

# SO, YOU WANNA... GO PRO

**Have you ever thought about going Pro?** Is it all glamour – life of the rich and famous? Surely, there is more to it. And when do you know when to call it a day? **AT's Margaret Mielczarek** spoke to seven triathletes about 'The Pro Journey'. Here's what they had to say.



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## AGE GROUPEUR

### "WHAT IS IT ABOUT BEING A PRO THAT MAKES IT SO ENTICING?"

#### ATHLETE PROFILE

**Name:** Simon Hearn  
**Age:** 23  
**Years in tri:** Five  
**Favourite distance:** Olympic/  
Half iron-distance

@simon\_hearn

**Australian Triathlete (AT):** Firstly, over to you Simon. You're at the top of your age group and currently thinking about stepping up to Pro. What got you thinking about going Pro?

**Simon Hearn (SH):** Like a lot of kids growing up, I always wanted to compete in a sport at the highest level. However, after starting triathlon in 2012, "Going Pro" wasn't by any means on my radar and I just really enjoyed pushing myself in training and racing. I've

had a reasonable amount of local age-group success and have had the opportunity to compete in short course races against a few guys who are currently racing professionally on the long course circuit. While racing against these guys, I haven't felt too out of my depth, and despite knowing I have a lot of work to do, I see racing professionally as the next big challenge to work towards.

**AT: I understand before stepping up, you'd like to achieve some goals in age group racing first. Is that right? What are these goals?**

**SH:** Yeah absolutely. My main goal as an age group athlete is to achieve a time in a couple of half iron distance races that puts me as reasonably competitive with

the middle-to-back of the professional field. My reasoning behind this is I don't want to take the step up and be way off the back of the field (otherwise I may as well continue as an age group athlete). However, I do understand that professional racing is very different to age group racing with far more tactics and a greater emphasis on the swim and trying to come out of the water with a group.

**AT: How will you know you're ready to step up to Pro?**

**SH:** I'm not sure if I'll ever know exactly if I am ready! However, if I can tick off a few of the key goals that my coach and I have developed, I will feel more confident that I am ready to make the step up without getting too big of a shock.

**AT: What do you think will be the main challenges in stepping up to Pro? How will the step up be, do you think?**

**SH:** The main challenge will definitely be the difference in the swim. At this point, I have only been in a few "open category" races that have involved being in a reasonably sized swim pack, so I expect that the start of the race will be very different and far more important than age group racing. After talking to a few guys who are relatively new to professional racing, I've learnt that often the start of the swim is very quick and then eases off a little compared to age group racing, which tends to be about finding your own water and getting into your own rhythm from the gun.

I'm pretty confident that the step up will be big and that initially, the transition will be really hard! However, I know what I have to work on to improve and will be as prepared as possible.

**AT: There might be a time, if you step up to Pro, that you're at the back of the pack in races to start with. Are you prepared for that? How do you think you will handle that transition?**

**SH:** Absolutely! I believe that one of the reasons that I improved relatively quickly as an age group athlete was because I was chasing all the time out of the water. It motivated me to train harder to narrow the gap. I anticipate the transition will be really tough; the guys racing in the professional field are all phenomenal athletes! Although the transition will be tough, I'm prepared for that and will do the work that it takes to gradually move my way towards being closer to the front of the field. I know that I have lots to learn and look forward to using the opportunity to continue to grow and develop as an athlete.

