

RUNNING CLUB F.C., VOLUME 17

Welsh a late bloomer

Buckland resident turns into impressive triathlete late in life

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As a reminder, we're always looking for suggestions and recommendations on people/stories we should be featuring in our series, Running Club Franklin County.

Do you have any tips? Send us your running stories to sports@recorder.com, and they may be included in this space.

Here's Volume 17, where we tackle the thrilling but challenging world of triathlons with a nationally-ranked triathlete.

Bob Welsh, Buckland

When he first tried to swim competitively, Bob Welsh admits he couldn't last the length of a pool. While the swim portion has never been his expertise, he's more than made up for it with stellar performances in the other two legs of a triathlon.

The 77-year-old Buckland resident is nationally-ranked in his age category with USA Triathlon, a considerable feat considering Welsh only got into the competitions less than 10 years ago.

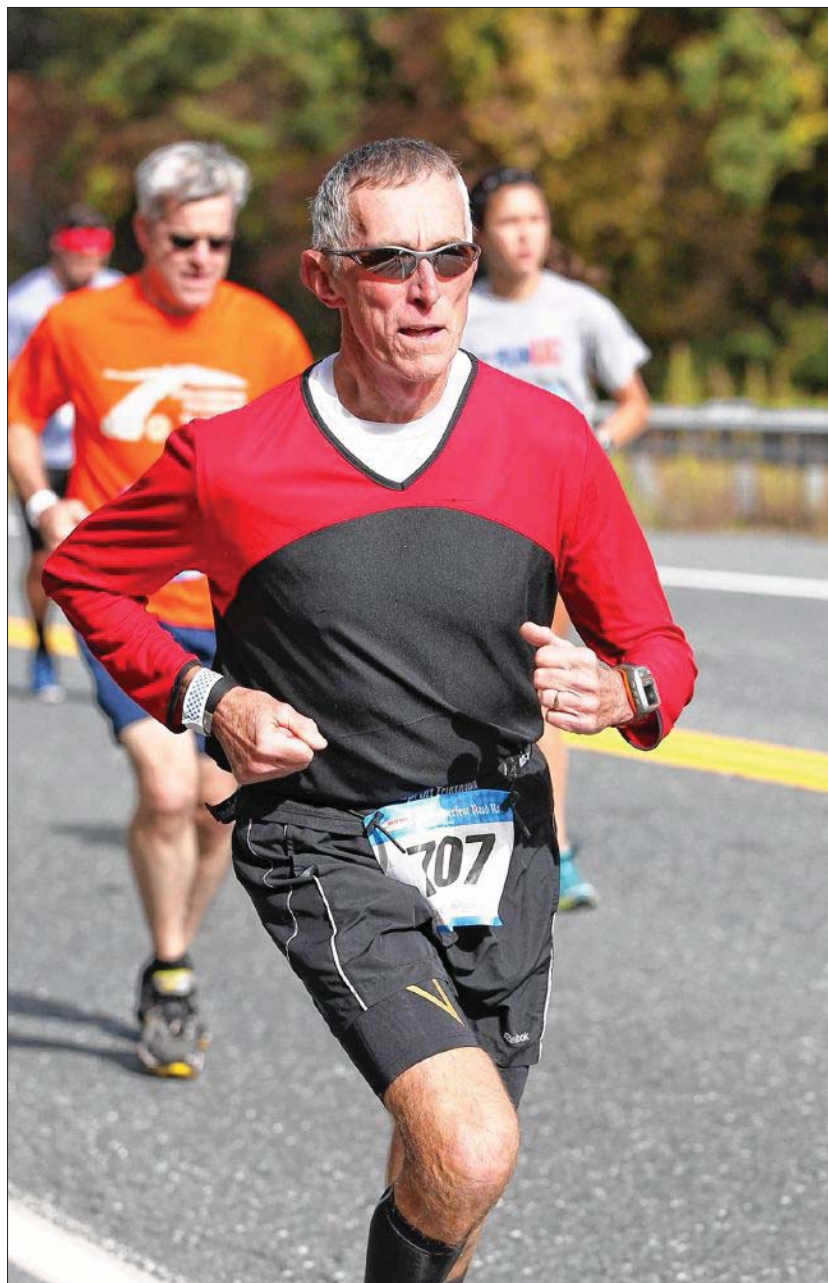
"When I retired, I hung around a whole bunch of people who do these things," he began. "I'd bike with them and then they'd go off and do Iron Man races, triathlons, crazy things. So that was kind of how it started. I'm an adrenaline junkie myself."

Welsh had long been a cyclist, but admitted he needed some direction in the other two disciplines. He went to Greenfield's Steve and Becky Shattuck for running help, but the swimming aspect took a bit longer.

"I couldn't do a full swim for my first race so I had to backstroke," he explained. "I've done a number of triathlons since then, including some ocean swims, and while they're very enjoyable, I'm still working at it."

Cycling is where he makes his moves during races. Welsh said it's not uncommon for him to be well behind the pace following the swim portion of a triathlon, but he manages to pick off competitors moving through the bike course.

"I know damn well that I'm certainly not going to be a competitive swimmer," he offered. "All I'm trying to do is get out and pass people. It's about surviving the swim and then that's where the real



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Buckland's Bob Welsh moves through the course during a past race.

SEE WELSH B2

Welsh

FROM B1

fun begins.”

Friend Brian Wadman agreed that cycling is the most lethal section of Welsh's triathlon.

“He is an incredible biker and good hill climber,” Wadman lauded. “He has to be as his house is two miles up Bray Road in Buckland. There is a ride sponsored by Harpoon Brewery called the B2B which goes 149 miles from their Boston brewery to their Vermont brewery. It's almost 4,000 feet of climbing. He was always the oldest finisher. One year he won a \$3,000 wheel set for being the oldest finisher.”

Despite the late start to running, Welsh has quickly impressed his training partners.

“Bob came to running a lot later than most of us,” said Wadman. “I don't think he started until he was in his 60's. We keep telling him the reason he's so good is he

isn't as beat up as the rest of us. There are days on our runs that he is pushing the pace and we have to try and keep up so we don't look bad.”

While he has enjoyed tremendous success competing in triathlons, Welsh said the purest joy comes from the camaraderie and environment that the races represent.

“Everyone is willing to share advice and encouragement at these races so it's just a very friendly group of people,” he said. “And the competition aspect is still a lot of fun. If one person beats you, it's, ‘OK, you got me.’ And vice versa. That's the sport in general.”

Welsh stays plenty busy with his training regimen. His running group consists of locals like Wadman, Rich Clark and Frank McDonald, and he mixes in swims at Ashfield Lake with his wife in a kayak beside him. Every Thursday, Welsh and McDonald do a 10-mile time trial where they run as fast as they can, and he even ventures to Joe's



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Buckland's Bob Welsh, far left, relaxes after a group ride with training group members at the Body Shoppe in Greenfield.

Garage in Haydenville for indoor cycling.

He admitted that he's slowed his training down a bit in 2020, with the race calendar pretty empty due to COVID-19.

“A little more fishing, a little less cycling,” he said. “When you don't have something to be in shape for, you still stay in shape, but you don't have to be at the peak.”

In a normal year, his triathlon schedule includes races in Westfield, Hyannis, New Hampshire and Greenfield. The Greenfield Triathlon, which has been canceled for this summer, is always a favorite on his calendar.

“Their motto is, ‘To finish is to win,’” Welsh offered. “That's not a bad way to look at it.”