

SPORTS

Erie County has 2 triathlon national champs

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Erie County is home to not one, but two gold medalists from the 2021 USA Triathlon Age Group National Championships.

To Phil Friedman, that fact was more satisfying than being one of those victors.

Friedman, 68, was one of five area athletes who traveled to Milwaukee for last weekend's swimming-cycling-run-triathlon competition.

Another was Andy Holland, who showed other athletes from throughout the country why he's a two-time winner and the defending men's champion for the Highmark Quad Games.

He, like Friedman, was an age-group champion in the meet's sprint distance race.

Holland, 42, finished first in the men's 40-44 division at 1 hour, 1 minute, 38 seconds. His time also was good for 31st out of more than 2,900 starters.

Friedman, who's participated in triathlons throughout the world, topped the men's 65-69 field in 1:11:54. He was

214th overall.

"It's very cool to have two people from Erie be national champions like this," Friedman said.

Sunday's sprint race was set up within city limits. Athletes opened with a .46-mile swim in Lake Michigan, followed by a 12.4-mile cycling course and then a 3.1-mile run to the finish line.

"I'm still trying to wrap my head around the fact I won," Holland said. "I was pleasantly surprised because I raced Saturday in the Olympic

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Erie County athletes Phil Friedman, left, and Andy Holland pose after finishing first in their age groups for the sprint distance competition during USA Triathlon's Toyota Age Group National Championships. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Triathlon

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(distance) and placed third in my age group. I knew I'd be in contention for the sprint but still, to win an age group national championship is pretty exciting."

Holland's Olympic time was 1:59:48. He cracked 2 hours on a course that consisted of a .93-mile swim, 24.8-mile bike and 6.2-mile run.

Friedman competed two weeks after he finished second in the men's 65-69 division for a USA Triathlon aquathlon at Long Beach, California. That race was limited to swimming and running legs.

"I just went into (nationals) hoping to do the best I could," Friedman said. "I didn't expect to win because I'm getting into the upper end of my age group and there were definitely people there who could beat me."

People like Terry Loftus. Friedman has come to know the Laguna Niguel, California, resident from their former triathlon appearances.

Loftus, at 1:13:30, was second to Friedman.

Mike Durlin and Erie County Judge Elizabeth Kelly were other local runners who participated in the sprint race at Milwaukee.

Durlin completed his three disciplines in 1:21:47, which was good for 16th in the men's 65-69 standings.

Kelly's time was 1:32:11. She was 28th in the women's 60-64 field.

Ryan Lawrence's 13th-place finish in the men's 35-39 division was for the Olympic distance. He was timed at 2:07:41.

Sam Tullis of South Bend, Indiana, at 56:29, was the sprint race's overall winner. Clara James-heer of Grand Rapids, Michigan, was the



Andy Holland prepares to cross the finish line in the sprint distance race during last weekend's USA Triathlon Age Group National Championships at Milwaukee. Holland, with a time of 1 hour, 1 minute, 38 seconds, finished first in the men's age 40-44 division. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

fastest female at 1:03:43.

The cancellation of the 2020 USA Triathlon National Championships, plus other related events because of COVID-19, made Friedman appreciate the potential return of such live competition on a regular basis.

"It was just nice to see every-

body again and be able to go out and do these things," he said. "When you don't have any races (scheduled), you do lack motivation."

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