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The creation and development of an international sport federation: A case study of the International Triathlon Union from 1989-2000

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the Department of Sport Management, Recreation Management and Physical Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded
Spring Semester 2006

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While the process of researching and writing a dissertation can at times isolating, there were a variety of people who had either direct influence or indirect influence on me throughout this process. I need to thank:

- Both my parents, Dean and Gladys Phelps, who stressed education and allowed me (and supported me) as I eventually came to the realization that getting the PhD was indeed important.
  - Mom: For tolerating my restlessness and wanderlust.
  - Dad: For passing on a little of your writing ability and encouraging me to finish the master’s degree and go after the doctorate.
- My brother Scott, who because of his success with the family business provided me the opportunity to chase my Olympic dream by working the Salt Lake City Winter Games, which solidified my desire to get this degree.
- My brother Corey, the first Dr. Phelps, who demystified much of what it meant to be a doctoral student (and provided a little sibling rivalry to motivate me to get the degree).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one gets to this point without having had a tremendous amount of help along the way.

- Dr. Aubrey Kent, as my advisor and guide, who allowed me to take off in a direction that incorporated my passion as well as permitting me to explore other possibilities when it came to writing this dissertation.
- Dr. Jeffrey James for challenging me academically and demanding that good enough is not good enough.
- Dr. Cecil Reynaud for the practical and real world insight that can only be obtained from having worked with national governing bodies and international federations.
- Dr. King Beach for clearing the cobwebs and misinformation surrounding qualitative research and for making class entertaining, worthwhile, and productive.
- Dr. Gary Gray, who was both my undergraduate and master’s professor. He was the first to show me that sport had an interesting academic side to it as well as showing me that volleyball is the greatest team sport ever.
- Paul Allan, who tolerated my mistakes as a graduate assistant in sports information and helped me achieve that Olympic dream.
- Mark Sisson, who took a real chance on a young, unproven 20-something, gave me the largest program budget at Tri-Fed/USA and then gave me the freedom to create and manage an officials’ program.
- Tim Yount, whose insight, experience and friendship over the years kept me grounded in the sport of triathlon.
- Steve Locke, who provided honest insight and opinions.
- Loreen Barnett and Les McDonald of the International Triathlon Union for allowing unfettered access to the organization’s archives that made this dissertation possible.
- The faculty and staff of Northwest College (connu avant as Northwest Community College). I remember from whence I came.
- Dennis Albrecht who introduced me to the sport of triathlon.
- Beth, Mark, and the rest of the MMC/PRSO gang for making it worthwhile.
- Mary who reminded me that ABD means all you have is a master’s degree.
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PREFACE

As is often the case with any industry the language inherent to that business is unique. The world of international sports and the Olympics is no different. Acronyms and abbreviations abound and one may become confused by the alphabet soup of letters representing the various entities that operate in and around the Olympics. To help the reader understand some of the primary groups involved and highlighted in this paper the following lists are provided.
DEFINITION OF TERMS

Aquathlon: Sport comprised of swimming and running.

Duathlon: Sport comprised of running and cycling. Traditional format is run-bike-run. Distances vary.

DWC: Duathlon World Championship

Triathlon: Sport comprised of swimming, cycling and running. Distances vary but the so-called Olympic-distance triathlon is composed of a 1.5K swim, 40K bike and a 10K run.

TWC: Triathlon World Championship
ACRONYMS

Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF): Organization representing the International Federations whose sports are in the Summer Olympics.

European Triathlon Union (ETU): Regional organization representing European National Governing Bodies which are members of the International Triathlon Union.

Federation International Triathlon (FIT): American led, first attempt at creating a world governing body for the sport of triathlon.

General Assembly of International Sports Federations (GAISF): Organization whose members include all International Olympic Committee recognized International Federations.

International Federation (IF): Also known as International Sport Federation. An IF is the world governing body for a sport as recognized by the IOC. An IF may be recognized by the IOC and still not have its sport a part of the Olympic Games competition program.

International Olympic Committee (IOC): Stewards of the Olympic Games.

International Triathlon Union (ITU): IF for the sport of triathlon.

National Governing Body (NGB)/National Federation (NF)/National Sports Organization (NSO): Organization responsible for a particular sport within a country that is recognized by its National Olympic Committee.

National Olympic Committee (NOC): Governing organization within a country responsible for sending athletes to the Olympic Games and acting as the umbrella organization for all the NGBs.

Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (OCOG)/Local Organizing Committee (LOC): Organization responsible for hosting the Olympic Games in a particular country.

Pan American Triathlon Confederation (PATCO): Regional organization representing Pan American National Governing Bodies which are members of the International Triathlon Union.

Triathlon Federation International (TFI): Outgrowth of FIT’s demise and second attempt at the creation of an IF.

Union Internationale de Moderne Pentathlon et Biathlon (UIMPB): IF for modern pentathlon and biathlon.

United States Olympic Committee (USOC): The NOC for the United States.

USA Triathlon (USAT): US National Governing Body for the sport. Previously know as Triathlon Federation/USA (Tri-Fed).
TIMELINE

1984
- ETU forms

1984 October
- FIT forms in Kona, Hawai’i

1984
- FIT presents to GAISF

1987 February
- FIT & ETU meet in Dallas: TFI is the compromise

1987 November 15
- TFI officially constituted in Amsterdam, Holland

1988 January
- TFI meets in Vancouver. Tri-Fed/USA doesn't attend.
  - Only 5 attend: Les McDonald (CAN), Phil Briars (NZ), van Zanten (HOL), O’Callaghan (IR), and Jeff Konings (BEL).

1988 April
- On a routine trip to Sweden, Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of IOC, discussed with Brigadier General Sven Thofelt (Sweden), president of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon (UIPMB), the possibility of triathlon entering the 1992 Barcelona Olympic program as a demonstration sport. Samaranch suggested that triathlon enter into the UIPMB to expedite this, and expressed that three successful world championships would need to be held prior to the 1992 Games.

1988 August
- Stockholm, Sweden – With Samaranch’s invitation as the unifying force, triathlon national governing bodies (NGBs) set their past differences aside and met in an attempt to reach consensus on the structure of a new world governing body that would go about fulfilling Samaranch’s requirements for Olympic inclusion: affiliation with UIPMB and creation of a world championship for 1989.

1988 October
- Cairo, Egypt – In a meeting of the UIPMB executive board, disagreements between the Russian vice-president and the triathlon group become apparent. Triathlon wants autonomy within UIPMB.

1988 November
- Montecatini, Italy – The triathlon group’s hoped for autonomy within UIPMB was crushed when the chairman of the meeting, the Russian vice-president, asks the Working Committee if they will accept provisional acceptance into UIPMB if they agree to the conditions established by UIPMB. Not wanting to alienate the congress, the Working Committee agreed to the terms.
1989 February  Meeting held in Vancouver, British Columbia with the WC finalizing the agenda for the April congress. This would include elections, by-laws, world championships, and the problem with UIPMB. The WC would proceed with the elections with or without UIPMB’s blessing.

1989 March/April  UIPMB meets in Avignon, France and breakdown of triathlon assimilating into UIPMB. Triathlon group decides to go it alone.

1989 August 4  ITU formed in Avignon, France
1989 August 6  First Triathlon World Championship
1990 January  Triathlon as demonstration sport at Commonwealth Games
1990 September 15  Second TWC held at Disney World
1991 June  IOC recognition of ITU
1991 Summer  World Cup Series inaugurated
1991 October  GAISF membership
1992  Frankfurt DWC
1992  Muskoka Triathlon World Championship
1992  Triathlon added to World University Games & Goodwill Games
1993 March 9  Triathlon placed on 1995 Pan Am Games program
1993 Fall  USA takes over DWC after Switzerland falters
1993  ITU begins to exam draft legal format for TWC and World Cup
1994  ITU bans 3 American elite athletes for competing in a self-proclaimed World Cup event in Australia
1994 Summer  Goodwill Games
1994 Sept. 4  IOC adds triathlon to the competition program
1995  ASOIF membership
1995 Summer  Pan-American Games in Mar del Plata, Argentina
1996 February  Pacific Sports Entertainment marketing deal announced
1996 Summer  Cleveland ITU Congress & Triathlon World Championship; USAT runs opposition candidate in election for ITU president.
1997  WTC sues ITU
1998 Spring  PSE deal collapses; ITU borrows money from IOC
1998 July  New York Goodwill Games
1999  German federation gives up TWC; Montreal awarded TWC
2000 April  Perth ITU Congress & Triathlon World Championship; Proxy voting issues related to presidential election.
2000 September  Triathlon debuts at the Sydney Summer Olympic Games
ABSTRACT

Creating and developing an international sport federation is an early step before governing a sport on a global scale. Then the organization must seek International Olympic Committee recognition to become the legitimate international federation rather than being self-proclaimed. Next the international federation lobbies to have its sport placed on the Olympic Games competition program. In just two years, the International Triathlon Union went from being a self-proclaimed world governing body for the sport in 1989 to being recognized officially as such from the IOC. Three years later the sport was placed on the competition program for the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games. No sport has accomplished so much in such a short period of time.

Using Institutional Theory as the framework, this study looked at identifying the various isomorphic influences exerted upon the International Triathlon Union as the organization moved towards its Olympic goal. While institutional theory describes why organizations move towards homogeneity, typically by three traditional isomorphisms, this study also looked at the variables of leadership and culture to see if they might also influence the direction of this international federation. Additionally, interaction between all the isomorphic influences and variables was also considered. Using a qualitative methodology incorporating heuristic inquiry and a constructivist philosophy, a variety of pressures, both internal and external, were exerted on the newly formed international federation.

Coercive isomorphism, provided by International Olympic Committee, was the strongest influence on the organization’s creation and development. However, mimetic and normative isomorphic influences were also present indicating that a hierarchy and interaction exists among and between the three isomorphisms in this case study. Additionally, leadership and cultural influences also guided how ITU was created and developed. While Institutional Theory has focused on macro elements regarding an organization’s move towards homogeneity, there is also evidence that micro elements provide similar sway.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Problem

Triathlon. The swim-bike-run sport came into existence in the 1970s and was created by members of the San Diego Track Club as an alternate workout session on Fiesta Island (Accardo & Feller, 2001; International Olympic Committee, 2004). Eleven years later, in 1989, the sport had its first official world championship and the fledgling International Federation for the sport, known as the International Triathlon Union, was formed (International Triathlon Union, n.d.). According to International Triathlon Union President Les McDonald, IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch saw a triathlon on television in 1984 and made the statement, “Get this sport into the Olympic Games” (Overington, 2000, p. 10). “Triathlon is among a generation of new sports and disciplines (mountain biking and beach volleyball)…it is a lifestyle, a form of entertainment” Davies wrote (1996, p. 21).

In 1990, the sport of triathlon was placed on the program for the Commonwealth Games, the first multi-national sport competition for both the new world governing body and the new sport (Graham, 1990a). In 1991 the International Olympic Committee formally recognized the International Triathlon Union as the international federation for the sport of triathlon (Minutes of the 97th International Olympic Committee Session, 1991). At the 1994 Paris meeting of the International Olympic Committee, the sport was placed on the program for the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games (IOC, 2004: Olympic Sports, 1994). It was the first event of the “Games of the new millennium” as the new Olympians swam 1.5 kilometers, cycled 40 kilometers and then ran 10 kilometers.

In less than 25 years the sport went from creation to debuting at the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games (Buchanan, Caravan, Lennartz, Lyber, & Mallon, 1998; Davis, 1996). In just two years, the International Triathlon Union went from being a self-proclaimed world governing body for the sport in 1989 to being recognized officially as such from the International Olympic Committee. Three years after that the sport was placed on the competition program for
the Olympic Games. In a span of five years ITU went from creation, International Olympic Committee recognition, and then to full medal status on the Olympic program. Other organizations have been in existence for much longer but have not achieved the rapid recognition and/or inclusion which the International Triathlon Union has achieved.

The International Rugby Board (IRB) was founded in 1886 and was in the Olympic Games in 1900, 1908, 1920, and 1924 (IOC, 2005; IRB, 2002). The IRB was not formally recognized by the International Olympic Committee until 1995 (IRB, 2002). With over 100 members representing all five continents for the men and over 50 teams and all five continents for women, rugby meets the requirements as stated in the Olympic Charter but has not been placed on the competition program. The World Squash Federation was formed in 1967, has 122 member national governing bodies, and was listed as a sport to be investigated further by the International Olympic Committee (World Squash Federation, 2004). Korfball, a Dutch game, has 208 affiliated national federations according to the IOC. The International Korfball Federation was formed in 1933 but has not been included on the Olympic competition program (International Korfball Federation, 2004).

If we look at examples of other activities that could be considered derivatives of another sport (as triathlon is a combination of swimming, cycling, and running, each which have their own individual international federations) the time frame varies. Beach volleyball held its first internationally sanctioned tournament by the Federation Internationale de Volleyball in 1987 (FIVB, n.d.). Seven years later the International Olympic Committee approved beach volleyball’s addition to the Olympic competition program. The Federation Internationale de Volleyball was created in 1947 (FIVB, n.d.). FIS, the international skiing federation, held the first world championship in snowboarding in 1995 (IOC, 2005) after the sport had been around for almost two decades. FIS was formed in 1924.

In August 2004, the International Olympic Committee Executive Council accepted the Olympic Programme Commission’s “Evaluation Criteria for Sports and Disciplines” (IOC, 11 August 2004). The evaluation contains 33 items under eight major headings (history and tradition, universality, popularity of the sport, image-environment, athletes’ health, development of the IF, costs, and general). These criteria are the contemporary justifications for placing a sport on the competition program. The evaluation criteria was in response to the International Olym-
pic Committee’s 2002 meeting in Mexico when the organization decided to place a cap on the size of the Summer Games in terms of sports (28), events (300), and athletes (10,500) (International Olympic Committee, September 28, 2004). Simply put, for one sport to be added to the Summer Games now, one must be removed. Sports now must “add to the quality and popularity of the programme” to be considered for inclusion (International Olympic Committee, September 28, 2004). Under the evaluation criteria for the popularity of a sport there are six items of consideration including best athlete participation, spectator attendance at Olympic Games (for sports already on the program), spectator attendance at World Championships, media interest at the Olympic Games, written press coverage, and television coverage of the Olympic Games and World Championships (International Olympic Committee, August 11, 2004).

