

THE INTER REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

PARENT, COACH AND ATHLETE INFORMATION BOOKLET

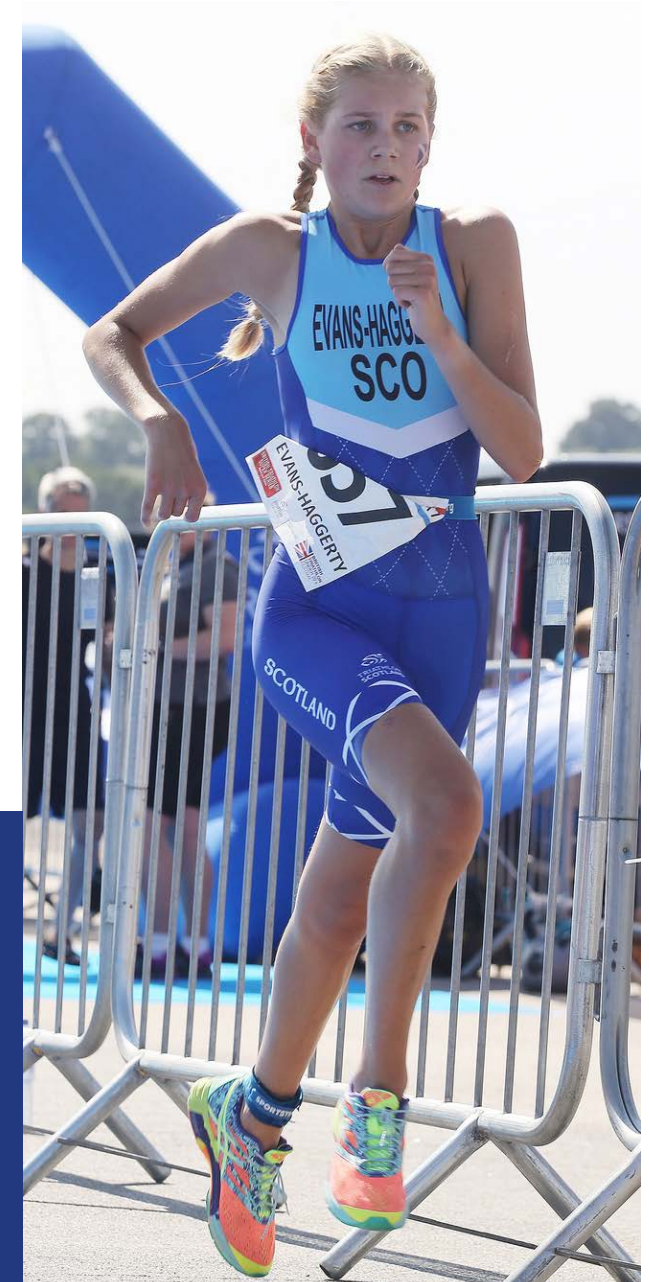


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PURPOSE

This document is designed to help parents of young triathletes. In particular parents of young triathletes interested in competing in the Inter Regional Championships (IRC). It is therefore also of relevance to coaches and young triathletes themselves. It explains what the IRC are and how to best support your athlete in getting the most from the opportunities that they provide, as well as answering some the key questions and outlining and highlighting some of the key areas that parents should understand to best support their developing athlete. This document is linked throughout to relevant information, all links are highlighted by red text; further useful links can be found at the back of the booklet.





WHAT ARE THE IRC?

The IRC are a once yearly event held as part of the **British Triathlon Under 20's Festival**. They are an opportunity for some of the best girls and boys across both the TriStar 2 and 3 age groups in each of the 10 English Regions, Scotland, Wales and Jersey to race against each other.

All athletes score points for their team based upon their finishing position. Points are totalled for each team with the lowest two scores discarded. The team with the highest score is crowned the Inter-Regional Champions. With the advent of Mixed Team Relay at the Olympics British Triathlon believes it is very important for young athletes to be exposed to and experience the format. 2018 sees the introduction of a Mixed Team Relay for all athletes across TriStar and Youth/Junior ages. A separate Inter Regional Relay competition will be held on the second day of the Under 20's Festival combining results from the TriStar and Youth/Junior teams. Athletes in the TriStar Relay will compete in the following order: TS2 girl, TS2 boy, TS3 girl, TS3 boy. Regions will be allowed to enter up to 4 TriStar teams enabling reserves to race also.