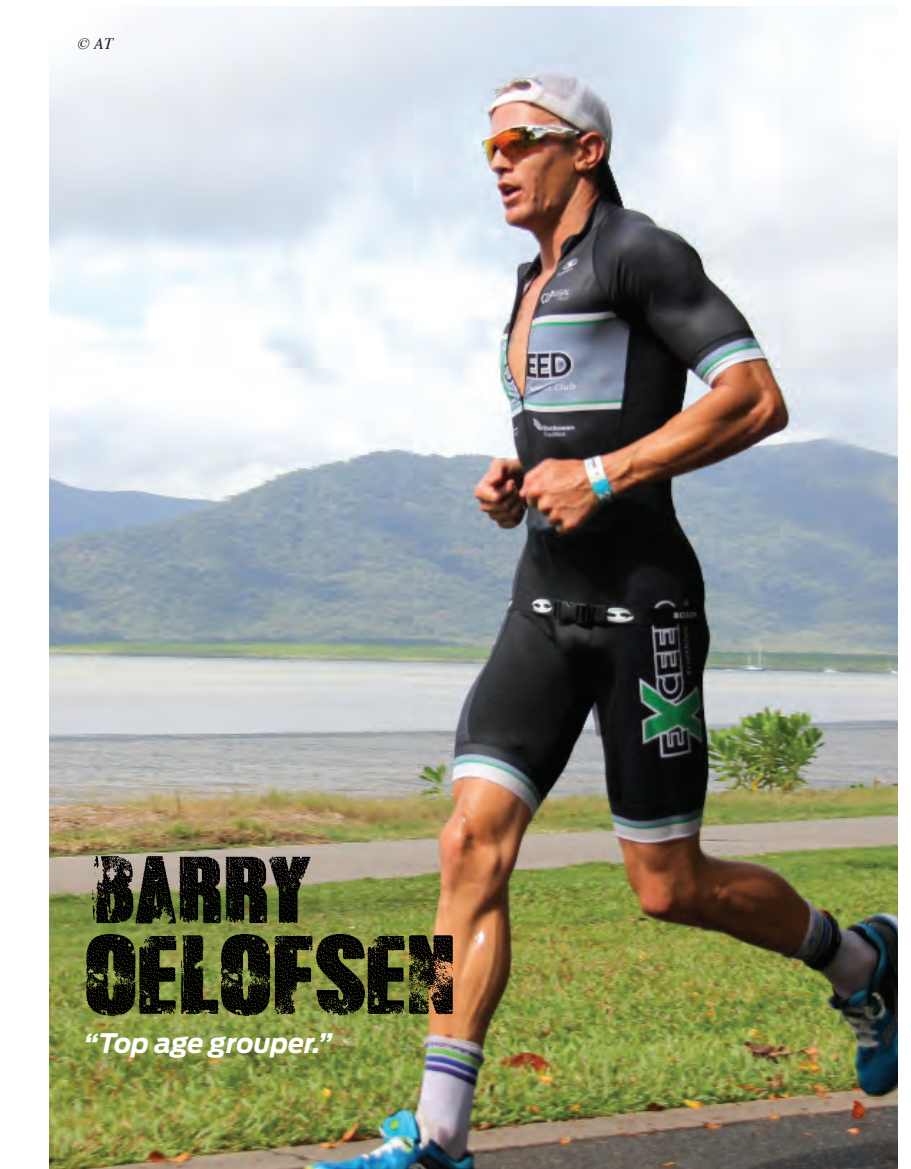
#### ATHLETE PROFILE

**Name:** Barry Oelofsen  
**Age:** 35  
**Years in tri:** Five  
**Favourite distance:** Full iron distance

@thetribum  
@teamfreespeed

**AT: Barry, I've read an interesting story about your foray into triathlon. Tell us about that.**

**Barry Oelofsen (BO):** I had 'lost' a couple of my best drinking buddies to the sport when I lived in London, and I just couldn't understand why they would choose not to go to the Puzzle in "mini South Africa", Earlsfield on a Friday or a Saturday night, just so they could get up early and ride their push bikes around Richmond Park or



to Box Hill. Idiots (I'm sure those that have done a London stint can relate). It was actually a drunken moment at The Slug in Wimbledon that I signed up for my first half. The four of us fist bumped, and that was it. I remember entering Austin, Texas 70.3 and buying a tri bike off eBay while drinking my cane and cream soda in the pub. Training probably started on the Monday. I was shite.

**AT: You went on to have an impressive result in your first 70.3 – Ironman 70.3 Austin – 4:54. That's awesome, especially given you'd signed up (and learnt to swim) only 14 weeks prior. What kept you going in the sport after that? Was it love at first race?**

**BO:** I think once I got fit and started seeing the results in training it drove me, that and the burning desire to do a full Ironman. Natural progression turned the focus to qualifying for the big show in Kona. And then winning. It doesn't all happen over night; it's a long slog.