Something transpired in that short period of time for both the sport of triathlon and the International Triathlon Union to become a part of the Olympics. This organization, ITU, was able to form, develop, and adapt in its quest for recognition not only as the sport’s international federation, but also as a lobbyist for the sport’s inclusion in the Olympic program. To accomplish these tasks, hopeful international sports federations must abide by the guidelines and rules of the International Olympic Committee. The International Triathlon Union accomplished all of this within a couple years of its creation in 1989. Recognition by the International Olympic Committee grants the international federation a monopoly-like control over a particular sport, thus guaranteeing clienteles, in terms of athletes and national governing bodies having to operate under the auspices of the international federation, for the organization (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). With this recognition from the International Olympic Committee, the International Triathlon Union then became a member of the General Assembly of International Sports Federations (GAISF) and the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF). This does not include membership in the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) or abiding by rulings of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). The International Olympic Committee, and these affiliated organizations, all may influence international federations directly or indirectly in terms of structure. The International Triathlon Union may have been both overtly and covertly influenced by the International Olympic Committee, and other organizations, in its quest for recognition. Such influences helped shape the configuration of the organization, thus the study looked at forces influencing the International Triathlon Union.
Theoretical Framework

An organization such as the International Triathlon Union might experience coercive influences; find it mimicking other organizations, and/or having to abide by the norms and standards of what is deemed professional and responsible. These influences, as presented by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) using institutional theory as a framework, may have provided ITU its “blueprint” for recognition and program inclusion.

Neo-institutional theory provides for three basic isomorphic influences (coercive, mimetic, and normative) that move organizations along towards homogeneity. Institutional theory, in its original form, showed how organizations tend to become homogenous over time. The International Olympic Committee bestows legitimacy on an international sport organization by recognizing it as the international federation for a sport. Recognition as the international federation of a sport grants an organization monopoly-like power over a sport because the action effectively hinders rival organizations from forming. Thus, a new self-proclaimed world governing body might want recognition as soon as possible and be granted this sense of legitimacy. The quickest means to do so would be to adopt existing standards and abide by the system put in place by the IOC. Dacin (1997), DiMaggio and Powell (1983), and Meyer and Rowan (1977), for example, discussed this notion of gaining legitimacy and acceptance.

Perhaps the most effective way to determine just how much influence the International Olympic Committee and other organizations had on the International Triathlon Union is to go directly to the source. In this case that means interviewing the founders of ITU and reviewing a wide variety of documents and artifacts that were created during the time period of its creation and the sport of triathlon’s debut at the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games. A qualitative methodological approach to probe and discover how and why the organization progressed in the manner it did was warranted. The trials and tribulations of the International Triathlon Union can be brought to light. Additionally, this type of study can expand the base of institutional theory because it also involved the individuals and groups (i.e., NGBs, regional organizations) associated with the International Triathlon Union’s development. Institutional theory has often taken a macro-view of an organization and what influences it to move towards homogeneity. Individuals, groups, and other sub-units which define leadership, organizational culture, and organizational climate have not been fully addressed in the process. ITU becomes more inimitable as it
has had the same president since its creation in 1989. These additional variables may have some bearing on the how and why the International Triathlon Union evolved in the manner it did.

For this study it was necessary to consider the how and why of ITU gaining recognition and inclusion in such a short period of time. This required the author to investigate a variety of documents (i.e., ITU and IOC meeting minutes, personal correspondences between officials and administrators) interview transcripts, popular press articles, and related research that focuses on institutional theory and sport organizations. By triangulating this plethora of data I gained a better understanding and appreciation of what occurred during the International Triathlon Union’s quest for recognition and inclusion. This newly discovered insight then can be compared to other organizational studies. It is because of ITU’s rapid recognition and inclusion compared to other international federations that have not yet been placed on the Olympic Games Competition Program that this case is unique.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to analyze what, if any, influences the International Olympic Committee and other organizations had on the International Triathlon Union as it rapidly went from creation, to recognition, and inclusion of the sport on the competition program of the Olympic Games. Through both primary and secondary data sources possible influences may become evident. Utilizing the framework provided by institutional theory, this study is designed to explore any isomorphic tendencies exhibited on the International Triathlon Union by the International Olympic Committee and other organizations such as member national governing bodies. Additionally, individuals and groups will be included in the study in an effort to draw attention to their potential influence on the organizations creation and development. This will further forward Institutional Theory-related research by including these variables which are not typically addressed.

The research questions listed later within this paper should be viewed as primers, or starting questions. During the data collection portion of the research additional insight and knowledge was gained, shifting the focus of these initial questions but still places the study within the framework of institutional theory. Qualitative research allows for some flexibility in the development and manner by which the research is conducted when new information is discovered.
Institutional theory is the lens through which this study is to be viewed, but additional erudition may change some of the questions posed.

**Significance and Implications of the Study**

An area of significance is the application of institutional theory to an international sports federation. Within the field of sport management, institutional theory has been used to demonstrate isomorphic influences on national sports organizations by a government (Kikulis, 2000) and the transition of an amateur sport league into a professional one (O’Brien & Slack, 2004), but its application to that of an international sport organization and the International Olympic Committee appears to be distinctive this type of case has not been researched previously. Further using institutional theory in a sport management setting, as opposed to conventional applications that have been used in other areas such as banking, newspapers, and museums for example (Barnett & Hanson, 1996; Dacin, 1997; DiMaggio, 1991), allows for the possibility of further adapting the theory to an area not traditionally associated with it.

This study also hopes to advance institutional theory by considering the influences organizational leadership and organizational culture and climate has on an organization. Institutional theory-related research has a tendency to view organizations as single-unit entities without consideration of individuals, groups, or sub-units. Organizations are comprised of individuals with some individuals in the position of leadership. Organizations, at a macro level, have meaning, themes, and beliefs that are held by the individuals and this helps define the organization’s culture (Denison, 1996; Harris, 1994; Mahler, 1997; Slack, 1997). Organizations, at a micro level, also have climates. Organizational climates occur at a lower level within the organization that may represent the individual or a group’s beliefs, values, and opinions (Denison, 1996; Patterson, Payne & West, 1996). These units of analysis are missing from previous studies using Institutional Theory.

While the study looks to advance institutional theory it also provides an opportunity to critique the existing theory. While neo-institutional theory focuses on homogeneity between and among organizations via three isomorphic influences, this study may find other influences and explanations. Mizruchi and Fein (1999) commented on the propensity of researchers to attribute homogeneity to one isomorphic influence compared to the other two. The measures used by oth-
ers to “capture” mimetic concepts “could have served as valid measures of on of the others” (p. 653). Mizruchi and Fein (1999) indicated

findings show that DiMaggio and Powell’s thesis has become socially constructed, as authors have selectively appropriated aspects of the work that accord with prevalent discourse in the field, and that centrally located researchers in sociology and organizational behavior are more likely than other scholars to invoke this dominant interpretation of their article. (p. 653)

After reviewing 26 articles focusing on institutional theory, they found that 20 focused on exclusively on one isomorphic influence, and 12 identified only mimetic isomorphism as the cause for homogeneity. “The problem here is that the focus on one isomorphic process leads to a failure to consider that alternative process might be operative,” they wrote (p. 664). Thus, an incomplete and/or imprecise representation is presented according to Mizruchi and Fein. This example provides a caveat to this project. Rather than make the data fit the framework, the results may indicate that other factors at work than what has previously been discovered.

While the International Triathlon Union is a unique case because of the speed of its rise to power, the results of this study should demonstrate what the organization did well and did not do well as it was on the fast track to International Olympic Committee recognition and program inclusion (five years from creation to International Olympic Committee recognition and then having the sport in the Olympic Games competition program). For new sports this would be of considerable interest to see if what the International Triathlon Union did as an organization might be applicable to their situation.

Finally, as this study is as much a historical review and essay as it is an analysis of how the International Triathlon Union was created and developed, the data collected serves not only an academic pursuit but also one of interest by members of the organization (L. Barnett, personal communication, March 19, 2004). An outgrowth of this study will be an opportunity for the International Triathlon Union to have some of its history compiled into a more readily available source (L. Barnett, personal communication, January 14, 2005). Triathlon has been used in sport science research but nothing has focused on the sport management-related issues of how the international federation works, its regional member organizations, and the national governing bodies operating within it.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review will introduce the reader to institutional theory and its notion that organizations move towards homogeneity because of isomorphic influences. A brief description of how many of the existing international sports federations and the International Olympic Committee developed provides a backdrop for the introduction of these isomorphic influences. The review will offer insight into a variety of applications of institutional theory in a multiplicity of settings, including the field of sport management. Finally, throughout the review, possible links will be addressed from institutional theory as it applies to this research project.

Institutional theory provides a view of the forces acting upon a new international sport organization such as the International Triathlon Union and its quest for recognition as the international federation for the sport. However, it is first necessary to define what an institution is and to provide some brief background information on how the Olympic movement and the International Olympic Committee itself were formed.

Defining Institutions

Chelladurai (2001) asserts that an organization requires more than one person, the member’s contributions are specialized, these specialized functions are coordinated, and there is a common goal that is being sought. Hax and Majluf (1981) indicate “organizations are formed whenever the pursuit of an objective requires the realization of a task that calls for the joint efforts of two or more individuals” (p. 417) and “organizational structure should facilitate the allocation of resources among its various businesses, support the implementation of the preferred strategy for each individual business, and permit the adaptation of existing businesses to a changing environment” (p. 436). Quarterman (2003) defines a sport organization and then lists the attributes of a sport organization. A sport organization is “a deliberately structured and coordinated system of individuals and groups with special skills and talents in the sport industry working together to achieve a common set of goals” (p. 150). Attributes of a sport organization, ac-
According to Quarterman, include a deliberate structure, the organization is deliberately coordinated, it exists as a system of individuals and groups, it’s made up of people with specialized skills, and the organization is goal oriented. Hernández (2003) proclaims that organization, administration, and management are “the most reliable driving forces of sports organizations in any country” (p. 7). These types of characteristics of an organization “identify it as a distinct entity and, at the same time, classify it as a member of a group of similar organizations” (Romanelli, 1991, p.82). Scott (2001) provides us with an “omnibus conception of institutions” (p. 48):

- Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience.
- Institutions are composed of cultured-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life.
- Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts.
- Institutions operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction, from the world system to localized interpersonal relationships.
- Institutions by definition connote stability but are subject to change processes, both incremental and discontinuous.

Scott (2001) added “institutions exhibit these properties because of the processes set in motion by regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive elements. These elements are the building blocks of institutional structures, providing elastic fibers that resist change” (p. 49). He describes these building blocks as the “three pillars of institutions” (p. 51).

**Development of International Federations**

“After 1870 virtually all Western countries emulated England in setting up sports clubs and national organizations” (Van Bottenburg, 2001, p. 5). Because of industrialization, improved transportation, and communications (both faster), cultural bridges were created thus blurring what were once strictly local customs and games. According to Van Bottenburg, the English upper class began to form “exclusive associations throughout the country, which enabled them to regulate and standardize local and variable activities (such as hunting, cricket, fencing, boxing, and golf) under their patronage and to follow their own physical and moral ideals in doing so” (p. 5). Elite English schools began to allow male students “to devote an extraordinary
amount of their time to rowing, running, jumping, and playing ball games” (Guttmann, 2002, p. 8). Through this combination of technological advances, industrialization, and the mixing of the classes through education and work, sport began to permeate English culture (Van Bottenburg, 2001). From this mixture of events and integration came the standardization of sports and rules.

The involvement of the nobility and the early start of integration processes in British society promoted the standardization of these sportlike activities….As the noblemen came from different regions, each with its own traditions, they had to agree on the rules. (Van Bottenburg, 2001, p. 47)

This amalgamation of events did not create a sports utopia because the notion of amateurism “as it was then understood was an invention of the Victorian middle and upper classes. Its freely acknowledged purpose was to exclude the ‘lower orders’ from the play of the leisure class” (Guttmann, 2002, p. 12). This concept of amateurism is something that would be a foundation of the Olympic movement until the 1980s (a part of the organization’s culture).

During the late 19th century, Pierre de Coubertin began to formulate his plans for reviving the Olympic Games having been influenced by what he had seen and read about the English enthusiasm for sport (Guttmann, 2002). At the risk of oversimplifying the events which transpired in the formation of the International Olympic Committee, Coubertin chose not to gather support from the French government, but rather from wealthy and distinguished individuals (Guttmann, 2002; Kristy, 1995). Committee members were expected to pay their own travel and contribute to the new organization, thus necessitating affluent members (Guttmann, 2002). A side effect of this group, according to Guttmann, was that Coubertin was able to create the idea that the individuals “were ambassadors from the committee to their respective countries” (p. 15; italics in original text). Nationalism was not supposed to play a role in the Olympic movement.