The Under 20's Festival is normally held toward the end of the season in a window from the end of August to the middle of September.

TEAM MANAGERS

Each region appoints a Team Manager. The Team Managers typically lead on all administration, including selection prior to the event. They are the single point of contact through which British Triathlon communicates all information about the event. The Team Manager will be present on the day to ensure that everything runs smoothly. Team Managers perform a vital role and do so voluntarily, their focus will always be on ensuring as positive as possible an experience for their team.

SELECTION

All athletes racing will have competed against others in their region to earn selection. Each Region is responsible for its own selection policy. Some Regions choose to focus on performances on a key selection race or races, others on performances in the Regional Series, others might do a mix of both. Regions that don't have their own open water/drafting event may use events out of Region.

Regions select 3 athletes along with a reserve for each race. From 2018 reserves will be able to race in the relay so they may be asked to travel too. Selections are normally made before the school holidays to allow enough time for kit to be purchased.

For many athletes and parents this is the first Triathlon event that involves selection policies. Team Managers, Regional Committees and parents should make sure that the policy is clearly understood prior to any selection events. This will help avoid any misunderstandings when selections are made.



DEALING WITH NON-SELECTION

At this level and in most regions selection for IRC teams can be very competitive. As with any selection process dealing with non-selection, especially when it has been very close, can be hard; this can be compounded if the selection policy has an element of subjectivity built into it. In such cases we would advise Team Managers to ensure that parents and athletes receive clear feedback as to why the decision has been made.

Parents might find their athlete is better able to process the decision if it is 're-framed' into a more positive experience. It is easy to see non-selection as a failure. This should not be the case. Athletes should be made to feel proud for having gone through the process and in so doing having committed to it fully and delivered their best in the process. This is a

considerable achievement in itself and is often forgotten upon non-selection. It is likely that every athlete in the sport will have to deal with non-selection at some point in their sporting career, as well as in life outside of sport (e.g. an unsuccessful job interview). An ability to bounce back from adversity is key to long term success. This adversity if managed well can lead to considerable growth and help athletes become far more resilient. This should always be encouraged rather than blaming others and focusing on factors that lie outside the athlete's control. Selection is very much a snap shot in time. Non-selection does not mean that an athlete will not be good enough next time and they should be encouraged to re-set and commit again to the process. Athletes at these ages develop quickly and performance levels can change dramatically year on year.

Two great examples of current World Class Programme athletes, both of whom raced at IRC, who have managed non-selection at younger ages positively are Sophie Coldwell and Olivia Mathias. Both just missed out on selection for the European Youth (Sophie) and Junior (Olivia) Championships and while desperately disappointed channelled their frustrations really well to bounce back the following year to earn selection. On reflection both are adamant that they needed to miss out at that time and were better for it. It was a very powerful and necessary formative experience that cemented their desire to commit even more to the sport and the pursuit of their goals. Further both commented that it provided a strong foundation to build upon in helping them to bounce back from other adverse situations.

PREPARATION

Most teams have preparation or training days prior to the event. We would strongly encourage athletes to attend these as they include key information about the day along with an opportunity to prepare for the technicalities that the course may provide. They also allow the athletes on the team to spend time together and get to know each other; important as this is a team event.

Regional Skills School sessions also provide athletes with useful learning opportunities. **Skills School** has been developed in line with British Triathlon's **Athlete Development Framework** (ADF) and is a great vehicle that puts the athlete at the centre of the learning experience and prepares them well for either life further up either the Performance or Participation Pathways.