**AT: I understand you work in the mining sector and do some crazy hours and work upwards of 15 days straight. That's some big hours! How do you make it all work? How do you juggle work with Ironman training?**

**BO:** I did work in the mining industry back when we lived in Perth, and yes it was challenging getting up at 2:30am to fit in training before work and not having a pool on site, but I didn't have to worry about cooking and socialising, so it was literally train, eat, work, train, eat, sleep.

Now we live on the Sunshine Coast; I am based up in Ipswich Monday-Friday back working for my old employer Bombardier Transportation.

**AT: Over the last ~5 years in the sport you've had some pretty impressive results – KQ'd twice in 2014 and 2015 (where you finished 12th in 30-34); you did a sub 9hour Ironman at Ironman Melbourne in 2015 and then at Ironman Western Australia that same year; you**



**KQ'd again this year at Port Mac where you came 2nd in 35-39. Have you ever thought about going Pro? Why/why not?**

**BO:** Thanks. They are some great results, and although I would qualify for a Pro licence, I don't think my times are quite fast enough to justify the commitment to the Pro field. I just don't have the run split. I also love doing it as a hobby; I don't think I'd get the same joy out of it if it were a job.

**AT: If you did decide to go pro what do you think the main challenges would be?**

**BO:** Financing it. It's a major issue in Pro triathlon. There is not a lot of money in the sport unless you're top tier.

**AT: Your fiancé, Katey Gibb is a Pro triathlete. Does that help with the motivation to train and race? Are you competitive with each other? Does that entice you at all to want to take the next step and go Pro?**

**BO:** Katey and I train a lot together. Of course, it makes it a lot easier to get things done, and we obviously spend a lot of quality time together as a result of it which is great for us. As far as competitiveness goes, it's swimming that gets us! I'm a half decent pool swimmer but take that black line away, and I will swim in circles. Katey is opposite, great open water swimmer but can't keep up in the pool. Needless to say, whenever we go open water swimming she is smug. At 35, I think my chance to have a crack at Pro is behind me; I quite enjoy being the Pro groupie anyway.

**AT: I understand you're currently sponsored as an age group athlete? What was the process of attaining sponsorship like? What role/significance have sponsors had in your racing decisions?**

**BO:** Attaining personal sponsorship based just on performances is a tough gig. I had just about given up searching for support, as many brands require you to be very highly visible on social media to sell products. I didn't feel comfortable doing that, so I went without for a very long time. Freespeed is an amateur team that recruits top age groupers based on their results and their chances at podium finishers in Kona. We don't get paid; we get product. The brands that back us are more interested in our results than our profile, which is fantastic as it rewards achievement rather than how many likes you can get on Instagram. There are a few other teams that are similar, like the Fusion Australia team. Hopefully, we'll see more in the future. Having sponsors definitely drives me a lot more because I'm not doing it for just myself anymore but for them.



**RENEE KILEY**

*"Just turned Pro."*

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## THE JUST TURNED PRO

### "WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS IN TURNING PRO?"

#### ATHLETE PROFILE

**Name:** Renee Kiley  
**Age:** 34  
**Years in tri:** Three  
**Favourite distance:** Ironman

 [@hello.renee](#)

 [www.reneekiley.com](http://www.reneekiley.com)

**AT: Renee, firstly huge congrats on recently getting your Pro licence (after Ironman 70.3 Cairns). That's a massive step. Why did you decide that you want to go pro?**

**Renee Kiley (RK):** I decided I wanted to go after my Pro licence after Ironman Australia last year. I came third in my age group and sure, people might wonder why that was my defining moment - it was a strong field that day. I was third in my age group but 11th female overall, including the professional women. I had won my first Ironman in Japan in August 2015 and raced Kona six weeks later. So, Ironman Australia was only my second fully prepped Ironman race. I had done my first ever triathlon in March 2014, coming off the back of being obese and a heavy smoker for 10 years. I had only ridden a TT bike for the first time in February 2015 and was riding times in my races comparable

to middle-pack professional women. I had run probably 200km in 10 years before I started triathlon and had not swum since primary school. I couldn't stop thinking about what I might be capable of after my sixth, 10th and 13th Ironman's down the track if this is what I could do now. At the time I had won my age group in Sprint, Olympic, long course and Ironman, and then won my age group at Ironman 70.3 Cairns just recently, which was my third half iron distance race. I am always searching for a new goal that frightens me. I also want to inspire others and show them that it is never too late to change your life if you find something you are passionate about and want it badly enough.