To summarize, the International Olympic Committee was formed and initially occupied by members who were the wealthy and affluent aristocracy of their respective countries, but who did not represent their countries to the IOC but represented the IOC to their countries. The Victorian notion of strict amateurism, firmly entrenched at the time of the committee’s creation, became a cornerstone of the Olympic movement until the 1980s. England appears to be a strong source of inspiration in the formation of sport. These are all items to be considered in the context of how an organization might be impacted by the International Olympic Committee.
In keeping with this train of thought, Scott (2001) provides us with this notion of creating institutions:

It is somewhat arbitrary to distinguish the processes involved in creating institutions from those employed to change them. Institutions do not emerge in a vacuum; they always challenge, borrow from, and, to varying degrees, displace prior institutions. The difference lies largely in the investigator’s focus. (p. 95)

**Institutional Theory**

Neo-institutional theory, as defined by DiMaggio (1991), “focuses on the mutual influence among organizations” and it “pays particular attention to organizations like government agencies and trade associations that stand outside an industry per se, but within a sector or field, and influence or constrain the goods – or service producing organizations within it” (p. 267). Institutional theory demonstrates how organizations are similar (Hodge, Anthony, & Gales, 2003). Slack (1997) defines institutional theory by stating that “organizations subjected to the same institutional pressures exhibit isomorphism, that is, they tend to be structurally alike” (p. 146). Singh, Tucker, and Meinhard (1991) state that “institutional theory…is mainly concerned with how the institutional environment, comprised of socially created beliefs and cognitions, widely held in society and reinforced by corporate actors, affects organizations” (p. 390). This study seeks to “address why institutional theory provides a strong foundation for advancing our understanding and management of this continuity and change” (Kikulis, 2000, p. 320) within sports organizations.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) asked the basic question “what makes organizations so similar?” In their seminal piece *The Iron Cage Revisited*, they built upon Meyer and Rowan’s previous work and introduced the three isomorphic processes known as coercive, mimetic, and normative. In the article they explain that “organizations are still becoming more homogeneous, and bureaucracy remains the common organizational form” (p. 147). What puzzled the authors was why organizations moved towards homogeneity when at the beginning of their life cycles there is “considerable diversity in approach and form” (p. 148). It is the isomorphic influences (coercive, mimetic, and normative) that pressure organizations to be more homogeneous in structure and “increasingly organized around rituals of conformity to wider institutions” (p. 150).
DiMaggio and Powell considered the influences that force organizations into homogeneity. “In the initial stages of their life cycle, organizational fields display considerable diversity in approach and form. Once the field becomes well established, however, there is an exorable push towards homogenization” (p. 148), they said. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) and Slack (1997) attribute the first discussion of institutional theory to Meyer and Rowan (1977). At the time they felt one of the problems in organization theory was demonstrating the circumstances that allow for “rationalized formal structure” (p. 342). Additionally, they hypothesized that because of isomorphism “formal organizations become matched with their environments by technical and exchange interdependencies” (p. 346) and an organization’s structure “reflect socially constructed reality” (p. 346).

The movement towards homogeneity is also known as isomorphism. Isomorphism is defined as a “constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 149). They postulate two types of isomorphism: competitive and institutional (p. 149). Competitive isomorphism involves competition within a market, “niche change and fitness measures” (p. 150). DiMaggio and Powell indicate that competitive isomorphism “is most relevant for those fields in which free and open competition exists” (p. 150) in addition to differentiation. Institutional isomorphism focuses on other organizations. “Organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for political power and institutional legitimacy, for social as well as economic fitness,” explained DiMaggio and Powell (p. 150). Isomorphism, as it applies to the impact of “institutional environments on organizations” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 348), influences why organizations “incorporate elements which are legitimated externally, rather than in terms of efficiency” (p. 348), define themselves by criteria derived externally, and can reduce “turbulence and promote stability” (p. 349) by depending upon another institution. Through these isomorphic influences an organization may survive and prosper and by “incorporating externally legitimated structures increases the commitment of internal participants and external constituents” (p. 349). By not abiding by these rationalizations an organization is “negligent and irrational…flow of support is threatened and internal dissidents are strengthened” (p. 350).

**Isomorphism**
Three types of institutional isomorphic changes are identified by the authors: “(1) coercive isomorphism stems from political influence and problem of legitimacy; (2) mimetic isomorphism resulting from standard responses to uncertainty; and (3) normative isomorphism, associated with professionalization” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150; italics in original text).

Coercive isomorphism “results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function” (p. 150). Coercion is the mechanism associated with Scott’s (2001) regulative pillar. “In this conception, regulatory processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect others’ conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions – rewards or punishments—in an attempt to influence future behavior” (Scott, 2001, p. 52).

The International Triathlon Union might feel pressure, both directly and indirectly, from other international federations, the International Olympic Committee, and the various member national governing bodies that comprise the organization. Like a child seeking acceptance and approval from a peer or parent, one should consider just how much influence the IOC has on “independent” and “autonomous” international federations (International Olympic Committee, 2004). This coercive isomorphism may also be applicable for the International Triathlon Union’s member national governing bodies, as ITU attempts to create some sort of standardized system for its members to operate in on both a global and national scale.

Uncertainty and ambiguity may encourage an organization to simply imitate what already exists. They may subscribe to the axiom that it is far easy to edit and adapt than it is to create. DiMaggio and Powell wrote that “uncertainty is also a powerful force that encourages imitation” (1983, p. 151). Since dozens of international federations already exist, might it not be easier, simpler, and quicker to adopt what another organization has done. Let them provide the template. “Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful,” (p. 152). Mimetic isomorphism is a mechanism of Scott’s (2001) three pillars of institutions. It is “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made…routines are followed because they are taken for granted as ‘the way we do these things’” (Scott, 2001, p. 57).
One would expect that the International Olympic Committee and other international federations would be influential in how a fledgling international federation such as ITU was being formed, especially one seeking legitimacy. O’Brien and Slack’s study (2004) of the English Rugby Union demonstrates this point as teams that were slow in adopting change from an amateur model of play to a professional model simply copied what early-adopter teams had done. Aldrich (1999) indicated that most new organizations, in established fields, reproduce rather than innovate as they simply copy the routines and competencies from existing organizations.

Supplemental support for the coercive and mimetic isomorphisms also exists. Scott (1987) added “organizational decision makers have been shown to adopt institutional designs and attempt to model their own structures on patterns thought to be, variously, more modern, appropriate, or professional” (p. 504). Meyer and Rowan (1977) proclaimed “organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society” (p. 340). Wholey and Brittain (1986) concurred by asserting “existing organizations provided models/training for those interested in forming comparable organizations” (p. 519).

The third source of organizational isomorphism is normative pressure. Normative isomorphism concentrates on professionalism and is the “collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 153). DiMaggio and Powell specifically refer to “the resting of formal education and of legitimation in a cognitive base produced by university specialists [and] the growth and elaboration of professional networks that span organizations and across which new models diffuse rapidly” (p. 153). Personnel are hired from a narrow field of candidates that are similar in nature, education, training, and experience. DiMaggio and Powell call this “filtering.” Professional career tracks “are so closely guarded, both at the entry level and throughout the career progression that the individuals who make it to the top are virtually indistinguishable” (p. 154). Chappelet and Bayle (2004) indicated that “professionalization (the technical management of dossiers and the actions delegation to permanent staff: salaried staff, staff made available by the State, or volunteers with time and specific competencies) under the control of volunteer administrators is a vector for progressing with and implementing projects” (p. 85). Scott (2001) adds that “professional and trade associations present clear modern instances of such groups and processes” (p. 118). Scott and
Backman (1990) stated “the professions rule by controlling the believe system. Their primary weapons are ideas” (p. 290). The normative pillar of Scott’s stance (2001) holds its position here. “Normative systems are typically viewed as imposing constraints on social behavior…they empower and enable social action…they confer rights as well as responsibilities, privileges as well as duties, licenses as well as mandates” (p. 55).

A potential risk lies in the creation of an incestuous relationship that simply recycles individuals from position to position without allowing for someone completely outside the situation to have an opportunity, thus potentially hindering the organization’s evolution and growth. There is no new blood coming into the organization. Chifflet (1987) wrote that French sport federations “have rarely accepted those coming from other fields (unlike major industrial companies or banks, for instance) and constantly draw upon their future executives from their own sector” (p. 77). Through education, socialization, and professionalization of an institution, normative influences take hold (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152). Similar experiences are shared. Similar backgrounds are demonstrated.

Isomorphic change and diffusion of organizational change were looked at with the transformation of the English Rugby League from a strictly amateur concept to that of a professional franchise and payment of players model (O’Brien & Slack, 2004). Conducting 43 semi-structured interviews with representatives of member clubs of the English Rugby Union, the two researchers looked at “changes in structure and strategy, interorganizational linkage and resource flows, and particular types of diffusion processes evolving throughout the field” as the once amateur clubs made the shift to professional organizations, both on and off the field (p. 22). Coercive isomorphism was “identified when evidence was found of particularly powerful actors, or coalitions of actors, exerting both formal and informal pressures on other constituents to adopt certain organizational practices” (p. 23). In this study one of the clubs ignored the league mandated one year moratorium to transfer from amateur to professional status, thus causing other clubs to respond in kind. Mimetic pressures occurred when operatives of one team “imitated particular organizational practices of their peers” (p. 23). Hiring sport marketers and creating strategic plans are examples of the mimetic influences in place within the English Rugby Union. Finally, “professionalization of key areas” (p. 23) is an example of normative isomorphism occurring. Clubs had to hire players and professional staff. Some clubs were purchased by indi-
viduals with motives that were different than community run clubs (p. 30). Additionally, O’Brien and Slack discovered that “intense competitive pressures throughout the field inhibited the development of social linkages” (p. 35). Individual clubs, according to the researchers, found out about innovative techniques through the mass media for the first two years of the transition from an amateur to a professional league. It was not until the third year that the social linkages were in place that the teams were able to learn from one another directly.

Levitt and Nass (1989) used a mixed method approach to study college physics and sociology textbook publishers and the “coercive, mimetic, and normative forces in the institutional environment are shown to order the decision and access structures of garbage can systems and to account for uniformity of outcomes” (p. 190). They define the garbage can process of decision making as the decision making processes operating in an irrational manner; “confounding situational elements further limit the cognitive capacities of organizational participants” (p. 190). Their hypothesis was to show that “the institutional environment, particularly the level of development of paradigms in the academic disciplines, shapes the organization and content of introductory textbooks in physics and sociology” (p. 190).

They tested the “general homogeneity in textbooks and differing levels of homogeneity between disciplines” (p. 200). From their statistical analysis they discovered that textbooks tend to be “significantly homogeneous with respect to the ordering of contents and topics” (p. 203). Through open-ended interviews with editors of the textbooks analyzed that “paradigms constrain editors, particularly the strategies they used for producing, differentiating, and revising introductory texts” (p. 204). Physic editors indicated that the most common way to revise a book is to “update or improve the accuracy of the problems” while sociology books are differentiated based on topics and order of presentation (p. 204). Levitt and Nass conclude their results show that “coercive, mimetic, and normative institutional pressures tend to homogenize college textbooks” (p. 205).

The applications to the International Triathlon Union are the mimetic influences which exist in an area of uncertainty. “They learn by imitation,” stated Levitt and Nass (p. 197). Copying others “clarifies the access structure” but also constrains some of the choices the editors have (p. 197). ITU was likely influenced by the International Olympic Committee and other international sports federations as to “how” to properly create and structure their organization. Coer-
cive factors were in place to achieve “structural equivalence”, which created matching “hierarchi-
chical or functional divisions of the organization” (p. 198). Athlete representation on commit-
tees, abiding by anti-doping rules, female participation, and so forth are examples demonstrating
the influence the International Olympic Committee would have on the International Triathlon
Union. Normative influences in the textbook study focused on having academics involved as
authors and reviewers. The norms of the academic world then seep into the arena in which the
editors operate. As the International Triathlon Union began to grow and expand its influence,
individuals with education, experience, and credentials in areas such as event management, mar-
teting, television, and officiating bring their own socialization roles into the organization.

Dacin (1997) asked “are there circumstances under which institutional forces act as pow-
erful drivers of selection” (p. 47)? One of her research goals was to show that institutional forces
do indeed play an important role in the unique characteristics of a new organization. This be-
comes important because the influences proposed by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), coercive,
mimetic, and normative, are thought to encourage homogenization. In her review of Finnish
newspapers over a 192 year time span, Dacin demonstrated how nationalistic norms influenced
the use of Finnish as the language of newspapers rather than Swedish or Russian.

Her findings determined that newspapers “did adopt institutionally prescribed character-
istics and that institutional pressures were more important in determining isomorphism than mar-
ket forces during the period of nationalism” (p. 72). Even in Swedish-speaking communities
within Finland, newspapers were published in Finnish, thus showing the “powerful effect” na-
tionalism had at the local level (p. 72). Nationalism would be the force being applied to the Fin-
nish newspapers. According to Dacin, there are two effects on the founding process of an or-
ganization when there is a strong institutional norm present. Institutional pressures cause a cog-
nitive action to occur as new organizations look to adopt “institutionally favored characteristics
and become isomorphic in the hopes of being judged as appropriate or legitimate” (p. 73). The
second force in place is “more exchange-driven” according to the author. Resource conse-
quences and economic activity are impacted by institutional forces (p. 73). When creating a new
organization “there is a tendency to fall back on socially constructed accounts of legitimacy” (p.
74). Incorporating normative elements is one way in which an organization may gain legitimacy.
“Normative factors are more consequential for founding because conformity to norms takes on greater significance when establishing the legitimacy of nonexistent organizations” (p. 74).

