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Sanford's Blake Harris emerges from the water after the first lap of the Olympic Distance swim at the St Malo Triathlon. Harris lead wire-to-wire at the event, racking up the best men's time in the swimming, cycling and running sections of the triathlon.

St Malo Triathlon celebrates 25th anniversary

by CASSIDY DANKOCHIK

Hundreds of athletes flocked to St Malo provincial park this weekend to participate in the 25th annual St Malo Triathlon.

Sanford's Blake Harris won the Olympic distance race June 25. Usually competing in the sprint distance, Harris said he hoped to win his first-ever longer event on his first try and came through.

Harris went wire to wire in front, coming leading after the first and second laps of the 1.5 km swim around St. Malo Lake, a 40 km bike ride across the town, and finally finishing with a 10 km run around St. Malo Provincial Park.

His time of 2:03:34.2 was over six minutes faster than his closest rival. Harris was the fastest male athlete in all three sections.

Normally a competitive cyclist, a break in his race schedule let him test his chops once again with triathlon, in preparation for the 2022 Canada Games.

"The hardest part mentally was the bike," Harris said on the transition to the Olympic distance.

"Especially because I'm usually in a draft-legal race, so that means a massive pack with a bunch of guys. Here I'm 20 kms away from everyone in the field for an hour."

Harris will be criss-crossing North America attending events in Iowa, Wisconsin and California before heading to Niagara for the Canada Summer Games.

"I'll see how it goes, but I'm hoping for a podium," Harris said of his goals for the Canada Games.

The only competitor who could best Harris in a section was Winnipeg's Nicole Walker, who was the first woman to cross the line in the Olympic distance, just four seconds out of a podium spot.

Walker's 10 km run time of 38:24.8 was the fastest of any competitor, but it wasn't enough to catch either Quinn Desrochers, who finished second or Thomas Law, who finished third. Walker said she was helped by having competitors close to her to provide motivation for her final kick.

"There was some guys out there to race, and I got beat at the line, but it was fun to have a race," she said after crossing the finish line.

Walker is building up to the 2022 Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii this October.

"I haven't raced for a long time because of COVID," Walker said.

"I just needed to start getting back into shape. I've always liked this race. It's low-key, it's fun."

Walker said the race was "smooth," despite her long layoff, and was happy to have her son, who is now two-years-old, able to watch and cheer her on for the first time since he was nine-months-old.

Walker said she'll probably run one more triathlon before heading to Hawaii, but will be spending most of her time training.

"It's a nine-and-a-half to 10-hour day for me, so more training is better," she said.

In the sprint distance, Anja Krueger's time of just over an hour and 10 minutes was enough to beat out Marin Kecman, who finished four minutes behind her.

Brenton Button won the Olympic aqua-bike and Larissa Dueck won the sprint event, which sees athletes compete in swimming and cycling, but not running.

Jame Treloar won the sprint duathlon, which features a cycling session sandwiched between two running sections.

Adam Spiers won the "Try-a-Tri" event which saw athletes get a chance to test out triathlon on a smaller scale than the other distances. Claire Reville won the "Do-a-Du," a beginner duathlon.

The day after adult races, junior triathletes got a chance to test their mettle on the course.

Addison Champagne and Quinn Reville won the U15 long and short course respectively. Rielle Champagne won the U13 long course and Jeremiah Thiessen won the U13 short course.

Mia Tetrault took top spot in the U11 race, Ella Weselak won the U9 age group and Graeme Beirnes was the fastest U7.



Nicole Walker waves at her son just after completing the cycling portion of the St Malo Triathlon. Walker would be the fastest female finisher, and finished the 10 km run faster than any other competitor.

Projected first round NHL picks were U15 teammates

by CASSIDY DANKOCHIK

When the 2019 Eastman Selects U15 team took to the ice, they were a force to be reckoned with. It wasn't a surprise the team would go on to win provincials at their age group, as they featured two potential NHL first round picks playing defense for them.

Cousins Denton Mateychuk and Owen Pickering, ranked 14th and 15th in the NHL central scouting list for North American skaters, played for the Selects that year.

"We were pretty good," Pickering said with a chuckle.

"My favourite hockey memory is winning the province that year with that group."

"We had a great defensive core, and some good forwards too," Mateychuk added.

"I think that was an awesome team, and a really awesome year."

The first round of the NHL entry draft will take place in Montreal on July 7, with both Pickering, who grew up in St Adolphe and Mateychuk, who grew up in Dominion City, planning on making the trip with family to take in the festivities.

Both players admitted to looking at mock drafts and pre-draft coverage projecting where they might go, despite making efforts to avoid them.

"I'd be lying to you if I told you I don't ever look at it," Pickering, who plays for the Swift Current Broncos in the WHL, said with a chuckle.

"I try to stay away from it, I think my teammates pay more attention to it than me."

In an NHL.com mock draft, writers Adam Kimelman and Mike G. Morreale had both players selected in the first round, with Mateychuk, who plays for the Moose Jaw Warriors in the WHL, projected to go as high as 10th.

"I'll definitely get a bit anxious," Mateychuk said, predicting his mindset through the early picks of the first round.

"It will be a cool moment though, I'm going to try and enjoy it as much as possible."

The draft stock before 2022 of both players can be seen in the point totals of the U15 Eastman Selects. Mateychuk was the captain of the team, racking up 61 points in 36 games played as a defenseman.

"I've always been an offensive guy, I can be used in lots of offensive situations, on the powerplay, late in the game to get a goal for your team, I think that's the type of player I am," Mateychuk said.

"I think in the last couple years my defensive game has come a long way. I want to be that two-way defenseman, that complete defenseman at the NHL level."

Pickering had a more pedestrian U15 season, scoring only 17 points across his 35 games. Pickering was ranked as a C prospect at the beginning of the season, but has rocketed up draft boards due to his size and potential. In bantam, he was only 5'7, but now stands over 6'4.

"I do the same thing every day — I come to the rink, I work out, I push myself as hard



It shouldn't be a surprise that the Eastman Selects U15 team of 2019 won the provincial championship for their age group. The team featured two potential first round NHL draft picks on their roster in Owen Pickering and Denton Mateychuk.

as I can," Pickering said of his routine which caused his rise as a prospect.

"If you told me a year ago I would be in this position, I would have told you, you were crazy."

Despite being cousins, playing the same position, from the same region of Manitoba, the two couldn't be further apart physically, with Mateychuk standing under six feet tall.

The draft process was a long one, with team interviews, workouts and years of efforts just to hear your name called on the big stage, and the criteria NHL teams can use is at times bizarre.

"I had one team ask me what food would I rather have, sweet or salty, that was a weird one," Pickering said, remembering an interview.

"That one I really didn't know what to answer."

With the process over, all that's left is waiting for franchises to make their decision.

"It's exciting," Mateychuk said.

"You've played all the hockey, you've done all you can to prove yourself off-ice, now it's just pretty much waiting until the day."

Pickering said he tries to model his game after the Dallas Stars' Miro Heiskanen.

"(When he's) skating, he never looks like he's trying," Pickering said.

"(Heiskanen) is very good offensively, he's very good at closing plays on the rush. He's pretty much good at everything."

As a Pittsburgh Penguins fan, Mateychuk's response to the same question came easy.

"Kris Letang," was the quick answer.

"I really liked watching Pittsburgh, so that's the guy I watched growing up."

Mateychuk and Pickering will also be attending Hockey Canada's world junior camp to be hosted this summer.