

PAT GRISKUS OLYMPIC TRIATHLON

The teacher and the pupil

Easton's Chris Thomas is on quite a roll at the Pat Griskus Olympic distance Triathlon. The 38-year-old has won three straight races. When they swim, bike and run the ninth annual Griskus on Saturday in Middlebury, does anyone have a chance against Thomas?

How about one of Thomas' most promising pupils, Dan Theleen of Southbury.

Only 21 and still rising in the ranks of American triathletes, Theleen makes no claim on his chances in Saturday's race.

"(Thomas) has given me great training tips and great advice on how to approach a race," said Theleen earlier this week.

So, have student and teacher



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discussed Saturday's race?

"Do you mean, do we talk any trash?" Theleen asked. "No, we do not."

Theleen has come a long, long way since he first tried a triathlon, on a lark, in 2006. It was the Griskus, the sprint version, and he finished 81st.

"I did it with a couple of race buddies, just to see what it would be like," Theleen said. "It sounded like fun, and it wasn't too long of a race."

It is, approximately, a half-

mile swim, a 12 1/2-mile bike and a 3.1-mile run. That day changed Theleen's life forever.

"I didn't know what I was getting myself into," he joked.

Theleen was a distance runner at Pomperaug High and a member of the 2007 state championship swim team. The triathlon, with its swim and run components, was a natural for him. The bike portion is where he must make gains, and gains he is making: Theleen was 160th in the 2009 end-of-year USA Triathlon rankings in the 20-24 age group. Right now, he is 32nd for 2010. He hopes to remain in the top 100 by year's end.

Combine that with Middlebury's Jessica Broderick, who

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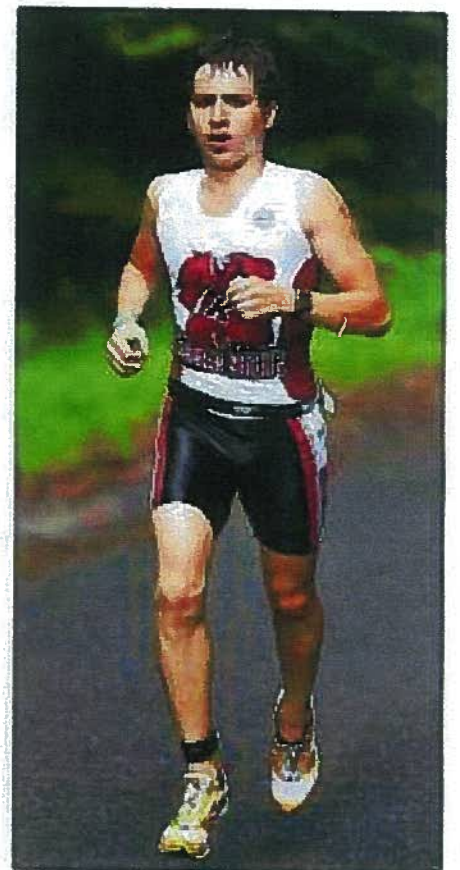


PHOTO BY DAN HICOK

Southbury's Dan Theleen finishes second at the Rev3 Olympic distance triathlon at Lake Quassapaug.

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is currently No. 1 in the nation in the same age group, and it appears that we are churning out sensational athletes over there at Pomperaug.

In the 2009 Griskus Olympic distance event (1-mile swim, 25-mile bike, 6.2-mile run), Theleen finished 35th in two hours, 30 minutes. Thomas won the race in two hours flat.

What, you think Theleen has no chance? Perhaps. But just two weeks ago in the Revolution3 Olympic event, on the very same Middlebury course, Theleen took second place in 2:12. "For the Griskus, I want to be under 2:10," he said, which means that Thomas had better be on his game.

Theleen, who has started a triathlon club team at Keene (N.H.) State College, was 35th at his first collegiate national championship race earlier this year, and he was not happy about it. Due to severe weather conditions, the swim was shortened to 500 yards. "And the swim is my strength. I was not able to get much distance on everyone," he said.

For now, he trains up to 20 hours per week, usually double sessions each day, in the hope that he can "progress to the professional level in this sport. Eventually, I want to go up to ironman distances."

Back at Keene State, he has grown the club team to 10 members. In his upcoming junior year, he will compete in

swimming and track, and maintain his rigorous triathlon training schedule, which means getting his butt outside in the harsh New Hampshire winters. He is gunning for a place at the age-group national championships in Tuscaloosa, Ala., in September. There he can qualify as a member of Team USA and a place at the World Olympic Triathlon championships in 2011 in Beijing.

"It would be the highest honor to represent the United States of America," he said.

The immediate challenge, however, is Saturday, when the student chases the teacher.

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