The International Triathlon Union might then fall back on the socially constructed accounts of legitimacy by determining what other international federations and the International Olympic Committee did. Creating a set of rules, governing process, World Congress, various operating committees, and a competition schedule are ways in which ITU could establish its legitimacy. Its ability to mimic and incorporate normative elements would aid in its attempt to seek recognition as the international federation for the sport of triathlon in the eyes of the International Olympic Committee. Once recognized by the IOC as the international federation for the sport, and then being included on the Olympic Games competition program, would allow the International Triathlon Union to be viewed as legitimate. This legitimacy would be of great assistance in the organization’s search for financial resources. The ability to use the five rings and tell sponsors that triathlon is part of the Olympic family would be a beneficial marketing tool. A similar situation would then present itself for those national governing bodies as they seek funding from their respective National Olympic Committees (NOCs). If the sport of triathlon is on the Olympic program, then National Olympic Committees will likely be more receptive in providing financial assistance and other resources to the national governing bodies. According to Van Buttenburg (2001)

the prestige of the Olympics also impacts organization. As inclusion in the Olympic movement is seen as the most coveted sign of recognition, players and managers of all kinds of sports endeavor to comply with the criteria set the International Olympic Committee. (p. 8)

Echoing this comment, Bareny, Wenn, and Martyn (2002) stated

there is simply no better way to promote a particular sport than through membership in the Olympic program. New member nations in the global community are quick to establish National Olympic Committees and seek membership in the Olympic Movement. The cost of doing that is cheap; the benefits, in a relative sense, are enormous. (p. 279)

Following up in 1991, DiMaggio looked at institutional theory again with a description of the “structuration of one organizational field, U.S. art museums” (p. 268). DiMaggio studied the
rise of professionalism in museum workers, the influence of the Carnegie Corporation, and the “emergence fieldwide organization and developing consensus about many aspects of museum form and function” (p. 268). Concentrating on two distinct models, one with a focus of collection and conservation and the other with a focus of education and exhibition, DiMaggio found conventional museums in the early 20th century were governed by different control methods based on their mission. The collection and conservation group wished to acquire more art and preserve what it had acquired while the education and exhibition group looked to increase their budgets and staff “through extension of public service and attendance and increases in municipal support” (p. 272). As the number of museums grew, organizations began to form to represent them. Universities began to embrace the arts and other organizations began to form. Universities began to train art specialists. Philanthropic groups started large funding efforts with the Carnegie Corporation being one of the most active supporters of the arts. Money and professionalism began to influence the activities of museums (coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphisms). Concluding, he states “Administrative professionalism is especially prominent in fields dominated by nonprofit organizations. Nonprofits are less likely than proprietary firms to be oligopolists, less likely to be highly competitive, and more likely to depend upon institutional as opposed to technical sources of legitimacy” (p. 288). IOC recognition provides a monopolistic charter for an international federation. The international federation is granted control of the sport on a global scale. Legitimacy is granted by the International Olympic Committee. The international federation then is less likely to face competition from a rival organization. Once the International Triathlon Union was recognized as the international federation by the International Olympic Committee, the threat of a rival organization forming and competing against it was virtually eliminated. The caveat here is that “organizations reap the static benefits of monopoly, but lack the dynamic advantage that comes from exposure to competition” (Barnett & Hansen, 1996, p. 153).

**Institutional Theory in Sport Management**

In a sport management article pertaining to institutional theory, Kikulis (2000) reviewed why institutional theory could provide a better understanding for managing change in Canadian national sport organizations (NSO). In an analysis of previous research looking at how National Sport Organizations went from volunteer staffed organizations to organizations with paid profes-
sional staffs, she felt there was a need to consider the “coercive pressures that come from not only the government, but the legal environment and cultural expectations” (p. 301). In Canada the government requires that before a national sports organization is recognized as a non-profit entity certain “legislative requirements must be followed” (p. 301). Additional requirements include a volunteer board that is legally accountable for the organization’s activities and affairs. These are some of the coercive influences on national sports organization in Canada. The government partially funds the national sports organization directly in Canada (a different model when compared to the U.S.). The government exerts pressure on the national sports organization to adopt certain standards before they can receive funding.

Through her research, Kikulis found that volunteer boards have become institutionalized in national sports organizations (a mimetic process). She found “in NSOs, as in other nonprofit organizations, the volunteer board is a deep structure and core practice that demonstrates traditionality” (p. 308). These boards have created the “values, history, and tradition that provides continuity and enables change in organizations” (p. 309). The challenge she discovered is when the normative influences begin to clash with this tradition. Paid executives have been hired because of increased demands for fund raising, greater organizational effectiveness and efficiency, the “institutional pressure of state involvement in sport policy” (p. 313).

Kikulis creates a model based on previous research by Berger and Luckman (1967), Oliver (1991, 1992), Tolbert and Zucker (1996), and Zucker and Darby (1997) that illustrates the various phases an organization proceeds through as it becomes institutionalized. These are the stages, levels, and processes of institutionalization according to Kikulis.

Her model shows over time that an organization might move from one stage to the next, thus increasing their level of institutionalization. This then also makes the organization more resistant to change (p. 298). In her research she determined that

institutions emerge over time and thus have a history that is important to consider…institutions control behavior through unquestioned compliance to the rules and values they espouse…Finally, the third element is the idea that humans play an active role in determining the level of ideas and actions that are institutionalized and deinstitutionalized. (p. 299)
Organizations may become habitualized, objectified, sedimented, and eroded throughout their lifecycle. Through institutional theory she found a “powerful tool to uncover how governance and decision making are created, preserved, and changed in NSOs” (p. 299).

Coyler (2000) discovered “tensions” existing between volunteers and professional management in a study of four sport organizations in Western Australia. The tension was caused as the sport organizations moved from volunteer, community based in format to one containing professional staff. “Most respondents identified a tension between the traditional voluntary management and the emerging professional management” (p. 335). The perception was that the volunteers were entrenched in their ways and did not want to adapt to the new model. Hence, the development of subgroups appears to be taking place (“us” and “them”), and the possible development of subcultures existing within the organization. Conflict “as a result of the competing values within an organization that [can] reduce its ability to be effective in achieving its desired outcomes” (p. 338).

**Legitimacy**

A variety of challenges meet the formation of any new organization. These challenges are particularly daunting at the beginning in an organization’s formative years (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). An evolving organization has no background, no history by which it is to be judged, and therefore lacks legitimacy in the eyes of others. It is this lack of legitimacy that is “critical, as both entrepreneurs and crucial stakeholders may not fully understand the nature of the new ventures, and their conformity to established rules may still be in question” (p. 645). This lack of legitimacy, both cognitive and sociopolitical (p. 646), confronts any new organization. “New industries emerge when entrepreneurs succeed in mobilizing resources in response to perceived opportunities” (p. 647).

Using the International Triathlon Union as an example, the stakeholders, perhaps, determined that there was a need for the sport of triathlon to have that one international umbrella organization. The various national governing bodies and national federations around the world come together to create a legitimate world championship rather than those events that proclaimed themselves as such and begin the process of lobbying the International Olympic Committee for placing the sport on the Olympic program. What was lacking was mainstream recognition of the sport and acceptance that it was indeed a sport. At the beginning there was little or no legitimacy
for the organization because it lacked “cognitive legitimation” (p. 648). According to Aldrich and Fiol (1994) “one can assess cognitive legitimation by measuring the level of public knowledge about a new activity” (p. 648). Cognitive legitimation means people know who you are and what you do. People, in this case the general public, were not knowledgeable about the sport of triathlon or most organizations associated with it. “Legitimacy is not an input to be combined or transformed to produce some new and different output, but a symbolic value to be displayed in a manner such that it is visible to outsiders” wrote Scott (2001, p. 59).

Additionally, the “founders cannot easily convince others to follow their directives, as they have no tangible evidence that such actions will pay off” (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994, p. 651) regarding the direction of the organization. No tradition exists; there is no reference point that indicates the proper path. This allows for the perceptions of others to formulate the risk assessment for the venture. During its formation in 1989, the International Triathlon Union was simply a group of people who had determined that the sport had reached enough of a critical mass to warrant the creation of an international governing body. These individuals had to develop a message not only for those involved in the sport already but also for others (i.e., International Olympic Committee members). How the message is conveyed from the leaders to the group and what the message is “may convince others of the tangible reality of the new activity” (p. 651). The knowledge creating this message is “only implicit, held by the founders and their employees in uncodified form” (p. 653). These people know the message, but others do not. These people have the tacit knowledge pertaining to the organization and the sport, but how can this information be presented effectively to allow others to understand the idea. “A new vocabulary must be coined, new labels must be manufactured, and beliefs engendered in an industry with no natural history” (p. 657). The organization must attempt to create a reputation for itself, via the perceptions of others.

Sociopolitical legitimation “refers to the process by which key stakeholders, the general public, key opinion leaders, or government officials accept a venture as appropriate and right, given existing norms and laws” (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994, p. 648). Does the public accept the organization? Does the government accept the organization? The government could apply to both those political entities that are countries, which in turn have National Olympic Committees, as well as the International Olympic Committee. The International Triathlon Union would need to
have the national governing bodies and national federations accept it as the world governing body. These national governing bodies and national federations, being members of their respective countries’ National Olympic Committees, would then seek funding for teams and coaches. These NOCs would then turn to their respective governments for financial support (for those National Olympic Committees which received direct support from their government unlike the United States Olympic Committee which receives no direct funding from the federal government). Substituting the International Olympic Committee as the government, the International Triathlon Union looked to that organization for support, recognition and acceptance as it lobbied for international federation status and inclusion in the Olympic program. IOC recognition legitimizes ITU. “Certification or accreditation by these bodies is frequently employed as a prime indicator of legitimacy” Scott (2001, p. 60) wrote about state, professional and trade associations bestowing recognition on organizations. Deephouse (1996) refers to this as “regulatory endorsement…the acceptance of an organization by the state agencies that formally regulate it” (p. 1025).

One must also consider the idea that those existing international federations, both whose sports are on the Olympic competition program and those who are recognized by the International Olympic Committee but not on the competition program, not wanting the International Triathlon Union to be legitimized through International Olympic Committee recognition because it would impact their power base having another international federation at the table. Having low sociopolitical legitimacy, according to Aldrich and Fiol, is a critical barrier for businesses.

As the International Triathlon Union became a formal organization with formal goals and objectives it was necessary to be viewed as the legitimate international organization for the sport. Since there was no officially recognized international sport federation for triathlon the possibility of a rival organization forming may have existed. Until sociopolitical legitimacy took place the International Triathlon Union was just a self-proclaimed world organization with no real power base or clout.

“Founding entrepreneurs must build a knowledge base that outsiders will accept as valid, and yet they have no external source of validation from which to argue” (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994, p. 652). The leaders must somehow convince all those involved that the goal is obtainable and that they know the way. Trust must be developed between the leaders and the rest of the group.
This is in an effort to avoid “confusion and uncertainty for potential stakeholders” (p. 655) when competing ideas and groups form that may reduce the effectiveness of the organization.

A unique aspect of this quest for legitimacy is that it takes place on a global scale. The International Olympic Committee mandates that a sport must be active within a specified amount of countries on a specified number of continents. This globalization of the sport, “a process of interconnecting the world’s people regarding the culture, economic, political, technological, and environmental aspects of their lives” (Greenberg & Baron, 2000, p. 145), in effect makes an international federation a de facto multinational corporation. The International Triathlon Union will be the umbrella organization for the various NGBs representing these specified numbers of countries. Its World Cup races will take place in countries around the world each season. The sport’s legitimacy must be promoted in each and every one of the countries as well as worldwide with the Olympics, the Triathlon World Championship and account for the cultural differences that exists between nations. The relationships between the IOC, ITU, GAISF, ASOIF, and other international federations should also be considered. “International regimes are multilateral agreements, at once resulting from and facilitating cooperative behavior, by means of which states regulate their relations with one another within a particular issue area” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 6).

Davis, Desai, and Francis (2000) built upon earlier research by Rosenweig and Singh (1991) which considered that a multinational enterprise (MNE) is faced with two sets of institutional factors impinging on “entry-mode decisions” (p. 240). The first factor is adapting to local markets and the unique characteristics inherent to them. The second factor is “vested in isomorphism prevalent between the multiple subsidiaries of the MNE” (p. 240). Two types of institutional pressures would therefore exist. Internal pressures, or forces from within the organization itself, and external pressures, coming from the individual countries. The International Triathlon Union is the multinational enterprise because it was attempting to become the international federation for the sport of triathlon. The local markets would be the individual national governing bodies across the globe which would form the membership of ITU, and help demonstrate that the sport of triathlon met the International Olympic Committee standards for recognition.

Davis et al.’s study proposed three hypotheses regarding the level of isomorphism that might exist as an organization moves into an international market. The first hypothesis specu-
lated that business units using “wholly owned modes of entry will have higher parent isomorphism than business units using other modes of entry” (p. 244). Simply put, if the parent company exclusively controls the entry into an international market then a higher level of isomorphic influence will exist. The second hypothesis was that “business units using exporting modes of entry will display higher local market adaptation than business units using other modes of entry” (p. 245). The final hypothesis stated “business units using multiple modes of entry will display similar levels of both parent isomorphism and local market adaptation” (p. 245). Their results confirmed that “parental and external institutional norms are strong contributors to patterns of international entry and expansion at the business unit level” (p. 251-252). Business units that are highly influenced by their parental institutional norms tend to use “wholly-owned entry-modes” while others that are influenced by the host country tend to use export as their entry-mode (p. 252).

Other Viewpoints

Countering these isomorphic influences is the concept put forward by Hax and Majluf (1981) that there is no “how to do” formula for the design of an organization. They believe in the “contingency theory of organizational design, which states there is no single set of principles to shape the structure of an organization” (p. 418). Broad guiding principles may exist but each organization is created uniquely. Scott (1995) proposed that organizations have their own life cycle that includes emergence, persistence, and dissolution. Greiner (1998) identifies five phases of growth (evolution) and corresponding five stages of crisis (revolution). Phases of growth include creativity, direction, delegation, coordination, and collaboration. Corresponding crisis phases include leadership, autonomy, control, red tape, and “?” (p. 5). Organizations develop and evolve while experiencing various stages of crisis which determine whether or not it survives. O’Brien and Slack (2004) countered that organizations do not necessarily “evolve in this linear fashion” (p. 36). Barnett and Hansen (1996) argue that under institutional theory organizations “respond to uncertainty by imitating other, usually competing organizations” (p. 155) and that some organizations try to differentiate themselves while in competition. The end result of both schools of thought is to seek equilibrium. In their study of nearly 3,000 banks in operation in Illinois since 1900, they found banks “with more competitively experiences recently were sig-
nificantly less likely to fail” (p. 149). This is part of the evolutionary theory of organizations – survival of the fittest.

