. Then, for five months before the event, the machinery and chemical company's team practiced two evenings a week and on Saturdays. The training paid off when FMC defeated all 12 rivals.

It was FMC's fourth victory in four years. A company spokesman says the team "improves morale and gives members and the company a great deal of pride."

To keep its own team running strong, the ad agency Leo Burnett & Co. in Chicago maintains an annual athletics budget of about $50,000. Some of its runners have flown to Chicago races from as far away as England and West Germany.

Running Into a Job

Burnett even hired one inexperienced writer mainly because he is a talented runner. (The writer later quit to train for the Olympics.) Explains Robert L. Barocci, the agency's executive vice president for world-wide business and its running captain: "In a business like advertising, where ideas are the only thing you've got, you can argue that a healthy, fit person will have a clearer brain."

Corporate athletes feel the same kind of pressure to perform that they feel in the workplace. "Winning is in our blood—it kind of consumes you," says Robert Radnoti, an Exxon Corp. runner and the chairman of the 100-member U.S. Corporate Track Association, the year-old not-for-profit group that now sponsors the Corporate Cup.

Mr. Radnoti doesn't seem to mind the pressure. The leading athletes, he figures, "are the ones who will be leading the company in the future." But Mr. Leavitt, the Stanford professor, isn't so sure. Top executives, he says, tend to be "more power-oriented than competitive."

EDITED BY LINDA VILLAROSA

WarmUps

News and views on health, fitness and the running life

PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRACY FRANKEL

FREEZE FRAME

Teamwork pays

Some 2,500 athletes from 45 corporations got down to business last summer in Los Angeles at the United States Corporate Track Association National Championships.

The team from AT&T ran away with the division I title, outpacing second place General Electric. Esprit, the San Francisco-based clothing company, took first in division II (for companies with fewer than 1,000 employees), beating the Jersey Shore Medical Center.

Left: *Posed for success:* James Wilson, Carmen Morrison, Michael Walker and Ulysee Walker, Esprit's victorious three-lap sprint relay team, shows *esprit de corps* with mascot, Loretta. The four-member team ran the 400-200-200-400 sequence in 2:32.3 Center: *Gimme a hug, mate:* Michael Walker and Harris Opara, two of Esprit's six-member sprint relay team, celebrate their win. Right: *Heavy medal:* Morrison shown hanging out on the victory stand with Olympian Ruth Wysocki. The Esprit group collected two firsts, two seconds and three third-place awards en route to the overall title. Not a bad couple of days work. ***—L.V.***

TRAINING

The right angle

To lean or not to lean became a hotly contested running question after an article by Dr. Leroy Perry appeared in the Sunday newspaper supplement *Parade* this past summer. Perry, a California chiropractor who has worked with many top track athletes, advises *joggers* to run more like *runners*, that is, with forward lean. Sprinters, he claims, lean forward as much as 30 degrees, middle-distance runners 20 degrees and long-distance runners ten degrees.

Was Dr. Perry dispensing bad advice? Consider how much lean 30 degrees represents. At 90 degrees, your body is perfectly erect, while at zero degrees you're lying flat. At 30 degrees, then, you're about one-third of the way to falling on your face. Who can run that way for long?

In refuting Perry's claim, other experts insist that running upright is natural for most runners, whether sprinters or distance runners, recreational or elite. In fact, former world-class hurdler Ralph Mann, Ph.D., a biomechanics expert who has studied U.S. Olympic athletes, says that you may even be able to increase your speed by "running tall."

Bill Bowerman, famed University of Oregon track coach, who trained the likes of Kenny Moore and Steve Prefontaine, always commanded his athletes to run tall. A forward lean increases the burden on the legs and can lead to problems of the back and shins. Fred Wilt, coach of the women's running teams at

ILLUSTRATION BY ANJA WREGO-WELLING

Purdue University in Indiana, adds that most distance runners run upright because it is comfortable. Even if you make an effort to lean, he says, you'll gravitate into a more erect position. "We're all governed by the same laws of physics," says Wilt. "People should just go out and run the way that is most comfortable."

Although sprinters are often encouraged to lean in order to increase speed, Mann suggests that running upright may be the key to faster times. Sprinters, of course, should lean when shooting out of the blocks or surging across the finish line, but the best short-distance runners remain virtually upright during the bulk of the race. This allows the body to flow with gravity. Who is the most upright sprinter in the world according to Mann? Carl Lewis.

So what's the best advice to all runners seeking speed, whether in the 100 meters or marathon? Straighten up.

—Hal Higdon

Life Beyond Jogging—The World of the Superfit

For more and more people, staying in shape has changed from a casual hobby to a complete way of life.

