



Jocelyn Pedersen

Catherine “Cat” Isom, left, from chemistry/biochemistry; Piers Hale, from the history of science; and Katrina Menard, from the Sam Noble Museum, are setting the pace for OU triathletes, competing in world championship events in France, China and Canada.

# Splash, Dash and Ride

BY JOCELYN PEDERSEN

**T**he University of Oklahoma's long tradition of producing outstanding athletes is not limited to students. Others at OU who also compete at the top levels of sport can be found among the faculty and staff, including three who qualified to compete at the Triathlon World Championships where they tested their prowess in swimming, cycling and running.

Piers Hale, associate professor of the history of science, qualified in his age group for the Long-Course Triathlon World Championship in Weihai, China, held September 21. Hale, who completed his first ironman triathlon in 2012, raced in China for his home country, Great Britain. A 4-km swim, combined with a 120-km bike ride and a 30-km run comprise the competition and can take up to 17 hours to complete in one day.

To train, Hale says he tries to swim five times a week, bike 200 miles per week and run four times per week. To fit it all in, Hale plans his day by exercising early, then doing his academic work in the afternoons, often followed by a second workout in the evenings. Since Hale did not teach over the summer, he says he had more time to train when not working and writing.

Although Hale has been competing for several years, this was his first time to attend the world championship. To qualify, triathletes in each age group from each nation must submit their fastest times from the previous 18 months. Each nation chooses its top 20 athletes to go to the world championship. His best qualifying time was 11 hours, 32 minutes and 29 seconds to complete a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run.

Hale, who came to Norman in 2007, is originally from Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire, England. He hadn't anticipated being able to compete at such a high level.

"I was really excited. I started doing it because I always wanted to," Hale says. "I've been a keen cyclist for 20 years. I'm over 40, so I never thought I'd be able to represent my nation. I'd

*They are athletes of considerable achievement,  
but they weren't recruited by any Sooner sports team.  
They came to OU to teach the history of science, work with  
natural history exhibits, and pursue scientific research.*



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David Gray/Courtesy Norman Transcript

Piers Hale, who completed his first ironman triathlon in 2012, qualified in his age group for the Long-Course Triathlon World Championship in Weihai, China, in September, representing his home country, Great Britain.

never been to China. I was excited to go.”

The 4-km swim portion of the race took place in Half Moon Bay, Weihai’s ocean harbor, and although Hale said he’d been working on his swim lately, biking is his favorite portion of the race. Overall, he says, “to be an ironman triathlete takes a lot of dedication, the ability to manage your time and a lot of self-belief. Success comes not from any one factor, but from consistently putting in the miles.”

Ever balancing work and sport, while in China after racing in Weihai, Hale lectured at Peking University on his published research. “I was very pleased to have the opportunity to share my research with my Chinese colleagues,” Hale says. “The timing worked out very nicely.”

Hale is joined at OU by two other triathletes. Katrina Menard has a doctorate in entomology and is the assistant staff curator in the Department of Recent Invertebrates at the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History. Catherine “Cat” Isom has a doctorate in microbiology and is a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at OU. Like Hale, they compete at peak levels.

Menard competed in the shorter Olympic distance event at the International Triathlon Union World Championships in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in early September. Although a shorter event, it still consists of a 1500-m swim, a 40-km bike

ride and a 10-km run. Some athletes complete this gauntlet in as little as two hours.

Menard qualified by placing 16th in her age group at the USA National Championships in Olympic Distance in Milwaukee in August 2013. She placed 14th in her age group in the World Championship Edmonton competition.

“It’s pretty awesome,” Menard says. “To compete with the best athletes in the world in your age group is an incredible opportunity.”

Menard says her favorite portion of the triathlon is running. She grew up with a swimming background, transitioned to running in high school and ran 5- and 10-km races as well as cross country in college. She only began biking when she took up triathlon in 2012, going from never having done a triathlon to a world competition in just two years.

Menard’s advice to parents who want their children to do triathlon is to teach them how to swim.

“Swimming is great fitness, and it teaches a lot of skills,” Menard says. “However, it’s relatively harder to learn as you get older. Sort of like riding a bike, when you learn early, it’s easier to get on again.”

Menard says the hardest part of being a triathlete is trying to maintain her normal work schedule and training.

“There are just some things you can’t do while doing field



Key Bishop

Triathlete Cat Isom is happiest when she is running. After competing for only two years, she represented the USA in the 2013 Long-Course Triathlon World Championship in Belfort, France.



Sandra Ashby

Katrina Menard emerges from the swimming portion of the International Triathlon Union World Championships in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in September, where she placed 14th in her age group.

work or conferences, for example, like bring your bike or finding a pool to swim in,” Menard says. “You have to be creative to make it work and be very good at time management.”

Like Menard, Isom’s rise to the top tier of triathletes came fast. She represented the USA in the 2013 Long-Course Triathlon World Championship hosted in Belfort, France, after having competed for only two years.

“It was really awesome to get to race around people from all over the world. Everyone was really supportive of each other.”

Mother Nature did not cooperate with the weather, however, causing the swim portion of the triathlon to be changed to a 9.5-km run due to cold water temperatures, followed by an 87-km biking portion

and finishing with a 20-km run. But that was okay with Isom. “Running makes me happy,” she says.

Competing in major events like these doesn’t come cheaply for the three athletes. Isom did a lot of fundraising, including selling knitted goods. She says her family helped, too. Between saving money, the scholarships, help from her family and graduation gifts after finishing her doctorate, Isom packed up her bicycle and set off for France with support from Buchanan Bicycles and 405 Bicycles in Norman.

All three athletes have received sporting scholarships from their club, Triathlon Club of Oklahoma City or TriOKC, as well as local bike shops. Hale and Menard race for the Oklahoma City-based Schlegel-Trek Oklahoma Elite multisport team.

Aside from hours of continued training, these Sooners have something else to anticipate. They and many other triathletes the world over are setting their sights on host Oklahoma City for the National Long-Course Championship in 2015 and the World Championship Long Course event in 2016.

To learn more about triathlon events in Oklahoma, visit [www.trifind.com](http://www.trifind.com) and for information about events in Oklahoma City, visit [www.triokc.org](http://www.triokc.org). To see race times for athletes, visit [www.athlinks.com](http://www.athlinks.com).

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