THE EXPERIENCE

At this age and stage a lot of focus should be placed on athletes learning from the experience. This should be promoted in front of the outcome. For many it is their first step into racing at this level. For some there may be a number of new elements that give this event a bigger feel. These include:

WHEEL REGULATIONS:

Wheel regulations exist in all forms of bunch cycle racing for safety reasons. Athletes ride in close proximity, so it is important that wheels are well made and safe. British Triathlon uses a phased approach to wheel regulations, gradually transitioning athletes to the Junior age group where they must conform to the full ITU regulations. At TriStar ages athletes must race on aluminium rims that are no deeper than 35mm. The reasons for this can be found in our athlete and parent booklet, other information including the restrictions themselves at all ages in the Performance Pathway is on our [webpage](#). All athletes will have their wheels checked on entrance to transition.

GEAR RESTRICTION:

There are a number of very good reasons for restricting gears and more can be found out about that in our specific athlete and parent [booklet](#). A lot more information including gear tables, information on cassettes, chain rings and some useful how to YouTube clips can all be found on our Gear Restrictions [webpage](#).

ROLL OUTS:

The roll out is the test for gear restriction. All athletes' bikes will be rolled out prior to the race to check that they are properly gear restricted. Some bikes will be spot checked after the race too. More information on how a roll out works can be found [here](#) along with a YouTube clip [here](#), these can also be accessed through our [webpage](#) too.

EQUIPMENT:

At younger ages we encourage athletes and parents not to focus on buying the latest or most expensive equipment. The main focus at these ages should be on learning and developing as an athlete not looking to maximise the small gains that can be made by having the best equipment. There is a strong second hand market in a lot of Triathlon and Cycling Clubs and we encourage parents and athletes to explore these options first.

Any further queries on equipment related issues should be directed to your Team Manager. Though please do ensure that in the first instance you take time to read and understand all the information on the website, especially if you are new to the sport.

KIT:

Athletes race in Regional kit at the event. As this is a team event athletes are normally expected to wear their kit throughout the event.

SEEING THE NEXT LEVEL UP:

As part of the under 20's Festival IRC athletes have the opportunity to race on the same course as the best Youths and Juniors in the country, who themselves are competing in their British Championships. Many of these athletes will be part of their Regional Academy which is the first selective stage on British Triathlon's Performance Pathway. This exposure to the level up is an important part of the experience and allows younger athletes to see first-hand what the athletes at the next steps in Pathway look like and how they race. For more information on Regional Academies please look [here](#) for England, [here](#) for Wales and [here](#) for Scotland.

GOALS AND RACE PLAN

Intelligent Racing is a key pillar of the **ADF**. A big part of Intelligent Racing is supporting athletes in developing clear goals prior to them racing. Three types of goals exist: (1) outcome goals (e.g. finishing in a certain position); (2) performance goals (e.g. completing a 1500m track race in a certain time); and (3) process goals (e.g. maintaining arm drive throughout the run) NB. In Triathlons, where distances in each discipline are rarely ever accurate (and especially in open water events), time based (performance) goals are arguably irrelevant, so here we will focus on outcome and process goals. Critically process goals are controllable whereas outcome goals are not.

For many athletes the IRC is the season focus and so is a key goal. Whilst it is very healthy for athletes to aspire and dream about making the team and achieving a great finishing position, these are both ultimately outside of their control and are therefore are outcome goals.

If athletes set and achieve process goals, they are not only more likely to achieve their performance and outcome goals, but also have positive experiences and successes whether or not they achieve their performance or outcome goals.

For best development an athlete's race plan should focus inwardly on what they can control, not externally on others and what they can't control. Athletes should be encouraged to set process goals to support the bigger outcome goal. The process goals can then be used to build a race plan which is something the athlete can then use to review their overall performance against.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF PROCESS GOALS FOR AN IRC OR AN IRC SELECTION EVENT; YOUR ATHLETES COULD WELL BE DIFFERENT:

- Sticking to a pre- race time plan (e.g. leave the house at X; arrive at the start at Y)
- Sticking to a pre-race warm up routine
- Using psychological strategies to help me best prepared to race optimally
- Accelerating from the start with (x)* short sharp strokes before lengthening out *with x number of strokes being athlete dependent
- Breathing to both sides throughout the swim
- Looking to find feet at the earliest available opportunity without compromising pace
- Picking a good line around the buoys
- Having a well-practiced transition routine and repeating it in the race
- Executing a flying mount
- Following a good wheel to take advantage of better in race decisions/technical riding
- Carrying speed through corners
- Attacking out of corners on the bike
- Tucking up and riding aerodynamically at all times
- Being first in your group back into T2
- Starting the run at a controlled pace and not sprinting off if others chose to do so
- Committing my best effort no matter what happens