In 1987, both Zucker and Scott separately reviewed institutional theories. Zucker stated “institutional theory is inherently difficult to explicate because it taps taken-for-granted assumptions at the core of social action” (p. 443). She looked at approaches to institutional theory, environment as institution and organization as institution (p. 445). Creating “defining principles,” such as motif, source, locus, and outcomes she highlighted the differences between the two approaches (p. 445). After reviewing the literature, Zucker concluded:

We would all benefit from an institutional theory that is much more precise: (a) It must make explicit such starting assumptions as how stable and coherent the social system is net of institutional structure; (b) it must be definitionally tighter, and should limit the use of underspecified terms such as “norms” and myths”; (c) the link between institutional elements and their consequences must be specified – and test – in more detail; and (d) the line between what is institutional and what is not needs to be drawn much more clearly, so that institutional theory is falsifiable. (p. 460)

Scott’s 1987 essay on *The Adolescence of Institutional Theory* analyzed “four sociological formulations all claiming an institutional focus” (p. 493). The four versions are institutionalization as a process of instilling value, institutionalization as a process of creating reality, institutional systems as a class of elements, and institutions as distinct societal spheres. It is the institutional systems as a class of elements that is derived from Meyer and Rowan (1977) and then DiMaggio and Powell (1983). After his review of the literature, he concluded “that institutional arguments need not be formulated in opposition or efficiency arguments but are better seen as complementing and contextualizing them” (Scott, 1987, p. 509).

Selznick (1996), who Scott referred to as creating one of the “earliest and most influential versions of institutional theory” (p. 493) with its emphasis on “instutionalization as means of instilling value, supplying intrinsic worth to a structure or process that, before institutionalization, had only instrumental utility” (p. 494), expressed concerns about the direction of what was deemed the “new institutionalism” in 1996. He wanted to distinguish the definition of institutional theory compared to the theory of institution. Institutional theory “attends to certain preferred variables, and provides some empirical generalizations,” while a theory of institution iden-
tifies “dynamics and character of, say, a school or type of school” (p. 272). While acknowledging the contributions of Meyer and Rowan and DiMaggio and Powell, Selznick felt there is a need to not overlook the variations that exist and should be explored (p. 276); to do so will “encourage an undesirable preoccupation with polarities and polemics” (p. 276).

Brint and Karabel (1989) identified gaps in institutional theory. Institutional theory “has been strongest in identifying distinctive organizational forms and their functioning,” but “it has been less effective in generating ideas why particular kinds of forms are chosen over possible alternatives, and why organizational forms change over time in particular directions” (p. 343). In their study of community colleges they hoped to “develop a more systematic framework for analyzing the forces bearing on institutional change” while also seeking a “higher degree of rigor” compared to earlier studies involving institutional theory (p. 345).

“Although its scope has certainly been expanded, institutional theory has often been criticized as largely being used to explain the persistence and the homogeneity of phenomenon” (p. 45) is a statement written by Dacin, Goodstein, and Scott (2002) in explaining how institutional theory has not been fully utilized. Institutions may drive change, but they also change themselves. Early efforts with institutional theory provided little insight into how the institutions changed in their own right (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Peters and Pierre (1998) call this the “structure-agency problem – how to relate change to presumably stable structures – is particularly significant in the theory” (p. 565). Powell (1991) indicated that the full power of institutional theory has yet to be realized but there is a need to understand “both the sources of heterogeneity in institutional environments and the processes that generate institutional change” (p. 183). However, institutional theory can address change in the manner that “organizations change and conform to the expectations of their institutional environment” (Slack, 1997, p. 216) because doing so helps them find legitimacy and obtain resources needed for survival.

Language itself poses a challenge within this theory. “Some scholars invoke institution simply to refer to particularly large, or important associations. Others seem to identify institutions with environmental effects. And some simply equate the term with ‘cultural’ effects, or historical ones” (Jepperson, 1991, p. 143; italics in original text). DiMaggio and Powell lament
the “ambiguity” and noting it’s often easier to define what institutionalism is not rather than what it is (p. 1).

    [S]cholars who have written about institutions have been rather casual defining them; institutionalism has disparate meanings in different disciplines; and, even within organizational theory, “institutionalists” vary in their relative emphasis on micro and macro features, in their weightings of cognitive and normative aspects of institutions, and they attribute to interests and relational networks in the creation and diffusion of institutions. (p. 1; italics in original text)

    Jepperson (1991) defines institution as a “social order or pattern that has attained a certain state or property; institutionalization denotes the process of such attainment” (p. 145; italics in original text). With these definitions in mind, institutional change, according to Jepperson, change due to contradictions experienced in their operating environment, develop contradictions with other institutions, or “with elementary social behavior” (p. 152). These contradictions can facilitate institutional change by hampering what he calls “reproductive procedures” which may modify or even ruin the institution (p. 153). This echoes Greiner’s (1998) premise of “stages of crisis” which is part of the growing process for companies.

    Taking a slightly different tack, Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002) suggest that institutional theory “neither denies nor is inconsistent with change,” but rather shows “isomorphic convergence, which implies movement from one position to another” thus indicating change (p. 59). They argue that it is possible to “distill from the literature the outlines of a model of nonisomorphic change” (p. 59; italics in original text). Changes, or “jolts,” are the result of social, technological, or regulatory factors according to the authors. These factors upset what has been socially constructed within the field for the institutions, therefore making it possible for change to arise (p. 60). Reiterating this thought, Peters and Pierre (1998) comment, “although institutions and institutional theory are usually thought to be the guardians of the status quo, they also embody more or less explicit approaches to change” (p. 578). For example, disruptive change, which the authors relate directly to institutional theory, is change requiring adaptation to external factors (p. 578). Contingent conception demonstrates that institutions respond to environmental factors but do so in a “continuous manner” (p. 579). Institutions are capable of adapt-
ing to environmental demands placed upon it. Institutional theory, while more associated on sta-

bility, does have a “well-articulated conception of change” (p. 581).

Sherer and Lee (2002) demonstrated that organizations “with prestige are enabled by their legitimacy to innovate from a standard and that these initial innovators and early adopters legitimize change for late adopters” (p. 102) under the auspices of institutional theory. Integrating resource dependency theory with institutional theory, the authors sought to exhibit how resource dependency theory would “drive change in response to a standard” and institutional theory “contributes to explaining change” in how law offices changed their hiring practices. Prestigious organizations acting as agents of change would be a different application of institutional theory as previous speculation has been that organizations not highly institutionalized or operating on the fringe would initiate change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Institutional theory, as it matures, has allowed researchers to expand upon it and look at variations. Environmental factors effecting institutions are now being considered (Scott, 1987). Issues of change, power, and efficiency are being reviewed (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Exogenous “shocks”, as described by separately by Jepperson and Fliqstein (1991), influence change on institutions. Evolutionary applications are an outgrowth of institutional theory seeking to explain the life cycle and survival of organizations. Resource dependence and population ecology offer yet another option. In the end, perhaps Zucker summed it up best by writing “clearly, a combination of insights would produce a more complete institutional theory, more testable, and significantly more explicit, since the hidden disciplinary assumptions would necessarily be questioned” (p. 460).

The Academy of Management Journal dedicated an entire issue in 2002 to institutional theory and institutional change. In the issue, Dacin, Goodstein and Scott explained that “institutional theory has risen to prominence as a popular and powerful explanation for both individual and organizational action” (p. 45). They recognize the criticisms leveled at the theory because it has been used to “explain both the persistence and the homogeneity problem” (p. 45).

One possible explanation is that what DiMaggio and Powell identified as institutional theory has become the basis for other lines of research and theories. Organizational evolution is one such example. Applying Darwin’s Theory of Natural Selection to organizations, “organizations learn in response to environmental pressures – and death to those that neither know nor
learn” (Barnett, Greve, & Park, 1994, p. 14). Rather than look at coercive, mimetic, or normative isomorphism, the emphasis is placed on competition. DiMaggio and Powell listed competition as an isomorphism applicable to those arenas that deal with competitive markets. “An organization facing competition is likely to engage in a search for ways to improve performance,” according to Barnett and Hansen (1996). There is drive for resources. Adapt or die becomes a mantra. Bruderer and Singh (1996) echo the sentiment as “a population of organizational forms that is capable of learning will discover a viable organizational form much more quickly than a population of their inert counterparts” (p. 1323). This evolutionary viewpoint allows for competition among organizations while institutional theory provides for demonstrating the influence one organization has on others. Publicly traded Company A competes with Company B for resources such as market share, sales, profits, personnel, and customers. An evolutionary position would focus on the changes occurring because of the competition. Institutional theory would provide insight to how the companies respond due to the Security and Exchanges Commission regulations.

Organizational ecology offers another variation on a theme. Organizational ecologists explain evolution by emphasizing variation (Romanelli, 1991). Wholey and Brittain (1986) stated that ecologists have made organizational researchers “pay greater attention to the bounds of generalizability” (p. 530). Singh, Tucker, and Meinhard (1991) indicate organizational ecology is concerned with “changes in populations of organizations over time” (p. 390). Institutional variables being analyzed may assist in the further development of ecological research.

Finally, Mizruchi, and Fein (1999) indicated that their study showed an over reliance on the mimetic influence at the expense of the other two isomorphic influences by researchers. The measures used by others to “capture” mimetic concepts “could have served as valid measures of on of the others” (p. 653). Mizruchi and Fein indicated that the findings show that DiMaggio and Powell’s thesis has become socially constructed, as authors have selectively appropriated aspects of the work that accord with prevalent discourse in the field, and that centrally located researchers in sociology and organizational behavior are more likely than other scholars to invoke this dominant interpretation of their article. (p. 653)
After reviewing 26 articles focusing on institutional theory, they found that 20 focused on exclusively on one isomorphic influence, and 12 identified only mimetic isomorphism as the cause for homogeneity. “The problem here is that the focus on one isomorphic process leads to a failure to consider that alternative process might be operative,” they wrote (p. 664). Thus, an incomplete and/or imprecise representation is available according to Mizruchi and Fein.

Another part of this incomplete and/or imprecise representation is the missing components of leadership, organizational climate and culture, and individuals. At times, researchers appear to consider organizations as single entity units rather than complex groups operating under the same “roof.” Organizations do not operate in a vacuum. They are comprised of a variety of leaders, departments, work units, groups, and individuals. All these factors contribute to the organization’s “movement.”

Other Variables to Consider

One of the variables not addressed by institutional theory is organizational leadership. If the isomorphic influences exuded on an organization are to be allowed then the leadership of an organization must have some role in the acceptance of them. If an organization’s leadership refuses to accept or abide by isomorphic influences the institutional theory would be applicable to that setting.

Leadership

The International Triathlon Union has had only one president since its creation in 1989. Les McDonald, a former labor organizer and Ironman triathlete, has been re-elected three times and maintained his leadership within the international federation. He has had a variety of challenges attempting to hold together an international organization that has some strong factions within it all the while he has held the position (Downes, 2002; Locke & Highfield, 2000; Magnay, 2000). Because of his longevity as the president it behooves us to touch on both the leadership and organizational culture literature because institutions are made up of people and people impact how the organization operates. Longevity appears to be de rigueur for some presidents of international federations (but these organizations have been in existence for decades with some being 100 years old). For example, Dr. Rubén Acosta Hernandez has been president of the Fédération de Internationale Volleyball since 1984 (FIVB, n.d.). Mustapha Larfaoui, the president of FINA (swimming), has been president since 1988. UCI’s (cycling) Hein Verbruggen has
been president since 1991 (UCI, n.d.). International Amateur Athletics Federation President Lamine Diack has been president since 1999 after having served in various vice-president positions since 1976 (IAAF, n.d.).

The statement has been made that there are as many definitions of leadership as there have been people trying to define it. Further confusing the issue is the synonym-like interchanging of the terms leader and manager. Yukl and Van Fleet (1992) define leadership as a process that includes influencing the task objectives and strategies of a group or organization, influencing people in the organization to implement the strategies and achieve the objectives, influencing group maintenance and identification and influencing the culture of the organization. (p. 149)

Kotter (2001) simply states that leadership is “about coping with change” (p. 86). Leaders look toward the future, searching for “patterns, relationships, and linkages that help explain things” (p.87). The leader of an organization provides the vision and the strategy. S/he is able to articulate that vision to others and “good leaders motivate people in a variety of ways” (p. 93). Leaders must attempt to see the “big picture” and see where the organization will be in the future, the future being long term in nature. Kotter also indicates that leaders had opportunities while they were in their 20s and 30s to “try to lead, to take a risk, and to learn from both triumphs and failures” (p. 96). A few years earlier Kotter (1996) defined leadership as a set of processes that creates organizations in the first place or adapts them to significantly changing circumstance. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles. (p. 25)

It would appear that these experiences prove beneficial for leaders who were able to try, succeed, and fail.

Chelladurai (2001) summarizes a variety of leadership definitions by identifying that a leader would:

- Ensure that members fulfill the requirements of the organization and achieve organizational goals
- Increase members capacity for production
- Enhance member satisfaction
• Shape organizational objectives (by setting new objectives or altering old ones)
• Maintain the group and organizational culture (p. 276)

Chelladurai then identifies three major fundamentals that seem to be inherent to the definition of leadership and those are that “leadership is a behavioral process; it is interpersonal in nature; and it is aimed at influencing and motivating members toward group or organizational goals” (p. 276).

Charismatic leadership, as defined by Chelladurai, refers to the perception of others, such as subordinates, suggest the leader has some sort of special, rare, and exceptional talents. Norrhouse (2004) identifies charisma, or idealized influence, as a trait which allows for followers to identify with the leader and “want very much to emulate them” (p. 174). Charismatic leadership “refers to follower perception that a leader possesses a divinely inspired gift, and is somehow unique and larger than life” (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992, p. 174). Yukl (1999) wants more “clarity and consistency in how the term charismatic is defined and used” (p. 294). He also posits “how do personal identification, social identification, internalization, and instrumental compliance interact in determining the behavior of others” (p. 295)? Finally, he proposes that the “simultaneous occurrence of transformational and charismatic leadership is both uncommon and unstable” (p. 299) and that the present research fails to provide an authoritative answer about the compatibility of transformational and charismatic leadership. Conger and Kanungo (1994) state that charisma is one of several components that makes up transformational leadership. Charismatic leaders are able to “formulate and articulate an inspirational vision and by behaviors and actions that foster an impression that they and their mission are extraordinary” (p. 442). Collins views charismatic leadership as a possible inhibitor. “Charisma can be as much as a liability as an asset, as the strength of your leadership personality can deter people from bringing you the brutal facts” (Collins, 2001, p. 89).