VIRGINIA BEACH

In the chilling rain of an early-fall morning, nearly 500 people line the beach in this seaside city. On signal, they plunge into the churning Atlantic toward their turnaround point—a cabin cruiser more than a half mile away and barely visible in the gray mist.

That's for openers. After battling strong currents and 4-foot-high swells, the swimmers climb out of the water and onto nearby bicycles for a treacherous 18.6-mile race on slick streets. One eager cyclist crashes headlong through the rear window of a moving car. Then, on legs of jelly, the competitors finish with a 6.2-mile run along the rain-drenched boardwalk.

Todd Jacobs, a tall, lean 24-year-old, places first in 1 hour and 48 minutes, leaping high to pound a "Bud Light" banner at the finish line.

What some call madness, participants at this Virginia Beach Sandman Triathlon consider fun, and they are not alone. The latest chapter in America's love affair with athletics, triathlon has emerged as a sure ticket to the world of the "superfit."

An aberration in 1978 when 15 people showed up for the first Hawaii Ironman triathlon, the sport now includes some 2,000 contests and over a million participants—numbers that easily eclipse the 300 marathons being held. From the U.S., triathlon has spread to foreign countries as well, including a world-championship event in Nice, France, on October 13.

One thousand athletes—20,000 applied—will compete in the 1985 Hawaii Ironman on October 26. The course: A 2.4-mile ocean swim, 112-mile bike race and 26.2-mile marathon. ABC will provide TV coverage, which in the past has yielded scenes such as exhausted athletes crawling across the finish line.

GARY L. KIEFFER—USN&WR

Cyclists battle slick streets in Virginia Beach's Sandman Triathlon.

Triathletes wince at such scenes and insist their sport is more enjoyable and easier on the body than is a marathon. While there are dangers, such as bike accidents or dehydration and hypothermia during swimming, serious injuries are rare. "Because of the cross training in three different sports, there is less wear and tear on any one muscle group, and the variety makes it more fun," says Michael Hechtkopf, 38, a dentist who directed the Sandman Triathlon.

Taking advantage of the triathlon boom are owners of businesses hawking products designed for superfit Americans—from new magazines and $1,000 racing bikes to ultrasheer triathlon suits that shave minutes off race time because they can be worn for all three events. "There's a real mystique to this sport," says John Pagenstecher, who quit his job with Control Data to open a Virginia Beach store selling triathlon gear. "The response has been tremendous."

Who's the typical triathlete? Many are ambitious young professionals looking for a new challenge. Harald Johnson, editorial director of the California-based *Triathlon* magazine, which has spurted to a circulation of 110,000 since its start in 1983, gives this profile: Average age of 34 for men, 31 for women; college educated; average household income of $45,000. About 85 percent are male. Typical is Don Anderson, a 34-year-old Annapolis production manager who used to smoke 2½ packs of cigarettes a day. He vowed to get in shape when he witnessed his dying father's last days. "Very few people can do this," he said after the Sandman race. "It's a real confidence builder."

"The experience is very uplifting," noted Pamela Zimmerman, 32, amid the euphoria of a postrace party with other triathletes. "It's a challenge every time, and you have to set goals for yourself." The slender Norfolk technical illustrator lost 60 pounds after getting into fitness in a serious way eight years ago. Her saga is typical of the superfit: A steady progression of ever tougher tests—from jogging to 10-kilometer runs to marathons and finally triathlons.

All ages. Younger people aren't the only ones getting involved. There's 61-year-old Bernie Duffy, a personnel director for the Norfolk public schools, who finished the Sandman in just over 2½ hours and now will go to Hawaii for the Ironman. "No matter what my problem is, it seems to disappear after a workout," says Duffy. Like many triathletes, he turned to the sport after being injured in marathon runs.

Only a handful of triathlons feature distances equal to or longer than those in the Hawaii race. In September, the Ultimate World Triathlon in Huntsville, Ala., put people through a 4.8-mile swim, 224-mile bike race and 54.4-mile run—an ordeal that Illinois triathlete Jon Noll calls "lunacy."

More typical are the "short courses" such as the Sandman and 13 similar events sponsored by Anheuser-Busch's Bud Light brand, the leading corporate supporter of triathlons. There's even a series of short triathlons for children—Ironkids—sponsored by Campbell Taggart, a major baking company.

"Those who stay in shape can enter a short-course triathlon every weekend," insists *Triathlon's* Johnson, "whereas most people can't handle more than

KIRK SCHLEA—FOCUS WEST

Endurance swimming poses risk of hypothermia, but serious injuries are rare.

two or three marathons a year." Getting in shape normally involves doing two of the three sports for a total of 1 to 2 hours nearly every day and buying a range of increasingly sophisticated equipment. For example, when the weather turns bad, the superfit can bring their bicycles inside and attach them to special stands with friction rollers that rub against the rear wheels and activate blowers that simulate the wind resistance experienced in races. More than 100,000 of these "wind-load simulators" were sold last year at prices ranging from $80 to $200.