Athletes should be encouraged to build their race plan from process goals and then review how they raced against these. Critically they should also be encouraged to consider if and how they had to adapt their plan during the race. Triathlon is a fluid sport and the best athletes have to be adaptable. To better enable this athletes should be guided to explore setting different race plans/scenarios to see what works and doesn't work for them.

In line with another key pillar of the **ADF One Day One Race** athletes should be encouraged to understand from a young age that performance and outcome are two very different things. Whilst the desired intention is for performance and outcome to both be good, an athlete can perform well and not achieve the outcome they wanted; on other occasions athletes may perform badly and still get the outcome they wanted. Whatever the outcome, it is the process that supports performance that should be the focus, along with athlete's committing their best effort no matter what. Focusing only on the outcome is likely to be detrimental to athletes in the longer term and should be avoided. A poor performance, no matter the result, should never be glossed over and equally an excellent performance without the ideal result should be rightly celebrated. A great example of this is if an athlete has something go wrong (e.g. a crash, a really bad transition or a mechanical problem) and despite this has carried on undeterred giving their best, despite being well down the field.

DEALING WITH NERVES

Some athletes will experience nerves pre-competition while others won't. Those that do may experience nerves in the form of negative thoughts, or physical symptoms (e.g. increased heart rate; butterflies in the stomach). For some athletes, these nerves are helpful (e.g. they feel full of adrenaline and ready to race), whereas others believe the nerves are unhelpful (e.g. they are unable to focus on appropriate cues or waste time and energy worrying about the upcoming race). It is important for athletes to start to understand whether they find nerves helpful or unhelpful. If the athlete believes that nerves are unhelpful, they may wish to try one of the following strategies:

TRY TO CONTROL OR STOP THE NERVES

If the athlete experiences negative thoughts they could develop a strategy to stop the thoughts, and try to reframe them to create a more positive statement, focused on things that are in the athlete's control. E.g. 'I'm never going to be able to keep up STOP I will do my best to keep up'. The athlete could use a cue word that is kept in mind, or written on the back of their hand, or on a sticker (e.g. on their bike) to remind them to stop their negative thoughts.

If the athlete experiences physical symptoms, athletes can use a simple breathing technique to control the nerves. The athlete should close their eyes and take three very slow breaths, inhaling for 5 seconds and exhaling for 10 seconds. By focusing on the breath, the athlete will not be focusing on their nerves, and their heart rate should slow down.

ACCEPT THE NERVES

Controlling nerves does not work for every athlete. For some athletes, they might find it more helpful to work towards accepting that they are feeling nervous and experiencing the associated symptoms. In this instance, athletes should remind themselves that nerves are a normal part of the process and allow them to be there. Nerves are just a thought, or a feeling, and do not have to correlate with actual performance. By accepting the nerves and focusing on their process goals, athletes may get used to feeling nervous. A by-product of this is that the athlete's belief around the negative impact of nerves on performance may change and become more positive.



DEALING WITH DISAPPOINTMENT

Often the bigger event the more emotionally invested athletes are. This is natural and should be encouraged. As already mentioned Triathlon is a very fluid and dynamic sport and during a race a lot of decisions are made; this means a lot can go right and equally a lot can go wrong too. We expect athletes to get things right and wrong throughout their development in the sport. Making a wrong decision should not be viewed as a failure, they will naturally happen as athletes explore different racing scenarios/strategies. Instead fearlessness to commit to decisions and racing positively (i.e. racing with purpose and intent) should be very much encouraged and praised no matter the outcome. Further up the Pathway this is very important. Being a 'passenger' in a race should be discouraged at all costs. A passenger is defined as an athlete who is passive in a race and just follows others with no real purpose or intent. We believe it is far better to make decisions that may not have the desired outcome than to follow others blindly and passively.

