Attracting Adaptive Athletes
Scott Bennefield

In my research over the last week or so, I tried to get a grip on what a RD faces if they want to open their race to include PC OPEN (Physically Challenged Open) paratriathletes:
> what cost will it incur?
>what is the potential gain & encumbrance my race might incur?
>what considerations are needed to accommodate, not give advantages, to adaptive athletes?

Here is a non-exhaustive list and comments of as many items that I could think of (pre race- in race - post race) for RD

Areas where it **would not** incur additional financial encumbrance:
Marketing
Website
Goody bag
Insurance
Sanctioning
Body Marking
Safety
Medical
Officiating
Aid stations
Finish line
Photography
Post race amenities
Finishers medal
T-shirts – *includes athletes, volunteers/handlers, and guides*

Areas that **should not** incur added expense, but has considerations:
Registration - gather more info from adaptive athletes to address: special needs; handler need; guide needs; verification of type of disability

**Categories** - need to add: WC Men + WC Women; Ambulatory Men + Ambulatory Women; VI Men + VI Women

**Restrooms** – include sufficient accessible/ADA restrooms or port o johns at transition(s) area(s).

**Distance between start and finish line** – one transition area or two
Packet pick up – make sure location is accessible

Race day parking – Have a dedicated drop off or parking zone for adaptive athletes and their guides on race day

Pre-race meeting – consider having a separate pre-race meeting that includes officials to navigate race day particulars and field questions

GUIDES/HANDLERS CONSIDERATIONS

Handlers – the RD should market in advance & in the registration process where the responsibility lies for providing handlers for WC and ambulatory situations. Does it lie with the RD or the paratriathlete? (it should lie and be discussed by the parathletes and communicated to the RD)

Handlers may assist with the following tasks:
• Assisting or carrying athletes from the water to transition area
• Helping with prosthetic or other assistive devices (moving legs and day chairs)
• Lifting participants in and out of handcycles and wheelchairs if needed.
• Removing wetsuits or clothing
• Repairing flats and other equipment (in transition only).
• WC may have 2 handlers, Ambulatory amputees may have 1, VI uses guide

Guides – Comp codes for guides (covered by insurance but not charged or recorded as a competitor) guides should be provided by the VI athlete; it is the RD’s discretion if the guide gets finisher medals or awards;

Race day Check –in – consider having body marking adjacent to the accessible drop off zone just for adaptive athletes

Pre-Transition 1 area – have a pre-T1 transition area for WC and amputees at the swim exit to stage prosthetics, crutches, wheelchairs

Transition area considerations
paratriathletes need more space for equipment
Surface of transition (asphalt, grass, sand)
Slope of transition
Size of transition
Paratriathletes require a separate area in transition with at least 6 feet of bike rack space per athlete (this is only for wheelies)
Ambulatory athletes require same as all upright bike space but can request space for and a chair to sit while putting on prosthetics.
Paratriathletes might require a folding chair to be in transition
Surface from T1 to bike mount line
WC mount their bike at their transition area (before mount line)
Distance between T1 and mount line
Access for handlers into transition
1 or 2 transition areas?
Consider turning radius for handcycles and tandem bikes when assigning
transition area designation to negate tight turns within transition area

Swim considerations
Paratriathletes usually go off in a wave all together about 5-10 minutes ahead of
the field and ALWAYS have an in-water start. May require handlers to assist in
going in and out of water.
Surface of swim entrance/exit (stairs, dock, sand, asphalt)
Point to point swim or enter/exit at the same spot
Multiple swim loops
Paratriathletes are not required to exit the water before beginning the second
loop
Paratriathletes are allowed to wear wetsuits within ambulatory guidelines and
temps. Wheelchair athletes are always allowed wetsuit bottoms no matter what
the water temp.
Paratriathletes have their own wave(s) in advance of the critical mass begins;
aids in dealing with course cut-off times & permits for road closures

Bike considerations
180 degree turnarounds as long as they are aware they can navigate
Tri 1 and Tri 6 Paratriathletes have a large turning radius
Curbs on course (including out of T1)
Tri 1 Paratriathletes will need these ramped, handcycles have very low ground
clearance
Topography of the course
hills with a gradient of 12% or greater is not feasible for Paratriathletes

Run considerations
Surface of run
Paratriathletes can only navigate runs on paved roads or sidewalks
Width of path or sidewalk
Must be wide enough for 2 racing chairs side by side going in the same direction
Open or closed course
Curbs on course
Sharp turns (preceding or after a hill)
Topography of the course
hills with a gradient of 12% or greater is not feasible for Paratriathletes
Areas that **will incur minimal investment** through simple adaptations and modifications:

**Handlers** – provide high contrast, unique color T-shirts or wristband or lanyard ID to allow handlers access to secure areas such as swim exit and transition area and move about therein.

**Swim caps** – extra caps with color designated solely to identify throughout the swim whether they are WC, Amputee, or VI; this aids in the handlers anticipation & execution in the swim exit.

**Awards** – cost for additional 18 awards if you go 3 deep in each category - WC Men/Women; Ambulatory Men/ Women; VI Men/Women

**Podium** – slight cost for three A-Frame to designate 1\(^{st}\), 2\(^{nd}\) & 3\(^{rd}\) place; used on flat or accessible ground; Don’t have them mount an elevated platform

If you think your race fits the basic requirements for a parafriendly race:

1. Contact gavin.shulock@usatriathlon.org for Paratriathlon Friendly Application
2. Submit application
3. If approved, you will receive the USAT Paratriathlon Friendly logo to use for marketing and promotion and will be included on the list of Paratriathlon Friendly races on the USAT website
**Gains from being inclusive**

*What is the rationale for being inclusive?*

More people participating in triathlon

Ability to compete at USAT sanctioned races makes adaptive athletes a vibrant part of the USAT family and community

Inspiring and motivations for other athletes

Media loves to cover stories about people overcoming obstacles. This can lead to free press to be used in future marketing.

Shows a passion for the sport that all can participate

May foster support from the local community such as: rehabilitation centers; Physical & occupational therapists; prosthetic community; medical community; recreational therapy; and other service entities.

May open doors to collaborate & expand to other local opportunities

It is just a great thing to do.

Make some wonderful friends.

Scott Bennefield

[scott@paraendurance.com](mailto:scott@paraendurance.com)

**USAT Level 2** certified coach *(2018)*

**USAT Paratriathlon** certified coach *(2017)*

**Journey Paratriathlon Camp** - Founder & Director

**USA Cycling Level 3** - certified coach with Distinction *(2013)*

**National Academy of Sports Medicine** – Certified Personal Trainer *(2016)*
- Fitness Nutrition Specialist *(2017)*

**Master Coach** – Bolton Endurance Sports Training *(2019)*

**US Masters Swim** certified coach Level 1 & 2 *(2017)*

**Paratriathlon Representative** USAT: South Central Region *(2018)*; Rocky Mountain Region *(2016-2018)*

**Dare2Tri** (Chicago, IL) – Assistant Coach; Paratriathlon Camp *(2016)*; Injured Military Paratriathlon Camp *(2018)*

**Challenged Athletes Foundation** (San Diego, CA) – Assistant Coach; Paratriathlon Camp *(2016)*

**USAT/USABA Vision Impaired Paratriathlon Development Camp** – Shadow coach with Mark Sortino at Olympic Training Center, (Colorado Springs, CO 2018)

**No Sight, No Limits Paratriathlon Camp** – (Chula Vista, CA) Assistant coach; Chula Vista Elite Training Center *(2018)*