

# Triathlon — How A New Multisport Competition Became An Olympic And Paralympic Discipline

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This success story is a result of the fruitful co-operation between many athletes and officials from triathlon federations, national and international, combined with the various international non-profit and non-governmental sports organisations, the commercial entities that are part and parcel of presenting sport today — and of happy circumstances.

In 1983, a year before the Olympic Summer Games in Los Angeles, the President of the International Olympic Committee, Juan Antonio Samaranch, was visiting the city and saw coincidentally a strange multisport competition on television. It was a broadcast of one of the first U.S. Triathlon Series events. Samaranch spontaneously thought that this sport should become a new Olympic discipline. There were many obstacles to overcome, such as the prejudice that a triathlete could not be a top-ranking athlete in all three disciplines. Furthermore, different rules in this new sport developed apace in different countries. And there was no international federation. Samaranch contacted the soon-to-be-President Les MacDonald (Canada) to initiate the process, trying to bring modern pentathlon and triathlon together, but this was frustrated by lack of a common vision. Delegates from triathlon's 30 national governing bodies met in Avignon in 1989 and founded their own international organisation: the International Triathlon Union (ITU). Now it was time to get triathlon into the Olympic programme. It took five more years of lobbying the IOC, with help from Samaranch, IOC member Gunnar Ericsson and others, before triathlon was voted onto the sports programme of the Olympic Games at the IOC Congress in Paris in 1994. 100 triathletes would make an Olympic debut for triathlon at the 2000 Sydney Games, in front of the famous Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge and packed crowds.

In parallel, particular efforts were aimed at ensuring that female triathletes would have the same opportunities to compete, with identical recognition to their male colleagues, so that they would have the same media attention, trophies, prize money and awards ceremonies. Women have been well represented in ITU governance from the start through these efforts, with leadership from current President and IOC member, Marisol Casado (Spain).

New disciplines were sought for the Paralympic games in 2009 and ITU submitted a 300-page application in 2010. A critical issue for Paratriathlon and its sub-disciplines were sport-specific, evidence based classification profiles: this is still an evolving field and Paratriathlon now has 6 categories. The International Paralympic Committee accepted Paratriathlon for inclusion in the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, which were an enormous success.

In parallel, recent inclusion of the triathlon mixed team relay, with 2 women and 2 men, in the Youth Olympic Games and the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, set up the latest exciting development with inclusion of this new medal event in the Tokyo Olympic Games in 2020. Now there will be 18 triathlon medallists in each Olympics and Commonwealth Games: an astonishing development for a modern sport that was only founded in 1989!