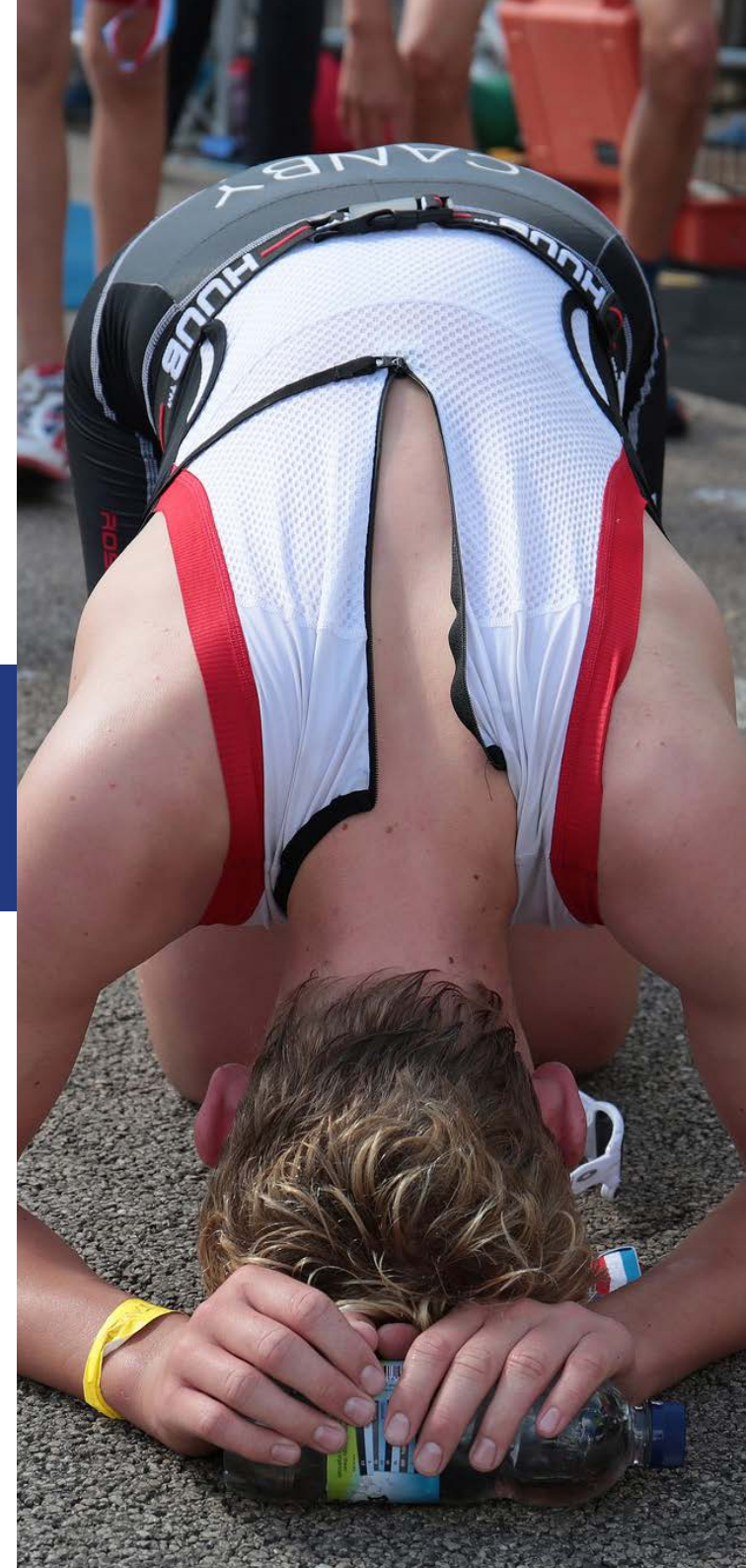
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Athletes must feel safe to explore and not be in fear of making mistakes

Athletes must feel safe to explore and not be in fear of making mistakes, this will not help long term development. Having a plan and a clear process to follow in the lead up to and during the race will support this as will parental influence that encourages adaptability and reduces outcome focus.