**AT: Wow, what a story! That's brilliant. What was the Pro licence application process like?**

**RK:** It was straightforward and easy to understand. I didn't meet the automatic qualification criteria so I submitted my results under Triathlon Australia's manual assessment option/policy. I received approval within a week and communication throughout was excellent.

**AT: You currently run a successful business. Will you still work aside from being a Pro? Or will you be a full-time Pro? Why?**

**RK:** I cut back my work hours to three days per week late last year to work towards this next step. Some of my friends and fellow athletes have been training and racing for ten years plus, so I knew if I wanted to go professional I needed to make some pretty drastic changes to allow me to make up some lost ground in terms of kilometres in the legs! I worked extremely hard for 10 years building several businesses so I am in a position now where I can afford to work less - although it has taken some adjusting getting used to a tight budget again!

I am of the opinion that you can never reach your potential unless you are willing to take risks and throw everything you can at your goals. Unless you have a 10-15 year history in this sport, in my opinion, you cannot be competitive in the professional field working full-time. I am a late starter at 34, so competing at a professional level is a relatively short-term plan for me (five to six years), and I don't plan on leaving any stone unturned during that time.

I will continue to work three days per week for the moment but can't say that it is not a consideration to take a couple of years off to be a full-time athlete. There are many discussions to be had and much water to go under the bridge before that can happen, but I am not discounting it at this stage.

**AT: You're a driven and successful businesswoman and athlete. What are your expectations around going Pro? What are your goals and what do you hope to achieve as a Pro?**

**RK:** I am very driven to the point sometimes I think it's to my own detriment! I am also very realistic with my expectations and understand that I have a lot of very hard work and challenging times ahead of me. Mentality going into races will shift from expecting to win or podium each time to trying not to come last. And I know that racing in the Pro field is very different to racing as an age grouper as you effectively don't get carried along as much in the swim and on the bike. I am prepared for these changes.

My goals as a professional are predominantly results driven. I would love to achieve my first podium as a professional in 2018. And I would love to qualify for Kona by 2021. I have a burning desire to be able to say later in life that for one year, I was one of the best female Ironman athletes in the world - in a sport I started at the age of 31. If I can achieve that, and have a positive and inspirational impact on the lives of others in the process, I would be extremely happy.

**AT: Impressive. You've said that it's important for more females, in particular, to step up to the Pro ranks? Why?**

**RK:** I think it is important because we all want equality for women in sport, right? We can't get to that point if women are not willing to step up.

I know many female age group athletes who would be competitive in professional fields. I understand that women often have family commitments, with children and it is simply not possible, but for others why not see what you are capable of? I often hear some people say they can't make it work financially. I don't accept this. If you take the risk and perhaps cut back work to three days per week - you can probably replace that lost income through race prize money, and

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sponsorship if you back yourself and approach being a professional athlete as your other job. If you want something badly enough, you will find a way.

And it is ok if women are not willing to take that step, but if not, why not whole-heartedly support those that do? Events need sponsors and exposure to survive. Businesses and sponsors get exposure through people - athletes. Increasing the public profile's (through social media) and support of our professional female athletes will only serve to improve equality in sport and perhaps make the path a little easier (and more lucrative!) for our friends, daughters and nieces in the future.



**MARINA JURJEVIC**

*"Current Pro."*

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## THE CURRENT PRO

### "IS BEING PRO ALL 'LIFESTYLES OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS'?"

#### ATHLETE PROFILE

**Name:** Marina Jurjevic  
**Age:** 35  
**Years in tri:** Seven years since joining first tri-club and started to take the sport seriously.  
**Favourite distance:** Ironman - my speed is OK, but my endurance is much better.