Transformational leadership is a subset of cultural leadership because it may allow for implementation of cultural change. Transformational leaders “are concerned with creating a new vision and order for the organization” (Chelladurai, 2001, p. 308) and having the ability of “influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members (organization culture) and building commitment for major changes in the organization’s objectives and strategies” (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992, p. 174). Transformational leaders “frequently provide ideas that
result in rethinking of old patterns of behavior, and enable followers to look at problems from
different angles and resolve those problems in new and novel ways” (Koh et al., 1995, p. 320).

Leaders are able to “transform” followers to understand the needs and wants of the or-
ganization, and then have the followers accept that message and respond accordingly. Northouse
(2004) includes charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized
consideration in his definition of transformational leadership (p. 175). The study of transforma-
tional leadership on teacher attitudes and student performance in Singapore (Koh et al., 1995),
found that transformational leadership “may be effective in enhancing attitudes and behaviors
among Singaporean secondary teachers.” (p. 330).

The caveat here is that each “transformational behavior includes diverse components,
which makes the definition more ambiguous” (Yukl, 1999, p. 288). Yukl also doubts the theo-
retical basis for distinguishing among the behaviors is definitive.

Trice and Beyer (1991) differentiate between two types of cultural leadership. The first
is innovation, which contains the subgroups create and change. The other type is maintenance,
which contains the subgroups embody and integrate (p. 163; italics in original text). When creat-
ing a culture, a leader must attract followers and unite them (charismatic leadership). To change
a culture, a leader must remove elements of the old culture and replace them with new ones
(transformational leadership). When changing a culture, according to Trice and Beyer, leaders
must initially rely largely on their personal qualities to attract followers to their cause.
Their first organizational problem is one of recruitment. Potential followers must be
convinces that the leader can deal effectively with the crisis that affects them. Ex-
traordinary personal qualities seem necessary to convince them because ordinary
leadership was not sufficient to avert the crisis. (p. 163)

Under maintenance cultural leadership, an embodying leader looks to keep the “existing
culture vital” and may be analogous to inspirational leadership. An integrating leader looks to
“reconcile diverse interests of subcultures” within the organization and may be a consensus
leader. Throughout their paper, charisma appears to be the common factor among the cultural
leadership styles. An interesting note in their conclusion is that organizations may require dif-
ferent types of cultural leadership depending upon the age of the organization and where it stands
in its lifecycle (p. 166). Organizations may need multiple types of cultural leadership styles to
occur simultaneously as one area of the organization may be new as an entity while another may have new department head. Creating, changing, embodying, and integrating all could crop up at the same time (which would appear to warrant a situational approach to leadership but this is not addressed by the authors).

Situational characteristics emphasize “the importance of contextual factors such as the leader’s authority and discretion, the nature of the work performed by the leader’s unit, the attributes of the subordinates, and the nature of the external environment” (Yukl & Van Fleet, p. 167). The basic premise is that different kinds of leadership are used in different types of situations (Northouse, 2004). Chelladurai explains situational characteristics in this manner:

The situational variables (unit size, technology, formal structure, group task, organizational goals, the norms and behavioral expectations in a particular social context, and the nature of the group) influence a portion of the leader’s behavior. That portion of the leader behavior controlled by situational factors is referred to as required leader behavior. These required behaviors tend to be task-oriented and instrumental in the realization of the group’s objectives. (p. 314)

Perhaps Chelladurai’s multidimensional model of leadership is another starting point for looking at the leadership traits, skills and the influence on organizational culture. In this model the “required leader behavior is largely determined by situational characteristics, and the preferred leader behavior is a function of member characteristics, required leader behavior, and leader behavior preferred by the members” (p. 313). Required leader behavior means “what the leader needs to do well as well as what the leader is not permitted to do” (p. 313). Perhaps a simplistic way to summarize this section is put forth by Collins (2001):

Leading from good to great does not mean coming up with the answers and then motivating everyone to follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not yet understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the questions that will lead to the best possible insights. (p. 75)

While Ott and Shafritz (1994) consider leaders, not as lead workers, but rather as “builders and maintainers of organizations” (p. 370), perhaps the best manner in which leadership can influence an organization’s culture is for the leader to not only have a vision, but also realize that
without the right people in the right positions the organization can not move forward (unless it is
done in spite of itself).

As the president of the International Triathlon Union, Les McDonald would be meeting
and dealing with International Olympic Committee members, heads of states, National Olympic
Committee officials, and national governing body representatives. The setting may be social and
formal where diplomacy and charm are essential or the setting might be an International Triath-
lon Union World Congress committee meeting where a strong will and forcefulness is preferred.
McDonald has been characterized as both charming and “ornery” (Kidder, 2000). Chapplet and
Bayle (2004) wrote:

The functioning of the system of governance seems clearly linked to contextual factors,
but above all to the profile of the OSO’s [Olympic Sport Organization] president. The
president’s (or sometimes the secretary general or treasurer’s) professional background
and situation, as well as his or her personality, charisma, professional career, and career
within the OSO’s system, are decisive in explaining his or her
• choices regarding management methods (strategic directions, political functioning, re-
lations with volunteers and salaried staff, recruitment policy, etc.);
• open-minded or hidebound approach to management tools (formalised or less formal-
ised culture, encouragement or discouragement of delegation, etc.);
• position with the environment (areas of knowledge, competencies, personal contacts,
networks, etc.), his or her legitimacy and aura within the federation’s system; and
• desire to control decisions (centralised or decentralised power; delegation or no dele-
gation of management of certain dossiers) in relation to the principal paid managers (na-
tional technical director, salaried directors, etc.) or volunteer administrators. (p. 72)

With leadership there comes power and the ability to influence. “The power possessed
by a leader is important not only for influencing subordinates, but also for influencing peers, su-
periors, and people outside the organization, such as clients and suppliers” (Yukl & Van Fleet,
1992, p. 160). The five-part typology by French and Raven (1959), as highlighted in Slack’s
chapter on “Power and Politics in Sports Organizations” (1997), includes legitimate power, re-
ward power, coercive power, referent power, and expert power. Legitimate power “is the same
as authority” and is acquired by association with one’s position (p. 181). If one is the president
of organization then a certain amount of power is associated with that position. Having control over another’s rewards is referred to as reward power. Coercive power is “derived from the ability that one person has to punish other” (p. 181). Punishment need not be corporal but rather through the reassignment of duties, reduction in salary, or being ostracized from the group. Referent power is “based on an individual’s charisma and another person’s identification with this quality” (p. 181). Finally, expert power amasses due to the knowledge or special skills possessed by the individual. Yukl (1999) added two more types of power to the mix. The two new items are agent persuasiveness and control over information (p. 161). How persuasive a leader is in convincing others to follow is a form of power. Controlling information allows a leader to emphasize the points that will enhance his or her position and even provide the leader with the opportunity to bring into disrepute the views and positions of opponents (Slack, 1997). These typologies may impact how the founder/leader chooses to reward and discipline subordinates.

According to Potter (1996), there are eight stages in creating major change. Constructing and developing an international sport federation would seem to fall into this concept of major change. Potter (1996) describes the process of change as establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, empowering a broad-based action, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change, and anchoring new approaches in the culture (p. 21). The sense of urgency, using an international sport federation as an example, might be the threat of a rival governing body being formed and just impatience on the part of founders thinking the sport had reached a point where it warranted the creation of international governing body. Creating the guiding coalition involves “putting together a group with enough power to lead the change” (p. 21). Developing a vision and strategy would entail looking at the Olympic Charter requirements for recognition and then developing a way to meet those requirements. Communicating this vision entails conveying the message in a variety of mediums (i.e., meetings, correspondences) and “having the guiding coalition role model the behavior expected by employees” (p. 21). Empowering broad-based action requires removing barriers, taking risks to make the change happen, and “changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision” (p. 21). Generating short-term wins to help promote and inspire change. An international federation might hold successful world championships and create a World Cup series. Inclusion in regional competitions in-
creases credibility and viability for the sport and helps consolidate gains and produce more changes (i.e., demonstrating control of the sport on a global scale). Finally, anchoring new approaches in the culture signifies the “connections between new behaviors and organizational success” and “developing means to ensure leadership and succession” (p. 21).

**Culture**

Trice and Beyer (1991) focused on “how cultural leadership that innovates, by either creating or changing organizational cultures, is likely to differ from that which maintains organizational cultures” (p. 149). From their viewpoint, this cultural approach to leadership may provide insight on how leaders “influence the understandings and networks of meanings that others hold and express through their actions” (p. 150). The founder/leader is creating the organization’s culture must also recognize peoples’ uncertainties, remove ambiguity, and be able to communicate and convince them about the culture so that it becomes shared (p. 151). Trice and Beyer use charisma as subset of cultural leadership because its “one likely to produce cultural innovation” (p. 152).

With only one leader for nearly two decades, one must consider just how much the organization reflects the beliefs of its president (and also the probability of dissenting views existing). Chapplet and Bayle (2004) indicate that “strong presidency” occurs when the “president takes the major decisions; he or she controls the functioning of the OSO and usually surround him- or herself with two colleagues to implement these decisions (usually the technical director and director of administration)” (p. 72-73). Simply put, according to Chapplet and Bayle, “the presence and legitimacy of the president thus appears necessary and essential to forming the basis of effective, sustainable work” (p. 76).

Providing an explicit definition of organizational culture is elusive and challenging. Schein (1990) indicates that culture is something learned over a period of time by groups “as that group solves its problems of survival in an external environment and its problems of internal integration” (p. 111). Weaving his way through systems theory, Lewinian field theory (where behavior is a function of the person and environment), and cognitive theory, Schein defines culture as

(a) a pattern of basic assumptions, (b) invented, discovered, or developed by a given group, (c) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal in-
tegration, (d) that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore (e) is to be taught to new members as the (f) correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 111)

Modifying his definition a few years later, Schein (2004) defined culture as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17; italics in original text)

Harris (1994) states that organizational culture “encompasses both individual and group-level phenomena” (p. 309) and that organizational culture is “ultimately manifested in and maintained by the sensemaking efforts and actions of individuals” (p. 310). Denison (1996) described culture as “the deep structure of organizations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by organizational members” and “meaning is established through socialization to a variety of identity groups that converge in the workplace” (p. 624). Mahler (1997) explains that organizational culture “informs the sense making and interpretation of the kinds of ambiguities seen in puzzling data, problematic situations, uncertain program technologies, and obscure links between problems and solutions” (p. 519). She adds that culture “provides a reservoir of organizational meanings” that all experiences, results, and performances from which they can be deduced (p. 519). Denison (1996) considers culture to be an “evolved context (within which a situation may be embedded)…it is rooted in history, collectively held, and sufficiently complex to resist many attempts at direct manipulation” (p. 644). This sentiment is echoed by Chappelet and Bayle (2004) as “culture demands time and strong mechanisms in order to change” (p. 110).

Finally, Slack (1997) states there are some “general themes” which apply to the variety of definitions. Among the similarities there is a focus on “values, beliefs, basic assumptions, shared understandings, and taken-for-granted meanings on which set of individuals base the construction of their organization, group, or subgroup” (p. 271). Culture is learned (Schein, 1990). For the sake of simplicity and continuity, Slack’s general themes will serve as the guiding principles for this paper as it is based on an amalgamation of the other definitions highlighted.
Schein (2004) dedicates several chapters in his book *Organizational Culture and Leadership* to the notion of the role of leadership in building a culture, driving a culture, and changing a culture. He points out that cultures originate from three sources: “(1) the beliefs, values, and assumptions of founders of organizations; (2) the learning experiences of group members as their organization evolves; and (3) new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders” (p. 225). It is the role of founders, according to Schein, that has the most impact on the formation of organizational culture. A small group is formed first and then the group typically embarks on a journey involving these types of steps:

1. One or more people (founders) have an idea for a new enterprise.
2. The founder brings in one or more people and creates a core group that shares a common goal and vision with the founder; that is, they all believe that the idea is a good one, workable, worth running some risks for, and worth the investment of time, money, and energy required.
3. The founding group begins to act in concert to create an organization by raising funds, obtaining patents, incorporating, locating work space, and so on.
4. Others are brought into the organization, and a common history begins to be built. If the group remains fairly stable and has significant shared learning experiences, it will gradually develop assumptions about itself, its environment, and how to do things to survive. (p. 226)

Thus, the “founder’s goals result in the enactment of specific policies and practices to achieve those goals, and the combination of goals and their resulting policies and practices yields an organization characterized by unique structures, processes, and culture” (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995, p. 753). Kimberly and Bouchikhi (1995) examined a French computer manufacturer over 14 years and found that the “influence of the firm’s founder and CEO has, in conjunction with both external and internal forces, shaped the firm’s development trajectory” (p. 17). Through the founder’s values, the management approach, and the decision making format of this particular organization allowed the authors to reach this conclusion.

Schein (2004) touches on some general traits that entrepreneurs typically possess. Self-confidence, intelligent, determination, and strong assumptions of the world are listed (p. 227). Similar in nature to the list of major leadership traits Northouse (2004) presents: intelligence,
self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability (p. 19). While it is appealing to create a list of traits of what a leader should be, the trait approach is filled with weaknesses because of the near impossibility to determine when to end the list (Chelladurai, 2001; Northouse, 2004). However, Collins (2001) established a five-level hierarchy for determining leadership traits. The “Level 5 Executive” is one who “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will” (p. 20). In comparing what he calls “good-to-great companies” to others, he found that the great companies had leaders with “compelling modesty,” humility, and who were willing to take the blame for problems while letting others take credit. This is compared to his Level 4 leaders who are more ego-centric and more “show pony.”

