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Gutting it out for 70 miles

Bethesda lawyer says triathlons, like litigation, can be grueling

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James R. Hammerschmidt took a 55-mile bike ride Memorial Day weekend in Garrett County. He followed the route used for the SavageMan Triathlon, which took him through Deep Creek Lake State Park, Savage River State Forest and New Germany State Park. He took in the beautiful scenery and gutted through the steep climbs.

And when Hammerschmidt finished, he had one thought: People have to be nuts to swim before and run after this bike ride. Yet, less than four months later, there he was in a body suit, swim cap and goggles, bobbing in Deep Creek Lake, awaiting the start of the 2010 SavageMan 70.0 Triathlon.

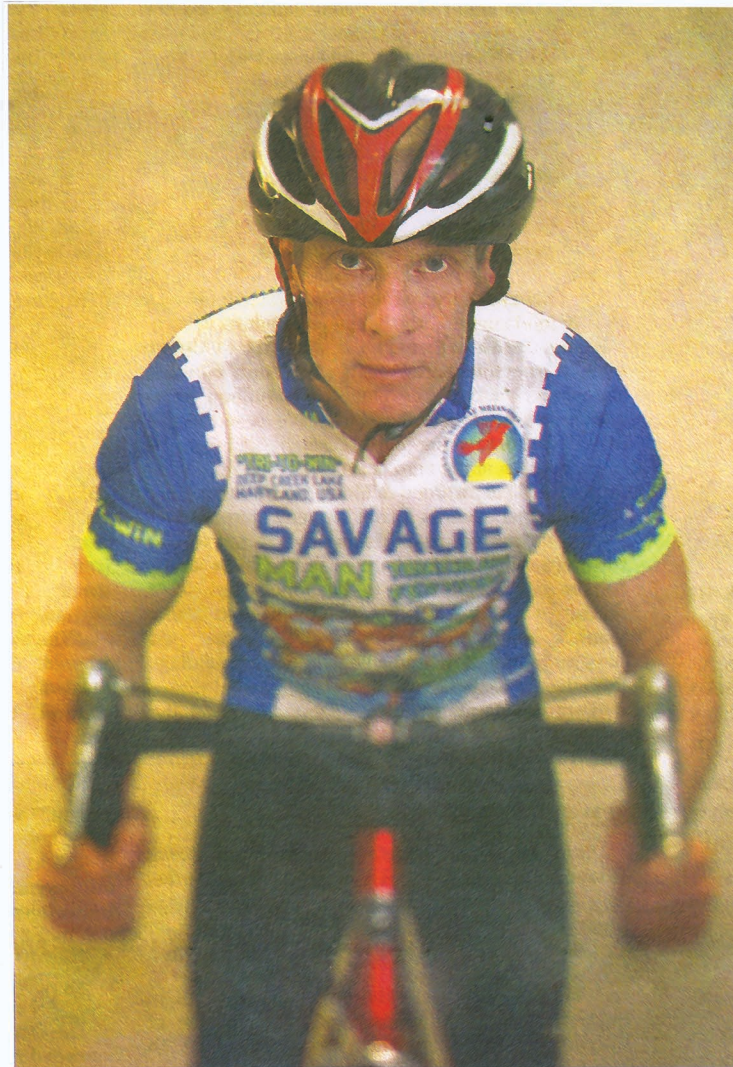
"I couldn't conceive myself doing that," Hammerschmidt said recently from his office at Paley Rothman in Bethesda, where he is a principal. "It just sort of evolved."

The SavageMan 70.0 consists of a 1.2-mile swim, 55.7-mile bike ride and a 13.1-mile run (a half-marathon). It is approximately half the distance of the famous Ironman Triathlon but three times longer than Hammerschmidt's only previous triathlon, a Virginia "sprint" race he finished with his wife in May.

Hammerschmidt is an avid biker, and it was on his long rides with fellow bikers this year that the idea of SavageMan first came up. The talk planted an idea in his head that grew.

"It was sort of at the last minute," said Hammerschmidt. "I said, 'If I can get in, I'll go for it.' Before I knew it, I was at the starting line."

Just not for the race he thought he'd be running. Hammerschmidt originally wanted to compete in the SavageMan 30.0, a shorter, less rigorous version of the 70-miler. But Hammerschmidt's wife is Jewish, and



RICH DENNISON

James R. Hammerschmidt, an attorney at Paley Rothman in Bethesda, completed the 70-mile SavageMan Triathlon in September and plans to compete in two more events in 2011.

the shorter race fell on Yom Kippur. Hammerschmidt saw the scheduling conflict as an opportunity.

"I wanted to challenge myself," he said.

Hammerschmidt began hiking after hip and joint problems forced him to curtail his running. When it comes to swimming, he admits he's

"terrible."

"I thought the swim was going to be the worst part," Hammerschmidt says of SavageMan. "The swim was the easiest thing I did that day."

Hammerschmidt rode the bike course several times prior to the race, but each time he was unable to stay on his bike for the duration of the

Westernport Wall, an almost vertical ascent of four pockmarked street blocks in that town. Crowds line the street, ringing cowbells and cheering on the riders.

"It's nutty," he said. "People who fall are swept out of the way. There are bodies everywhere."

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Paley Rothman

But Hammerschmidt was one of the more than 250 people who reached the summit without leaving his bike, a feat immortalized in a brick with his name on it, laid on the road at the Wall's summit.

"It was part luck, part mental and physical endurance," he said.

Hammerschmidt was joined at various points of the half-marathon by family members, including his three children for the last 20 yards. He finished the race in a shade over seven hours, which was his goal.

It also gave him a time to beat at next year's SavageMan. Hammerschmidt is recruiting family and friends to join him and has entered the Columbia Triathlon in May. Having a race six months away makes the 4:30a.m. wake-up calls to exercise in the dead of winter more manageable, he said.

"At 46, what do you train for?" he said. "You just kind of need goals."

The triathlon training had Hammerschmidt feeling more fit and energized for his litigation practice as well.

"Both can be a little grueling," he said. "Sometimes you've just got to gut it out."