 [@marinajurjevic](#)

**AT: Firstly, Marina - when did you turn Pro? Did you automatically qualify for your Pro licence at Ironman Western Australia? What was the application process like?**

**Marina Jurjevic (MJ):** I applied for my Pro licence after the Ironman World Championships in 2014. I used my result from Ironman Western Australia in 2013 to qualify. My qualification was automatic

based on my time in that race, but as I did not finish fastest age grouper, it was still at the discretion of Triathlon Australia (TA). Thankfully they granted me the licence, and I've been grateful ever since.

The application process was very simple, and the response from TA was quite quick, which was nice. My first Pro race was Ironman 70.3 Geelong in 2015.



**AT: You achieved success at long-distance racing quite quickly, and after only a handful of races you turned Pro. What made you decide to go Pro?**

**MJ:** I was pretty lucky to have some early success at the Ironman distance. I had completed six iron distance events when I decided to apply for my licence in late 2014, two of those being the Ironman World Champ's in 2012 and 2014. I always knew my swimming would be a struggle in the Pro ranks, but I honestly figured why the hell not give it a go. What did I have to lose? YOLO as they say. And I'm really glad that I took the step. It's always fun winning your age group and qualifying for the World Champ's, but I wanted to challenge myself and figured this was the way to do it.

**AT: How big has the step up been from age group racing to racing Pro? What have the main challenges been?**

**MJ:** It's funny - as a top age grouper you tend to compare your times to the Pros and think that you aren't doing too badly. You finish high up the overall rankings and think you're pretty special. It's usually this that gives you confidence that you could be okay as a Pro. But it's a completely different ball game once you make the transition. Being a weak swimmer, it generally means that you are solo most of the day. I guess you don't really appreciate how much benefit you get from being around a couple of thousand age groupers. Up the pointy end, it's just you or a few others. You definitely need to work much harder for a similar or better result. Of course, it was disheartening, in the beginning, being the last out of the water and seeing an empty bike rack but you tend to get over that part of it pretty quickly. If you don't, then it becomes a much bigger roller coaster of emotions than it needs to be. You start to care less about what people think and remember that you're not doing it for anyone but yourself. I've got enough people in my corner to keep me going.

**AT: Has being Pro met your expectations? Has it been everything you thought it would be?**

**MJ:** I'm in my third year as a Pro now. To be honest, I don't think I have taken it as seriously as I would like to have and feel like the last couple of years have been wasted a little with a lack of direction. I started with a new coach at the beginning of this year with the goal of really turning things around and achieving some goals I had set myself, and I am definitely headed in the right direction. When you start setting PB's again, it's a nice feeling, and you are more motivated to really focus all of your attention on it. The journey certainly hasn't been without

its lows. But there have been some highs too. The entry process is really easy, especially with the Ironman branded races and there are races that take good care of the professionals, which is definitely very helpful. For me personally, the results have been a bit up and down, but I definitely put it down to a lack of focus and motivation, and of course underestimating the difficulty in transitioning from amateur to professional.

**AT: I understand you currently work, part-time, in addition to being a Pro triathlete. Why have you chosen to keep working instead of being a full-time Pro?**

**MJ:** I have finally, this year, reduced my hours down to four days a week with the view to move to three days at some stage. To be honest, I couldn't afford to be a full-time Pro. With all of the expenses associated with training and racing, and not being able to rely on prize money, I need to have some financial backing. And I don't mind having a bit of balance too. Sometimes it's nice to put your corporate hat on and use your brain for something other than training data and sessions. And I'm lucky enough that my employer is pretty flexible when it comes to taking time off for travelling and racing.

**AT: Are you currently sponsored? What has the process of attaining sponsorship been like? What role/significance have sponsors had in your career?**

**MJ:** To be honest, I am largely self-funded. Putting myself out there and seeking sponsorship has never been something I've been comfortable with. I've definitely had assistance along the way, but you learn pretty quickly that you never get something for nothing and it can be taken away as quickly as it was given to you. I am hopeless at the whole social media thing, and a lot of brands need that commitment from you, which I struggle with. I have a few brands for which I am an ambassador, but there is minimal financial sponsorship currently. Of course, if I can change this, it means less financial pressure and reducing work hours further would become easier.