While the founders continue to exert their influence on the organization they must contend with the influx of new individuals and groups into the organization. While homogeneity maybe maintained in the early development of the organization (Schneider et al., 1995), these individuals and groups bring in their own unique experiences and perspectives. If the founders are powerful enough to overcome the new influences “they will continue to have a dominant effect on the emerging culture” (Schein, 1990, p. 115). There are six primary “embedding mechanisms” according to Schein (2004, p. 246, 1990):

- What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control on a regular basis
- How leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises
- How leaders allocate resources
- Deliberate role modeling, teaching, and coaching
- How leaders allocate rewards and status
- How leaders recruit, select, promote, and excommunicate

Collins takes a slightly different track but identifies similar themes. Under Collins’ model, Level 5 leaders determined “first who…then what” (p. 41). Leaders first got the right people “on the bus” before determining where to go (p. 43). The corollary to this philosophy is getting the wrong people off the bus before moving towards the destination. “Once you have the right people in place, figure out the best path to greatness,” Collins summarized (p. 47). Paying attention to those who operate an organization is a component of control.

An example of how leaders react to critical incidents and organizational crises is based on emotional outbursts. Suppose an individual vehemently disagrees with a leader and this dis-
agreement is witnessed by others. What happens next is a “norm formation around [a] critical incident” according to Schein (1994). Will the leader retaliate? Will the group be silent or vocal? Who will apologize? Who will admit a mistake has been made? Can the organization “conduct autopsies without blame” to get to the source of the problem and correct it (Collins, p. 78)? The actions and reactions then become a norm within that organization.

“The creation of budgets in an organization is another process that reveals leader assumptions and beliefs” wrote Schein (2004, p. 257). Will the leader eschew debt? Will this mean an opportunity is lost? The other extreme is being played out in courtrooms as the CEOs and high level managers of companies like Enron, WorldCom, and HealthSouth are facing fines and jail time because of “cooking the books.” The actual worth of the companies did not match the stock price until it was too late. They rewarded themselves with large salaries and a variety of benefits while their companies were in financial trouble.

Modeling, teaching, and coaching can be the formal actions undertaken by a leader to demonstrate the philosophy of an organization. Welcome speeches, video presentations, and pep rallies all project an image of the organization. However, as noted by Schein (2004), it is the informal message that is a “more powerful teaching and coaching mechanism” (p. 238).

Allocating rewards and status allow leaders to “quickly get across their own priorities, values, and assumptions by consistently linking rewards and punishments to the behavior they are concerned with,” according to Schein (p. 259). He focuses on the reality of what transpires and not what is said in public. To encourage the values and culture of the organization are learned by its members, then the reward system must be “consistent with those assumptions” (p. 260). Collins (2001) echoes this sentiment:

Yes, compensation and incentives are important, but for very different reasons in good-to-great companies. The purpose of a compensation system should not be to get the right behaviors from the wrong people, but to get the right people on the bus in the first place, and to keep them there. (p. 50; italics in original text)

Schein (2004) writes that “one of the most subtle yet most potent ways in which leader assumptions get embedded and perpetuated is the process of selecting new members” (p. 261). There is a tendency to seek out those who are like-minded and who are similar to those of the founder and/or leader. The caveat here concerns “the role of founders in the long-term culture of
organizations and the tendency, over time, to become homogeneous in the kinds of people in them” (Schneider et al., 1995, p. 748). This can negatively impact the long-term effectiveness of an organization because of the lack of diverse opinions, acceptance of group-think, and little or no stimulation to spur on the organization. Collins (2001) added:

Indeed, one of the crucial elements in taking a company from good to great is somewhat paradoxical. You need executives, on the one hand, who argue and debate – sometimes violently – in pursuit of the best answers, yet, on the other hand, who unify fully behind a decision regardless of parochial interests. (p. 60)

As the organization grows and matures, there exists the possibility and opportunity for diversity to take hold in the forms of subcultures that form and are integrated into the organization (Schein, 1990).

Schein (1990) concludes his section on leaders embedding and transmitting culture by indicating that all the mechanisms “interact and tend to reinforce each other if the leader’s own beliefs, values and assumptions are consistent” (p. 262). There are, however, “secondary articulation and reinforcement mechanisms” which exist. They include:

- Organizational design and structure
- Organizational systems and procedures
- Rites and rituals of the organization
- Design of physical space, facades, and buildings
- Stories about important events and people
- Formal statements of organizational philosophy, creeds and charters. (p. 246)

Schein differentiates these mechanisms because they are “cultural reinforcers, not culture creators” in young organizations. If they are consistent with the primary mechanisms they will work for the organization. If they are inconsistent with the primary mechanisms they will be in conflict with the organization’s ideological stance.

The design and structure of an organization reflects the values of the founder. Organic administrative systems are often reflective of entrepreneurial ventures (Harrison, 1994). There is more freedom and flexibility associated with the organic system. Others may choose a more mechanistic system that has defined hierarchical structures and specialized units. The challenge becomes when the leaders disagree on that structure. The battle between John Sculley and Steve
Jobs over Apple computer is a case study of such an incident (Trice & Beyer, 1991). Jobs favored a decentralized organizational format while Scully wanted the opposite. Jobs lost that battle (but only to be brought back later).

Systems and procedures can reinforce the founder’s message. The creation of committees, staff meetings, reports, and forms help provide structure and definition in what can be hazy and uncertain (Schein, 2004). Rites and rituals, while existing in many organizations, “typically reveal only very small portions of the range of assumptions that make up the culture of an organization” indicated Schein (p. 267). By means of stories, language, displays, and other artifacts all help shed light on what types of communication is valued and thereby shaping what is deemed effective (Mahler, 1997).

Hatch (1993) felt that Schein’s initial 1985 model had “gaps regarding the appreciation of organizational culture symbols and processes” (p. 687). Introducing a model called “cultural dynamics” (p. 658), she modified Schein’s model in “processual terms” by introducing four processes named as manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretations (p. 658).

First, cultural dynamics “refers to such issues as the origins and evolution of cultures, enculturation processes, and the problem of change versus stability (e.g., through diffusion, innovation, cultural conservatism, and resistance to change)” (p. 660). Second, Hatch adds the new element of symbols to Schein’s model thus creating the four elements of values, artifacts, symbols, and assumptions (p. 660). The “processes of the cultural dynamics model,” that is relating the elements to one another and defining what constitutes culture, are “manifestation, realization, symbolization, and interpretation processes” (p. 661).

Manifestation is the process “by which an essence reveals itself, usually via the senses, but also through cognition and emotion” (p. 662). This allows for cultural assumptions, part of Schein’s original theory, to appear in the “perceptions, cognitions, and emotions of organizational members.” (p. 662). Realization is defined “as the process of making values real by transforming expectations into social or material reality and by maintaining or alternating existing values through the production of artifacts” (p. 666). Symbolization looks at how the “physical forms…are produced and used by organizational members” (p. 669). Interpretation “contextualizes current symbolization experiences by evoking a broader cultural frame as reference point for constructing an acceptable meaning” (p. 675). Hatch proposes that “through culture that a per-
son constructs the sense of individual and organizational identity and creates images that are taken for the self and organization” (p. 682). It is through these “processes of cultural dynamics are simultaneously cognitive and social (as well as perceptual, emotional, and in some cases aesthetic), and individuals and their interrelationships are not usefully distinguished with this frame” (p. 683).

Summary

As the International Triathlon Union began to gain control of the sport on a global level, it began to export its plan and view of Olympic recognition to national governing bodies. For many triathlon national governing bodies it was simply easier to adopt the international rules verbatim rather than develop and create their own unique set of rules. ITU, thereby, was capable of influencing these national governing bodies, or local business units. However, some national governing bodies, such as USA Triathlon were able to export their entry-mode into the international market because it had already been in existence several years before the International Triathlon Union, had seen its rulebook adopted by other countries (including ITU’s first draft), was in the process of seeking recognition by the United States Olympic Committee and be less influenced by the inexperienced international federation.

Throughout this time, the International Triathlon Union would have looked to build relationships and coalitions with individuals and organizations already associated the Olympics (i.e., existing IFs, GAISF, and ASOIF). “Coalitions are built when people spend time communicating their views to others, establishing trust relationships, and building mutual respect” (Slack, 1997, p. 184). “Today, the sport organization must manage relations with partners (the State, local and regional authorities, commercial enterprises, broadcasters, etc.) with multiple and diverging – or even contradictory - interests” (Chapplet & Bayle, 2004, p. 43). The International Triathlon Union, through President Les McDonald and others involved with the organization would seek to create political alliances that would help it navigate the organizational politics of the Olympics. ITU, through its executive committee, would also find it “advantageous to build alliances with subordinates because they carry out the tasks necessary to acquire political power” (Slack, p. 187). In the end, “the primary task of a federation is to federate, in order to create solidarity between the units of which it is composed, in order that these do not compete among themselves” (Chappelet & Bayle, 2004, p. 78).
Through its member national governing bodies, the International Triathlon Union would be able to cultivate other resources that might assist it seeking recognition and program inclusion. The leader of a national governing body might have a working relationship with an International Olympic Committee member from its home country that International Triathlon Union leaders would not have. These actions would also allow the organization to further its network of contacts that might be sympathetic to its cause (creating a “friends of triathlon” network).

At the risk of oversimplifying the theory, institutions exert varying strengths of “gravity” on one another much like planets in a solar system. This dance of attraction and repulsion upon each institution can create homogeneity within that field by allowing orbits of influence to be created and maintained. Furthering this analogy, the International Olympic Committee would be the sun, the most powerful gravitational force in the international sport solar system, while the international federations would be the planets circling. While the International Olympic Committee has captured the various international federations, the IFs then push and pull on one another. As planets in a solar system become round because of gravity, each international federation reaches a similar level homogeneity. However, just as each planet is unique in size and atmosphere, each international federation has a unique form.

If sport management is a unique field of study, then this case study of an International Federation provides us with the opportunity to take an in-depth look at how a sport organization, neither a college nor a professional team, was created and developed. Institutional theory and contemporary leadership theory provides the theoretical framework for the research, and the qualitative method presents the means by which rich, detailed data may be obtained, reviewed, and then presented, applying to this setting.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In an effort to assist the reader in navigating this chapter a variety of sub-heads are used to differentiate areas within the methodology section. Definitions are also provided to aid in the understanding of qualitative terminology that may be unfamiliar to some.

Research Design

Researching the influences which impacted the creation and development of ITU mandated securing and analyzing a variety of data sources including going directly to the organization’s founders for information. To address the questions (how and why) being generated from this study a qualitative approach was the best choice. Further explanation and examples will follow.

Research Questions

Research questions guiding this study included:

1. How did the International Triathlon Union become the IF for the sport of triathlon rather than another organization?
2. How did ITU form as the IF for the sport?
3. Why did ITU seek IOC recognition?
4. How did ITU seek IOC recognition?
5. What organizations influenced ITU in its creation and development?
6. What influences were experienced by ITU including opposition, end-arounds, internal dissension and so forth?

Qualitative research, like quantitative research, ultimately serves the purpose of learning (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). However, rather than statistical analysis involving T-tests, SEM, and \( R^2 \), qualitative research combines interviews, document reviews, and observations in natural settings to “learn about some aspect of the social world and to generate new understandings that then can be used” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 4).

Case Study
Within qualitative research falls the case study. A case study “involves organizing the data by specific cases for in-depth study and comparison” as well as being both “holistic and context sensitive” (Patton, 2002). Rossman and Rallis (2003) consider case studies an overall strategy rather than a specific type of research. They also indicated “case studies are descriptive, holistic, heuristic, and inductive” (p. 104). Patton (2002) emphasizes, “The analyst’s first and foremost responsibility consists of doing justice to each individual case. All else depends on that” (p. 449). The data from a case study consists of such items as “interview data, observations, the documentary data (e.g., program record or files, newspaper clippings), impressions and statements of others about the case, and contextual information one has accumulated about each particular case goes into that case study” (p. 449). The decision to focus on case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 1998).

The case study is the popular method for research conducted using institutional theory, regardless of whether it is quantitative in nature or qualitative. Yin (2003) wrote “in general case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context” (p. 1). Additionally, Yin wrote, “The case study’s unique strength is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 8). A wide variety of evidence was reviewed for this study ranging from the International Triathlon Union and International Olympic Committee meeting minutes, articles in the popular press, letters to and from IOC, ITU, and national governing body officials as well as interviews with some of the founders of ITU. Of particular interest is Yin’s description of looking at organizations. If you want to study a single organization and its relationships with other organizations, information must be collected from not only the case but also the other organizations to better draw accurate conclusions about the relationships. For this study other organizations included the International Olympic Committee and USA Triathlon. The case study format is not without challenges as “case study research is among the hardest types of research to do because of the absence of routine formulas” (p. 57).

As a reporting format (Wolcott, 2001), those researchers involved in institutional theory have readily adopted the case study. A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth under-
standing of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). This process indicates that “time is of the essence, in particular, the time ordering of the contributory events” (Scott, 2001, p. 93). The case study also does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis (Merriam, 1998).

After collecting the data, content analysis took place. In the context of qualitative research, content analysis refers to “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making efforts that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p. 453). The researcher is looking for themes and patterns from all the data collected. It is through the triangulation of the data, reviewing all the interview transcripts, historical documents, and field notes from observations that these themes and patterns may begin to appear. These themes are then coded to help make sense of the plethora of material under review. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) “coding is analysis” (p. 56).