Among items advertised in magazines such as *Tri-Athlete, Ultrasport* or *Sports Fitness*: Heart monitors to find optimum stress levels in training, cyclo computers to measure time and distance for bikers, running and cycling shoes and apparel, such as bicycle shorts and $40 triathlon outfits that resemble men's old-fashioned, one-piece swimsuits.

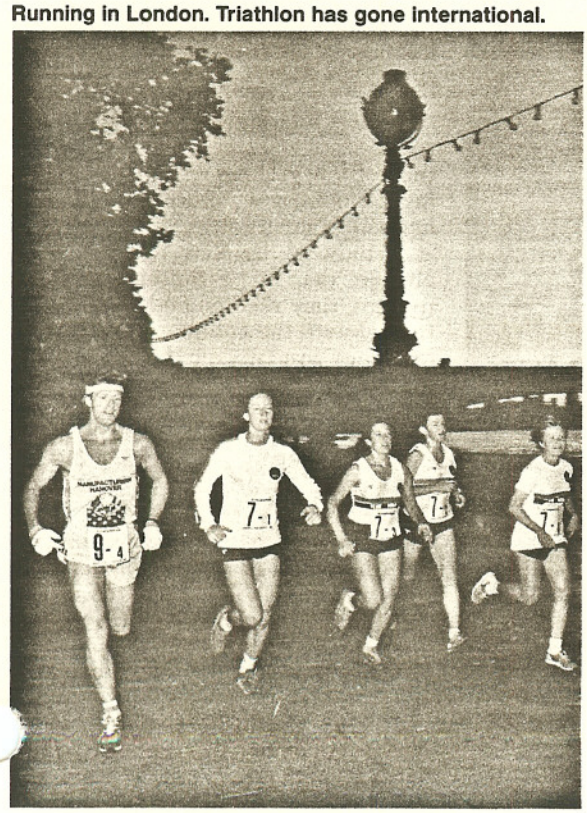
For many, the sport is a way of life. "Training has become my social life," says triathlete Zimmerman, who often runs or bikes with triathlete friends and schedules her vacations to jibe with triathlons. Dentist Hechtkopf bikes to and from work, runs at noon and swims late at night when his family is in bed. "Most people have a tough time juggling family, jobs and training," he admits.

Sandman winner Jacobs, after finishing the race, planned to go home and swim an additional 1.2 miles and "maybe do some biking." But he's unusual. In a sport almost entirely populated by amateurs, he recently joined a small but growing group of professionals—many based in San Diego—out to win the purses offered at more and more triathlons.

Most triathletes, though, are in it for the glory and the sense of total fitness that the lifestyle brings. There's also a sense of sharing an adventure that shatters the monotony and relieves much of the stress of sedentary jobs.

"These are cutting-edge folks for whom the sheer rigor of the sport is very appealing," points out psychologist Richard Weinberg of the University of Minnesota. "Triathlon is really the answer to the question of what comes next after fitness." □

Running in London. Triathlon has gone international.



ROBERT GARVEY—WHEELER PICTURES

By LAWRENCE D. MALONEY

Running Shoes for Corporate America

If sales battles aren't enough, U.S. firms now can square off in a new arena—sports competition.

Weekend athletes and former college stars alike are representing their firms in a growing number of events—from triathlons to track and field.

A prime mover: Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company, which already sponsors the New York marathon, to be held October 27. This year, the New York bank is putting on 3.5-mile road races for corporations in 12 U.S. cities. The events will draw an estimated 58,000 people from 3,000 firms.

"Companies love it because it allows employes to get to know each other on a more informal level, like a family," says Barbara Paddock, the bank vice president who directs the events. "For us, it's a valuable new marketing tool." After the bank's August race in New York City, Dun & Bradstreet held a reception for their runners at the posh Tavern on the Green in Central Park. American Express had a catered picnic.

"There's an even sharper sense of competition in corporate events because of the aspect of being on a team," says Michael Smith, 26, an employe of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia who took part in a triathlon sponsored by Manufacturers Hanover in that city in early September.

Pluses. Adds Judy Stolpe, a San Diego race consultant: "Companies want that sense of teamwork to carry over into the workplace."

Competition really heats up for events sponsored by the U.S. Corporate Track Association. Started this year, the group held 15 regional events and a national championship in California in July. The champion in the large-company category, AT&T, flew in some 80 employes from around the nation.

"When AT&T, IBM and GE go at it, the rivalry can be as intense as anything you see in college sports," says Robert Radnotti, chairman of the track association.

Stolpe says more public races—from 10-kilometer events to marathons—now include a corporate category. "Any race that doesn't is missing the boat," says Stolpe. "It's the hottest thing going."