#### ATHLETE PROFILE

**Name:** Allister Caird  
**Age:** 30  
**Years in tri:** Four  
**Favourite distance:** Ironman

 [@alcaird](#)

 [www.allistercaird.com](http://www.allistercaird.com)

**AT: Great, thanks, Marina. Now, Allister, I understand you turned Pro at the end of 2015 after some incredible performances as an age grouper. Tell us about that.**

**Allister Caird (AC):** I was lucky enough to meet the auto qualification criteria set out by Triathlon Australia, but funnily enough, my 8.45 and eighth place overall at Ironman Western Australia did not meet these standards. My auto-qualification was my podium place (+ within three percent of winning age group time) eight weeks prior, in Kona 2014. Each national triathlon body has slightly different qualification criteria and even different membership requirements (with regards to annual fees). Contrary to popular belief, Australia is generally seen to have more stringent standards than others (The UK, US, etc.). Having said this, if the qualification standards are not met, there is also an avenue to apply to Triathlon Australia's high-performance team for a professional licence. This is accompanied by supporting results. I've heard of successes here but also failures.

**AT: What made you decide to go Pro? What were your expectations going Pro?**

**AC:** Like languages, some people can learn bit by bit by sitting in a classroom, while others are probably more likely to be shooting spitballs through a hollowed-out ballpoint pen. For the latter, the best bet to hone one's craft is immersion. Pro triathlon is not dissimilar - some people can learn it pretty easy and make a seamless transition swiftly, others need to just learn from their mistakes and chip

away (in case you haven't guessed, I relate to this type of athlete). There is also a third type of person; those are the individuals with multilingual families (ITU or junior athletes). I have goals in the sport, both short and long term, but my only real expectation is progress.

**AT: Love your blogs on #prolyf – tell us about “#prolyf”. Is it all that it's made out to be? Life of the rich and famous...**

**AC:** #prolyf is a double entendre of sorts. It's based on the belief that being a Pro triathlete seems cool/glamorous to age groupers, while the security and predictability of a full-time wage is seen to be quite glamorous to some Pro's. #prolyf is really a journey of highs and lows for one's own amusement as well as, of course, the amusement of others.

**AT: What has been the hardest/most challenging thing about going pro/being a Pro?**

**AC:** The isolation. I mean this in the sense of the athlete as a single entity. We are, as professional triathletes, the CEO's, CFO's, legal, contracts, treasurers and even cleaners of our own organisations. Race organisations (such as Challenge and Ironman) are private businesses whose primary goal (despite slogans) is to make money. The professional athlete is generally the lowest in the pecking order. Personally, I've waited up to six months for race payments and had it not been for follow-up emails; I doubt I would have ever been paid. Six months is probably considered timely for some Pro's. I was even at a race recently that announced the prize purse would be more than halved less than two days before the start, with no warning or notice to the professionals on the start-list. At times like these, I believe the singularity of the sport bites us in the backside. Many athletes and I'll even go as far as saying most athletes, are too afraid to stand up for their rights, for fear of retribution from race brands/organisers. This may come in the form of race assistance (hotels, homestays, flights, etc.). In short, no one wants to be in the bad books of race organisations as it might mean your racing options could quickly become very limited.

**AT: You've been a Pro for a couple of years now. Has being Pro met your expectations? Has it been everything you thought it would be?**

**AC:** I am currently amidst my second year as a Pro (I am definitely still a noob). Being a professional remains to be a fairly steep learning curve though, I wouldn't say any of it has been particularly surprising. As a professional, there is an urge and need to train and race at the upper limits of your capabilities; this undoubtedly

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means you walk a finer line between agony and ecstasy when it comes to injuries and/or race performances than you might have as an amateur.

