

ATHLETE GUIDE — ESSENTIAL TOPIC AREAS

A RACE DIRECTOR'S REFERENCE FOR BUILDING A COMPLETE ATHLETE GUIDE



PRE-RACE LOGISTICS

1 ATHLETE CHECK-IN

Dates, times, location, required ID, and race packet contents (bib, timing chip, swim cap, helmet stickers, wristband).

WHY INCLUDE

Missed check-in = can't race. Clear instructions prevent day-of chaos at registration.

2 BIKE CHECK-IN

When and where to rack your bike, sticker placement requirements, and what is/isn't permitted (covers, locks, etc.).

WHY INCLUDE

Improper bike setup leads to delays, penalties, or denied transition access on race morning.

3 PARKING & VENUE ACCESS

Parking locations, restricted zones, shuttle info, and how to access the race venue and transition area.

WHY INCLUDE

Traffic and parking confusion is a top athlete complaint and a common cause of late arrivals.

4 RACE PACKET CONTENTS

Itemized list of everything in the packet — bib, timing chip, swim cap, helmet stickers, wristband, and instructions.

WHY INCLUDE

Athletes need to know what to expect and how to use each item before race morning.

5 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Full weekend timeline including clinics, expo hours, wave starts, transition open/close times, and award ceremonies.

WHY INCLUDE

Athletes plan their entire weekend around this — it's the single most-referenced section of any guide.

6 EXPO & PRE-RACE CLINICS

Vendor locations, open water swim clinics, beginner briefings, and athlete briefing details and times.

WHY INCLUDE

Clinics and briefings improve safety outcomes and athlete readiness, especially for first-timers.

RACE DAY INFORMATION

7 SWIM WAVE & START INFO

Wave assignments by age group/gender, cap colors, rolling vs. mass start format, warm-up procedures, cut-off times, and estimated water temperature.

WHY INCLUDE

Athletes need to know exactly when and where to be. Confusion at swim start creates unnecessary safety risks.

8 TRANSITION AREA RULES

Access hours, rack placement, mount/dismount lines, prohibited items, and conduct expectations inside transition.

WHY INCLUDE

Transition violations are among the most common penalties — clear rules reduce confusion and DQs.

9 COURSE MAPS & DIRECTIONS

Detailed swim, bike, and run course maps with turn-by-turn directions, aid station locations, and mile markers.

WHY INCLUDE

Surprises mid-race can lead to wrong turns, course cutting, and/or accidents.

10 TIMING CHIPS

How to pick up, wear (left ankle), and return the chip, plus what to do if lost. Must be worn for all race segments.

WHY INCLUDE

Missing or improperly worn chips result in no official time — athletes need to understand this before race day.

11 AID STATIONS & NUTRITION

Location and frequency of aid stations, products offered (water, electrolytes, gels), and bottle exchange zones.

WHY INCLUDE

Knowing what's on course lets athletes plan their nutrition strategy and avoid unnecessary gear weight.

12 CUT-OFF TIMES

Swim, bike, and run course cut-off times, and what happens if an athlete misses them (course closure procedure).

WHY INCLUDE

Athletes have a right to know the time limits — proper communication prevents disputes at cut-off points.

13 SPONSORS & EXPO

Event sponsor recognition, expo vendor map, booth hours, and any sponsor activations or athlete perks available on-site.

WHY INCLUDE

Recognizing sponsors fulfills contractual obligations and helps athletes take advantage of on-site offerings.

RULES & CONDUCT

14 USA TRIATHLON RULES SUMMARY

Most commonly violated rules — drafting, helmet, course compliance, headphones, race numbers — with associated penalties.

WHY INCLUDE

Most violations occur because athletes didn't read the rules — a concise summary reduces enforcement friction.

15 PENALTY PROCESS

How athletes are notified of penalties (card system), where to serve them (penalty tent), and consequences for non-compliance.

WHY INCLUDE

Athletes who don't know the process often fail to serve penalties, turning a time penalty into a DQ.

16 SPORTSMANSHIP & CONDUCT

Expectations for respectful behavior toward officials, volunteers, and fellow athletes, with consequences for violations.

WHY INCLUDE

Setting a tone of good sportsmanship protects staff and volunteers and makes the event enjoyable for everyone.

