



Tim O'Donnell is among the top short-course triathletes moving up in distance next season.

Three U.S. Short-Course Standouts To Take on 70.3 in 2009

After modest success on the ITU circuit, O'Donnell, Umphenour and Fleischmann will try their hands at a little longer distance.

By Courtney Johnson

After the 2004 Athens Olympics Andy Potts decided to step up to the 70.3 distance to further challenge himself. "The 70.3 distance seemed like a good challenge for me based on my goals in the sport," Potts says. "I knew it would test my riding ability as well as my ability to stay mentally focused for a longer race."

To put it mildly, Potts has found success on the 70.3 circuit, highlighted by his win at the 2007 World Championship in Clearwater, Fla. The former Olympian has continued his roll this season, with dominating 70.3 wins at California and Timberman.

"To be successful at the 70.3 distance you better not have any weaknesses," Potts says. "You might be able to hide a little bit on the swim, but there is nowhere to hide on the bike or the half marathon."

Now another four-year Olympic cycle has passed and a new group of U.S. athletes are taking on the challenge of a new distance. "I have always believed a very strong ITU or Olympic-distance non-draft specialist would be very dangerous at the 70.3 distance," says former U.S. Olympic Team coach Cliff English. "Most short-course athletes train long enough to handle this distance, and the it allows an athlete to go quite hard throughout—almost as hard as an Olympic-distance event."

Tim O'Donnell

Olympic Training Center athlete Tim O'Donnell stepped it up to the half-iron distance in the summer of 2008 and found much success already. O'Donnell led through the run at 70.3 Buffalo Springs Lake (Lubbock, Texas) and the 5430 Long Course Triathlon (Boulder, Colo.) before he was passed within a mile of the finish in both races. "I think Tim will be a top 70.3 guy," says English.

With the fastest bike-splits at Lubbock and Boulder, the 28-year-old clearly enjoys the longer bike because he can take advantage of his strength. "I am a strong cyclist and with drafting in an ITU race I have not been able to really utilize this strength," O'Donnell says. "In 70.3s there is the chance for me to really gain time on the bike."

A competitive swimmer since the age of 5, the Naval lieutenant doesn't doubt his physical ability to cover the distance as much as his ability to manage his nutrition. "Nutrition is probably my biggest worry because in ITU races, one gel on the bike will keep you going," he says. "In long-course racing if you don't nail your nutrition it could be a bad day."

The 70.3 World Championship is next on O'Donnell's race schedule. "I feel that my cycling is at a great level. I just need to keep