**AT: Do you also work or are you a full-time Pro? Do you think it's possible for a professional Ironman triathlete to be a full-time Pro?**

**AC:** I was a geologist for six years before switching suits and adding a significant amount of chafe to my daily routine. I'd love to keep this light and entertaining, but the fact of the matter is that being a professional triathlete is really tough. There is very little money in the sport and the money that is there is usually only accessible to the top five to 10 percent of Pro's. This is pretty evident by the steep drop off in annual earnings. The path of a developing athlete is a treacherous one and really only undertaken for the love of the sport ....as well as the solid, year-round tans.

**AT: Are you currently sponsored? What has the process of attaining sponsorship been like? What role/significance have sponsors had in your career?**

**AC:** I am currently sponsored by a number of great companies. Most of these sponsorships are product-only sponsorships, a few cash sponsorships and one with a bonus structure whereby I earn more based on performance. It's not overly difficult to secure product sponsorships, especially if you have a banging Instagram page. Finding products you want/need/believe in versus the ones that are just offered is a finer art. As an athlete, it's important you give back to your sponsors, above and beyond a social media tag. This may come in the form of regular training and racing updates, product feedback, helping out at open/family days and even a card at the end of the year to say 'thanks'. Each sponsor is different, they are relationships and as such, should be built upon and spoken openly about - you should only ever have eyes for that sponsor.

As a tip, try looking for sponsors that are not endemic to the sport of triathlon, that way there's less likelihood of someone asking for the exact same thing 10 minutes before you. It's important to try and increase the stake that non-endemic companies have in our sport for the progress and professionalism of triathlon in years to come.

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# KRISTY HALLETT

**"Back to age group racing.  
Qualified for Kona at Ironman Cairns."**

## THE EX-PRO'S

### "HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN TO CALL IT A DAY?"

#### ATHLETE PROFILE

**Name:** Kristy Hallett  
**Age:** 44  
**Years in tri:** 10  
**Favourite distance:** Ironman  
 **@kristy\_heartthawaii**

**AT:** Kristy, firstly to you. How many years did you race as a Pro? Across both Ironman 70.3 and Ironman events?

**Kristy Hallett (KH):** I raced professionally from July 2012 to July 2016, four years racing both 70.3 and Ironman. Over four years, I raced 12 Ironman 70.3 races and nine Ironman races.

**AT:** What was it like being a Pro? What did you learn?

**KH:** I loved being a Pro. I came into this sport later at 34 and didn't decide to go pro until I was 38 when I'd met and exceeded the criteria required by Triathlon Australia. I worked in banking and had a corporate career for 11 years. The opportunity to go Pro is one of those rare, once-in-a-lifetime

opportunities and I took it. It was exciting and I fully committed. Racing and training are up several levels in the Pro ranks. Also, I learned that I needed to swim A LOT better! It's no fun being dropped in the swim and racing all by yourself at the back!

**AT:** Why did you decide to return to age group racing? Who helped you make the decision?

**KH:** Being 43-years-old and not getting any faster (or recovering as well as I used to) helped me decide to return to age group racing. Sadly I retired from Pro racing but not from triathlon – golf can wait.

**AT:** What was the process like of going back to age group? Did you have to wait a period of time before being allowed to race age group?

**KH:** The process wasn't difficult. I had to wait out the time for my Pro licences/memberships to expire (TA and WTC). These expire at different times of the year – TA 30 June, WTC 31 December. I retired after Ironman Cairns last year, June 2016, after having completed Ironman New

Zealand, Ironman Australia and Ironman Cairns in the space of 14 weeks. After this, I was pretty tired after the three Ironman's, and happy to have a little break, find corporate employment again, and do a bit of coaching for Sean Foster, Fluid Movements. I was able to start racing age group again this year.

**AT:** Since returning to age group racing you've qualified for Kona (at Ironman Cairns this year). Huge congrats! Do you think that would have been possible if you were still racing Pro? If not, why?

**KH:** Thank you, yes I was very lucky to get a Kona spot. The women in my age group at Cairns were so strong and talented. My main aim when I was racing Pro was to try to get to the Big Island and race the World Champ's as a Pro, but unfortunately, I fell short. I raced a lot in an attempt to get enough points, but the standard is so high in the women's Pro field, and with only 35 slots, it didn't happen for me.