Athletes should be supported to review and understand what went both right and wrong, and importantly why; and then learn from it. Athletes should be encouraged to come up with specific ideas about how they will learn from the mistake (e.g. I wasted time in transition which meant I ended up missing the group; therefore I will practice and build a transition routine before my next race).

It is also important for the athlete to be able to contextualise the disappointment too. Ultimately whilst a level of frustration at a poor performance is a good sign, as it shows the commitment the athlete has for their endeavours, this is only sport. It is widely shown that being supported to maintain a level of healthy perspective in this regard is important for athletes to be able to deal with the pressure of racing as they develop through the Pathway.



UNDERSTANDING ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

Athletes will all develop at different rates as they grow, and especially through adolescence. Whilst athletes will develop both physically, psychology and emotionally through this time it is physical development, that for the majority of athletes, is most apparent and generally has the biggest impact on racing.

THE IMPACT OF PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

It is important for both parents and athletes to maintain a long term perspective here. In general physical development for girls is most apparent between the ages of 11 and 16 and for boys between 13 and 19. A quick look at the starting pen indicates that the biggest discrepancies in size and physical maturity at the IRC normally occurs in the T2 girls and T3

boys events. Sport often favours earlier developers and for the most part Triathlon is not that different. Strength and power are key elements in both swimming and cycling and so early developers are generally at an advantage here. Whilst (endurance) running is less influenced by strength/power and early maturation, critically when running off a bike a stronger athlete will tend to deal with the fatigue better and so this should also be borne in mind. Our research so far would indicate that physical maturation, whilst still relevant for girls, plays a more important part in influencing the outcome in boys events. Females as a rule are far more reliant on their aerobic systems than on strength/power, for males strength/power plays a bigger role. While aerobic systems are still influenced by physical development the effect is less apparent than that seen in strength/power at these ages.

Whatever the stage of maturation outcome should never be the focus, all athletes should be encouraged to focus on their process and performance instead.

There are pro's and con's in the experiences that being an earlier or later developer can provide – outside of TriStar 2 the impact of physical development probably has less influence for girls than boys across the Pathway as whole.



IMPACT OF PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

EARLY DEVELOPERS:

- Are more likely to be at the front of the race and especially are more likely to be in control of the decisions they make in the race.
- In both the swim and bike they will have the strength/power to support their decision making by being able to move up, cover gaps, create gaps and race aggressively much more easily than their peers.
- They are better able to get out of trouble if a bad decision has been made.
- They are more likely to be selected to teams as they are getting better results.
- Aren't challenged physically and races can be too easy, consequently learning experiences are not as profound and obvious.
- Being able to get away with making poor decisions and getting out of trouble by relying on strength and power is unhelpful at later stages in the Pathway when the impact of physical maturity levels off.
- Thought needs to be given here to exposing them to racing where this can't happen, they are put under pressure and have less time to make decisions.
- Constantly getting good results can lead to an outcome focus and a potential complacency that this will continue. Early developers will often be put under considerable pressure when others catch up and this can lead very quickly to them dropping out as it is difficult for them to come to terms with having to struggle and not getting the results they have been used to.
- Focusing on process and not outcome at all times becomes absolutely critical, as does being honest with the athlete about their physical development versus their peers, and helping them to maintain a long term perspective.

ON TIME OR LATE DEVELOPERS:

- Are less likely to be in control of their race and will be more likely to be just keeping up. They will be forced to make quicker decisions and learn faster.
- Learning to keep up will normally mean that these athletes become more strategic and intelligent in their approach to racing and decision making.
- They will also probably be forced to consider how they can improve technically and tactically to just keep up.
- If managed well this should naturally develop more of a performance/process focus.
- They will often also become more resilient and really learn to strive as racing is tough and difficult and this can be a real strength for later on.
- Making a mistake in a race can be stark and immediately lead to them being dropped.
- It is also difficult for such athletes to ever race when they have more physical control over the outcome.
- Some thought should be given to them racing in other disciplines/formats or events where they are in control and can benefit from this and the associated decisions, learning and building of confidence that will come with this.
- Always struggling to finish near the front and in the perceived better positions can affect both selection for teams and can build the belief that the athlete isn't good enough. This can often lead to such athletes dropping out of the sport early as finishing further back in the field can be de-motivating.
- Parents and coaches should encourage a very long term perspective here and through clear process goals and thoughtful race planning through the season keep athletes motivated.