17 WETSUIT RULES

Temperature thresholds for wetsuit legal, optional, and prohibited conditions, and impact on award eligibility.

WHY INCLUDE

Wetsuit rules are event-specific. Athletes need to know in advance to help with training and reduce pre-race anxiety.

18 PROTEST PROCEDURE

How and when to file a protest, required timeline (typically 15 min notification / 30 min form submission), and process.

WHY INCLUDE

Clear procedures protect both athletes and race directors from unresolved disputes after results post.

19 DROPPING OUT / DNF

How to properly withdraw mid-event, who to notify, and where to report after exiting the swim or course.

WHY INCLUDE

Unaccounted-for athletes trigger search-and-rescue responses — a simple procedure prevents major incidents.

LOGISTICS & ATHLETE SERVICES

20 AWARDS & RESULTS

Ceremony times and location, award categories (overall, age group, masters, grandmasters, Clydesdale/Athena, relay), places per category, pickup, and results posting process.

WHY INCLUDE

Athletes plan post-race schedules around awards — clear info prevents crowding and missed ceremonies.

21 BODY MARKING & RACE ID

Whether body marking is used, where to get marked, helmet sticker placement, and the full athlete identification system.

WHY INCLUDE

Proper ID enables officials to record penalties and times accurately — and is required for transition access.

22 RELAY TEAM RULES

Check-in process for relay teams, timing chip handoff procedure, transition relay area logistics, and substitution policy.

WHY INCLUDE

Relay athletes have different logistics than solo athletes — a dedicated section prevents confusion.

23 POST-RACE & FINISH AREA

Finish line process, medal/finisher gear distribution, post-race food and beverage access, and bike retrieval procedure.

WHY INCLUDE

A well-communicated finish experience is core to athlete satisfaction and post-race flow management.

24 GEAR CHECK / BAG CHECK

Whether gear/bag check is offered, location, hours, and any prohibited items that cannot be stored.

WHY INCLUDE

Athletes traveling to races especially need to know where to store belongings during the race.

25 COMMUNICATIONS & UPDATES

Event app download info, social media handles, email update process, and PA system use for race-day announcements.

WHY INCLUDE

A single communication channel prevents information gaps during weather delays or course changes.

SAFETY & MEDICAL

26 MEDICAL CARE & SERVICES

Location of medical tents, who provides care, heat illness risk, hydration guidance, and emergency contact protocol.

WHY INCLUDE

Medical awareness saves lives — athletes must know where to go and what to expect in an emergency.

27 COURSE SAFETY NOTES

Traffic control officers, open road sections, urban course considerations, and instructions to obey traffic laws.

WHY INCLUDE

Most race-day accidents occur on the bike course — proactive guidance reduces the risk of incidents.

28 ATHLETE SAFETY PROTOCOLS

USA Triathlon-aligned safety best practices for swim, bike, and run — including emergency signals, buoy use, and pacing guidance.

WHY INCLUDE

Safety protocols empower athletes to make smart in-race decisions and reduce reliance on emergency intervention.

29 ANTI-DOPING & SAFESPORT

USADA testing policy, banned substances reference, SafeSport/MAAPP obligations, and mandatory reporting requirements.

WHY INCLUDE

Required disclosures for all USA Triathlon-sanctioned events — ensures race directors are compliant with all policies and rules.

INSURANCE

30 INSURANCE COVERAGE

All athletes (whether they purchased a USA Triathlon annual membership or one-day membership) are eligible to file a claim under the USA Triathlon Participant Accident Insurance plan in the event they are injured during a USA Triathlon sanctioned event.

The Participant Accident plan is secondary to any other insurance and provides coverage for medically necessary treatment for covered injuries, with a maximum limit of \$25,000 per injury. **A \$1,000 deductible applies to all claims.**

If injured while participating in [insert race name], ensure event staff are aware. USA Triathlon will email claims instructions after the race via Administrative Concepts, Inc. Allow 1–2 weeks. If not received, contact insurance@usatriathlon.org.

WHY INCLUDE

Communicating insurance coverage builds athlete confidence and ensures all parties understand the coverage in place at USA Triathlon sanctioned races.