**AT:** Do you think you'll return to Pro racing one day? If not, why?

**KH:** If I could turn back time and I was 30 again, I'd definitely race Pro, but now I'm very content to act my age. Actually, that's a lie – I rarely act my age – in fact, I have trouble on a daily basis with the whole 'adult' concept – life is supposed to be fun.

**AT:** Oh, totally! In your opinion, how do you know when to call it a day? To know that you've reached your peak and it's time to either return to age group or retire?

**KH:** That's a tricky thing. It's difficult. I didn't want to think I'd reached my peak – sure I was 43, but I still felt like I didn't fulfil my potential and could go faster. Maybe I still can go faster. In the end, though, I gave it my best shot. I lived my life around triathlon for four years as a Pro. Everything was planned around training, eating, sleeping, and recovery. I felt like I made the most of the opportunity I'd been given and now at 44 I am at peace with the decision. I've loved my time doing some coaching for the Fluid Movements squad and am looking forward to training with them in my prep for Kona in October.

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#### ATHLETE PROFILE

**Name:** Tom Rodgers  
**Age:** N/A  
**Years in tri:** Eight  
**Favourite distance:** Half Ironman

@tomrodgerstriathlete

[www.tomrodgers.net](http://www.tomrodgers.net)

**AT: Tom, I understand that you were quite young when you turned Pro. Why did you decide to go Pro?**

**Tom Rodgers (TR):** I took my professional licence in 2013 when I was 20-years-old. I made the decision to take my Pro licence as the challenge of age group racing was no longer there, and I'd always wanted to race the best athletes in the sport.

**AT: What was the biggest difference between racing age group to racing Pro?**

**TR:** Racing age group is purely a time trial, and you are basically going out there to do the fastest time you can do by yourself. In the professional race, there are times when you are going well above your threshold to stay with groups and by being in those groups your time may be five or 10 minutes quicker at the end of the race or you could blow up and go 10+ minutes slower. When I stepped up to racing in the Pro field, I quickly realised that the 10-meter draft rule means that the race was still very much draft legal and the

swim was now a major factor. As an age grouper if you swim slow you can still have a great race if you are fast over the other two legs. As a professional if you swim slow it is very hard to get back into the race as the drafting effect on the bike of the guys up front working together at 10 meters is such a massive advantage.

**AT: You raced as a Pro for three years, largely racing 70.3s, with some great results (you placed in top 10 at least five times). Why did you then step back to age group racing? Especially given that you were still so new to Pro racing? Who helped you with that decision?**

**TR:** Yes. I raced Pro for three years and had a great experience racing against some of my idols growing up. I made the decision to go back to age group racing when I began full-time work as I had missed out on so many other things in life and was never at the level where I could make money off the sport. It was a hard decision to make and one that I made speaking with friends, family and my coach, Julie Tedde. But I was no longer able to train the same hours that I had been unless I spent every minute of my spare time training. I also didn't want to look back on my life in 10 years time and regret missing out on all the things you miss out on when training at that level.

**AT: What has it been like stepping back and racing in age group?**

**TR:** Stepping back to age group racing was a lot less stressful, especially at the start line when you know that if you miss the swim pack, your race is not over. I raced twice last year as an age grouper, and while I enjoyed both races, I didn't get the same sense of achievement as I did racing against the top guys as a professional. One thing I did notice is that winning an age group race overall gives you a lot more promotion than coming sixth or seventh in a Pro race even if you did go quicker in the Pro race.

**AT: I understand that you've decided to give up the sport for now, after racing age group. Why? Do you think you'll race again and do you think you'll want to race Pro again one day?**

**TR:** After my two races as an age grouper I realised that the challenge was gone for me and without that challenge; I no longer had the motivation to push myself in training. The decision was made to have some time away from the sport for at least one year to travel, party and enjoy everything that I had missed out on over the past eight years. After having six months away from the sport, I'm confident to say I won't be coming back to triathlon any time soon. I do miss racing, but I certainly do not miss the long, boring hours of training. As for racing at a professional level again, I can't see it happening, but I will never say never. **AT**

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