FEMALE ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

All athletes will go through periods in their career when performance doesn't step forward consistently, and there are obviously a number of reasons for this. Some, but by no means all girls may well see a reduction in their rate of improvement and perhaps even a drop off in their performances during and after puberty. This is very normal. Very generally this is more likely to have more impact on girls who develop earlier. At the same time it is important to be aware that some girls, no matter whether early or late developers, may not notice much if any performance impact. Puberty will mean a change in body shape and composition for most girls (around age 13 for body shape changes with menstrual cycle or periods starting by age 16). This is normal and healthy and will not limit but rather enhance long term performance potential.

What is vitally important for all girls is being strong and robust. In addition a healthy (regular and manageable) menstruation cycle is central to long term female health and in particular is critical in supporting the development of bone strength. Any concerns around menstrual health should be raised with your GP, particularly lack of a cycle. Common injuries in endurance sport are often linked to impact and/or overuse. A robust athlete with good well balanced nutrition is far more likely to build strong bones and manage the necessary training loads without breaking down.

Success in Triathlon is not just about swim, bike and run, in line with the **Athlete Development Framework** (ADF) we are focused on developing the whole athlete. Any girls that do experience a slowing in performance improvement need to understand this will be temporary and that being patient is key. The focus should be on enjoying their sport, developing key pillars of the ADF e.g. **Training as Play, Informed Choice, Learning to Lead, Intelligent Training** while also staying strong and healthy.



MATURITY DATA COLLECTION

British Triathlon is currently collecting data at the Under 20's Festival each year to better inform us about the impact of physical development across the entire Pathway. As we build our understanding we may choose to explore making some proactive changes at certain events as to how we group athletes. Critically, however, whatever changes may or may not be made the challenges that surround physical development will never go completely away and ultimately what will help most is parents, coaches and athletes understanding the impact of it in both the short and long term.

RELATIVE AGE EFFECT (RAE)

This applies to when an athlete's birthday falls in the competitive year. In Triathlon the competitive year is from

January to December. Athletes born early in the competition year are likely to be more developed and in sports where physical maturation plays a part consequently are at an advantage. There is a slight RAE in Triathlon in girls racing and a more profound one for boys. In looking at RAE it is usual to group athletes in the four quarters of the year. In Triathlon quarter 1 (Q1) athletes are born in Jan/Feb/Mar and Q4 athletes are born in Oct/Nov/Dec. It is the Q4's who are most under represented at the front of races.

There are two ways we are working to combat RAE.

One is by educating athletes and parents as to what it is and how it works. Better understanding will help support athletes no matter their birth quarter. Q1's understanding they are advantaged, especially if they are early or on time (physical) developers. Q4's being aware that they are disadvantaged especially if on time or late developers.

Secondly by ensuring that there are opportunities through the year, that aren't focussed on the normal January to December competition year. Triathlon is this year being added to the UK School Games programme. We have chosen to select athletes in school years 10 and 11 (England/Wales) or athletes who are 15 or 16 on 31st August in the year of competition (for Scotland where school years are different) as this will support the Q4's especially. Academy selections are also done in a similar fashion to offset RAE. Further athletics and cross country operates in school years too (age on 31st of August), so this gives athletes with a September to December birthday another opportunity.



USEFUL INFORMATION

For more information please click on the relevant topic:

[Gear Restrictions](#)

[Wheel Regulations](#)

[Athlete Development Framework](#)

[British Triathlon Talent Home Page](#)

[British Triathlon Talent Identification](#)

[Under 20's Festival Home Page](#)

[Skills School](#)

[Triathlon England Home Page](#) - use the right hand menu to navigate to your regional page

[Triathlon Wales Junior Series](#)

[Triathlon Scotland IRC information](#)

[Performance Assessments \(England and Wales\)](#)

[Performance Assessments \(Scotland\)](#)

[Youth and Junior Competition page](#)





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