

2013's

# 10 Most Influential People in Triathlon

MEET THE ICONS, INNOVATORS AND ENTREPRENEURS WHO ARE DRIVING THE SPORT FORWARD.

BY FREDERICK DREIER

**O**ur daily lives as triathletes are impacted by scores of people within our immediate universe: a swim coach, running buddy, local race promoter, to name a few. But there are those in our sport whose work impacts every triathlete, whether we realize it or not. These men and women are the business executives, coaches, athletes and mentors who are steering triathlon toward its future and growing the sport, one swag bag at a time.

We identified 10 of these individuals for our annual “10 Most Influential People in Triathlon” list based on their work in the United States triathlon scene over the last 12 months. Our editors compiled the list after an exhaustive voting process, and ranked them based on their impact.



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**Rob Urbach**  
“THE STRATEGIST”

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN DAVID BECKER

**W**e've never seen the job description for USA Triathlon's CEO position, but we can only guess that the document is long and imposing, with the following line items highlighted: oversee 4,300 complicated sporting events and 550,000 Type-A athletes; develop the nation's Olympic talent; attract non-endemic sponsors to a sport with a tiny media base; grow awareness of the sport and its television footprint. Each of these jobs could overwhelm even the most seasoned executive, but somehow Rob Urbach finds a way to address them all. Urbach, who took over USA Triathlon's top spot in 2011 after a long career in sports marketing, says his trick is to set reasonable goals for his organization.

“I don't think we're going to engage 350 million people—our vision is to have everybody that engages in our sport realize their full potential,” Urbach says. “Then we find ways to grow out of that.” Urbach's participation growth strategy involves beefing up collegiate and junior triathlons, and winning more first-tim-

ers over with the sprint distance. He is pushing for the National Collegiate Athletics Association to recognize women's triathlon as an NCAA sport in January. Urbach believes the televised super-sprint triathlons in San Diego and Las Vegas succeeded in winning over TV viewers. And in 2015, Chicago will host the ITU World Triathlon Series Grand Final, which Urbach hopes will increase the sport's appeal to sponsors and media companies.

Urbach's work is already paying off. Since joining USA Triathlon, he's brought new mainstream sponsors into the fold, with United Airlines, Avis, MetLife, TransAmerica, Hilton Hotels and Subway becoming official partners. The U.S. Age Group National Championships has also expanded, from a race of 1,200 to nearly 4,500, and the number of USA Triathlon members—largely flat in the two years prior to Urbach's arrival—is now at a 7 percent growth rate for adults and more than twice that for youth. “This type of thing takes years of investment and patience,” Urbach says. “Triathletes are so passionate. We're just trying to show that passion to a greater audience.”