This part of the analysis involves how you differentiate and combine the data you have retrieved and the reflections you make about this information. Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. (p. 56)

**Heuristic Inquiry**

A qualitative research strategy that may be used with a case study is that of heuristic inquiry. Heuristic inquiry is a branch of the participation observation strategy within qualitative research (Wolcott, 2001). Heuristic inquiry, part of the phenomenological analysis of qualitative research, is considered more personalized as the researcher “includes and analysis of his or her own experience as part of the data” (Merriam, 1998, p. 159). Heuristic inquiry, according to Patton (2002), requires the researcher to have “personal experience with and intense interest in the phenomenon under study” (p. 107). Patton added, “Heuristics is not inquiry into casual experience. Heuristic inquiry focuses on intense human experiences, intense from the point of view of the investigator and coresearchers” (p. 107). Rossman and Rallis (2003) designate that heuristic inquiry “implies personal insight and tacit knowing” (p. 25). It is from this knowledge that hunches, ideas, and insights are derived and which further drive the questions that are asked during the research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The challenge for the researcher is to be cognizant
of his or her own feelings, experiences, and thoughts, while being able to effectively capture the necessary items that are needed for the research while immersed in the setting. In terms of my personal insight and tacit knowledge of the sport, I have been involved in the sport of triathlon for 24 years as competitor, administrator (having worked for USA Triathlon for four years in the early 1990s), race official, race director, and coach (presently serving on USAT’s National Coaches Commission).

Finally, qualitative research provides a picture of a unique and specific setting. The results are not designed to be generalized, but rather are applicable only to that precise situation (this is a strict interpretation). It is through the rich, descriptive narration that the researcher is able to convey the “who-what-when-where-how-why” of the unit of analysis, which in this case is the International Triathlon Union. However, Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) suggest replacing the “quantitative concept of generalizability [with] the qualitative concept of transferability of theoretical constructs” (p. 78; italics in original text). According to the authors “if a construct is truly transferable, it will serve as a guide for investigating a new sample” and that “theoretical constructs you developed in one study will help you understand the subjective experiences of the participants in the new sample” (p. 86). Kvale (1996) allows for three “forms” of generalizability in relation to case studies. They include naturalistic generalization, statistical generalization, and analytical generalization. Naturalistic generalization is derived “from tacit knowledge of how things are and leads to expectations rather than formal predictions; it may become verbalized, thus passing from tacit knowledge to explicit propositional knowledge” (p. 232). Statistical generalization is what is traditionally associated with quantitative research. Analytical generalization “involves a reasoned judgment about the extent to which finds from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation” (p. 233). This is similar in nature to Auerbach and Silverstein’s definition of transferability. “Postmodern approaches to sport management research therefore involve a search for the nonobvious, the counterintuitive, the ambiguous, the contradictory, and the chaotic reality of sport practices or organizational nature of sport organizations” (Skinner & Edwards, 2005, p. 414).

In her address at the 2004 North American Society for Sport Management conference for receiving the Earle F. Zeigler award, Frisby discussed the need to conduct research from multiple
paradigms (Frisby, 2005). She focused on critical social science being underused in sport management.

Perhaps the reason for the paucity of studies using a critical lens lies in the training we have received as researchers. Most management and sports management studies reflect a positivist orientation that addresses some important aspects of our field. But we need to ask whether we have been trained to ask research questions from a critical perspective, to use the types of qualitative and mixed-method approaches that might best address these questions, and to negotiate access to data when people will be wary of our intentions. (p. 5)

**Constructionism**

I wish to note Frisby’s comment about positivist orientation because this study was undertaken from a constructionist viewpoint which allows for more than one interpretation of the data to exist. Constructionism allows for multiple viewpoints to exist simultaneously because each person has different experiences, perspectives, and opinions as what is real based on each of their experiences (Patton, 2002). Patton provides several examples of what he terms “central questions” associated with constructionism:

- How have people in this setting constructed reality?
- What are their reported perceptions, “truths,” explanations, beliefs, and worldviews?
- What are the consequences of their constructions for the behaviors and for those with whom they interact? (p. 132)

According to Crotty (1998), “social constructionism emphasizes the hold our culture has on us; it shapes the way we see things (even in the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world” (p. 58). If what we believe and what we perceive are created by our social world (perception is reality) then are we able to seek out knowledge and determine what truth is or does truth change based upon what society determines it to be? This does not mean that anything goes and data can be simply made up or conjured out of the air. It does, however, allow for individuals to perceive differences from the same data set because of background, context, education, history, and so forth. This type of interpretative approach “hold[s] that social life is based on social interactions and socially constructed meaning systems. For in-
terpretative researchers social reality is based on people’s definitions of it” (Skinner & Edwards, 2005, p. 406).

In her definition of proactive manifestation in organizational culture, Hatch (1993), could have been discussing constructionism at work.

What organizational members assume to be true shapes what they value. This shaping occurs through the processes of proactive manifestation through which assumptions provide expectations that influence perceptions, thoughts and feelings about the world and the organization. These perceptions, thoughts, and feelings are then experienced as reflecting the world and the organization. (p. 662)

Discussing the many perspectives of institutional theory and investigation, Scott (1995) wrote:

We see then that within the framework of institutional analysis, quite different assumptions and arguments are made. Economists tend to emphasize the more regulative aspects of institutions, as do many political scientists. Early sociologists stressed the normative elements, but more recent sociologists and social psychologists have given more attention to their cognitive features. Anthropologists and sociologists, along with economic historians, tend to view these institutional elements as primarily carried by cultural rules and beliefs. By contrast, institutional economists emphasize the importance of organizational routines as institutional carriers. (p. xix)

Two studies in sport management that were cited previously (Kikulis, 2000; O’Brien & Slack, 2004) were done by researchers from countries other than the U.S. (Kikulis is Canadian, Slack is English and lives in Canada, and O’Brien is Australian) looking at organizations based in countries other than the U.S. (Kikulis and Canadian National Sports Organizations and O’Brien and Slack looking at the English Rugby League). Constructionism would allow for an American researcher to develop alternative interpretations of the data because his or her background and reference points are different. Canadian National Sports Organizations receive some funding directly from the federal government. American NGBs receive no funding from the federal government. America is typified as being a capitalistic society with non-scholastic sports usually operating without direct government intervention.
For another example of possible interpretation differences refer back to Mizruchi and Fein’s (1999) study on the social construction of knowledge within institutional theory. Their research determined that mimetic isomorphism is more common for explaining homogeneity between organizations at the expense of the other two. It is the interpretation of the individual researcher that ultimately decides which category to apply to a case study. The definition of each isomorphism is interpreted by each researcher and then applied.

Additionally, the discussion about whether organizations form bottom-up or top-down allows for similar data to be interpreted differently (Scott, 1994, 1995; Suchman, 1995). “The prevailing assumption guiding earlier studies was that institutions are constructed from the bottom up or locally, that is, by participants working inside the structures they were creating” (Scott & Christensen, 1995; p. 305). However, “institutions may be constructed from the top down or globally, as actors external to and at higher levels impose institutional arrangements or provide a limited menu of models from which local designers are expected to choose” (Scott & Christensen, 1995, p. 306). Suchman summarizes the two models as a “dispute between sociologists and economists” (p. 39). Additionally, individuals reading the same material may react “differently because of unique prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings. Thus, each reader and the work are interrelated in idiosyncratic ways” (Jacobs, 2006, p. 114).

The language used by the researcher, an interview subject, written in documents and translations from one language to another all allow for the possibility of more than one interpretation of the same material to exist. The English language is challenging enough on its own. A house may burn down. A house may burn up. I may go to the store to buy two items; you may come too. Add punctuation into the mix and the potential for more interpretations (or misinterpretation) expands. A panda eats shoots and leaves. A panda eats, shoots and leaves (Truss, 2003). The comma placement changes the meaning of the entire sentence (and I shall refrain from the discussion of whether or not an additional comma is necessary after the word shoots; that is debate for English professors and editors of the APA manual).

**Data**

Both primary and secondary data were used to explore and examine what influences were experienced by the organization as it was created and developed into the international federation for the sport. Primary sources of data included interviews and correspondences with some of the
founders of the International Triathlon Union as well as members of other organizations that have been involved with ITU representing national governing bodies. The founders were selected because “they were there.” These individuals have firsthand knowledge of how and why the International Triathlon Union formed. The former representatives of USA Triathlon were chosen because of their work with the International Triathlon Union and their opposition to the organization at times. Appendix A provides the list of basic introductory interview questions used.

Access to these founders and sources has been negotiated and granted because of prior working relationships with many of them. Having previously worked for USA Triathlon, I was able to reaffirm these relationships with several interviewees. Additionally, a partial snowball effect took place as those being interviewed provided me with additional names and resources.

Secondary data included content analysis of International Olympic Committee, International Triathlon Union, and USA Triathlon meeting minutes, official correspondences from ITU representatives to IOC and national governing body members, review of official documents such as sponsorship agreements and other contracts, and articles and materials from popular press pertaining to the International Triathlon Union’s creation, development, influence, expansion and growing pains. Some materials came from those being interviewed, some from the organizations’ archives, some from libraries, and some from my personal items.

Patton (2002) indicates that special challenges are involved with analyzing documents such as getting access to the documents, understanding how and why the documents were produced, determining the accuracy of the documents, linking the documents with other sources such as interviews and observations, and “deconstructing and demystifying institutional texts” (p. 499). Miller (1997) adds that “demystifying institutional texts is one way of demystifying institutional authority” (p. 91).

This study took place over several months and involved multiple interviews with the founders of the International Triathlon Union as well as with those who have worked for and with the organization. Sources included:

- ITU President
  - Only President in history of organization
- ITU Executive Director
- Started out as a volunteer in 1989
  - Former ITU Secretary General
    - Was also the Executive Director of USA Triathlon in the early 1990s
  - Former Executive Director of USA Triathlon
    - ITU presidential candidate
  - Former Deputy Director of USA Triathlon
    - Worked for the organization for 15 years

Additional individuals were interviewed as the process further developed and the access to other individuals was gained. This included a Triathlon World Championship race director, a member of the British delegation at the first congress, and a European Triathlon Union representative.

Initial contact with each subject was done via e-mail, letter or by phone. The preferred method of interviewing was a face-to-face at a setting agreed upon by the subject. Each face-to-face interview was audio taped and then transcribed to assist in the accuracy of the information being reviewed. Interviewing allowed the researcher to “enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 340). Each interviewee had the option of allowing his or her name to be used or to remain anonymous. All interviewees allowed their names to be used.

Field notes for each interview were maintained to assist the researcher in monitoring the data. A separate log was also kept identifying times, dates, and subjects of each interview as well as time spent and location of document reviews. Interview questions were structured, semi-structured, and probing in nature in an attempt to capture the experiences and thoughts of each subject. “Probes should focus on eliciting greater detail – filing out the descriptive picture” (Patton, 2002, p. 352). If a face-to-face interview was not possible then a phone interview was done (the TWC race director interview was done in this manner). Should a phone interview not be possible then another method was employed in an effort to capture what an individual had to say. An email “interview” was done with both the ETU representative and the member of the British Triathlon Association. This allowed for structured, semi-structured, and probing questions to be asked and then the interviewee responded in writing to the questions.

By allowing the research to be done over the course of several months and sharing the interpretations of the “emergent findings” with the subjects, this allowed for the establishment of truth claims according to Rossman and Rallis. It is through member checking, the use of thick,
rich descriptions, peer debriefing, prolonged time in the field, and data triangulation that a qualitative study demonstrates rigor, validity, and credibility (Creswell, 2003; Piantanida & Garman, 1999; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

After compiling this plethora of data from the interviews, documents, and popular press materials, it was triangulated in an attempt to collaborate and coordinate statements, identify differences in opinions, and compare and contrast information. While the interviews provided the individuals’ perspective of the experiences, the secondary data sources provided an opportunity to confirm or contrast what was said. Upon reviewing this data patterns and themes began to develop that helped clarify what was said and written. It is through these patterns and themes the influences experienced by the International Triathlon Union, or not experienced, started to become evident. From these classifications, categories, and subcategories coding can commence. According to Merriam (1998), “category construction is data analysis” (italics in original text; p. 180). The three isomorphic influences presented by DiMaggio and Powell provided a starting point.

Coding is the “evidence of a category of theme” according to Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 285). Patton (2002) indicates that coding is the means of “developing some manageable classification...is the first step of analysis” (p. 463). Through the classifications and coding, “a framework for organizing and describing data during fieldwork” is developed (p. 465). Merriam (1998) is more succinct stating “coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data” (p. 164). Merriam adds that coding “occurs at two levels – identifying information about the data and interpretive constructs related to analyses” (p. 164). Coding is designed to reduce data and to serve two purposes according to Ryan and Barnard (2003). Coding “acts as tags to mark off text in a corpus for later retrieval or indexing” and “codes act as values assigned to fixed units” (italics in original text; p. 276-277).

Categories developed for the data obtained for this research include

- Institutional theory [IT]
  - Coercive isomorphism [IT-COE] as defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Coercive isomorphism “results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by
cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function” (p. 150). Coercion is the mechanism associated with Scott’s (2001) regulative pillar. “In this conception, regulatory processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect others’ conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions—rewards or punishments—in an attempt to influence future behavior” (Scott, 2001, p. 52). Coercive isomorphism need not carry a negative connotation implying no choice in the author’s opinion. Coercive isomorphism is being interpreted as a “carrot or stick” approach by the author. Coercive isomorphism could be the roadmap an organization follows while it is seeking legitimacy.

- **Mimetic isomorphism** [IT-MIM]. Mimetic isomorphism is a mechanism of Scott’s (2001) three pillars of institutions. It is “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made…routines are followed because they are taken for granted as ‘the way we do these things’” (Scott, 2001, p. 57). “Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful,” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 152).

- **Normative isomorphism** [IT-NORM]. Normative isomorphism concentrates on professionalism and is the “collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 153). The normative pillar of Scott’s stance (2001) holds its position here. “Normative systems are typically viewed as imposing constraints on social behavior…they empower and enable social action…they confer rights as well as responsibilities, privileges as well as duties, licenses as well as mandates” (p. 55).

- **Leadership** [LDR]. Kotter (2001) simply states that leadership is “about coping with change” (p. 86). Leaders look toward the future, searching for “patterns, relationships, and linkages that help explain things” (p.87). The leader of an organization provides the vision and the strategy. S/he is able to articulate that vision to others and “good leaders motivate people in a variety of ways” (p. 93). Leaders must attempt to see the “big picture” and see where the organization will be in the future, the future being long term in nature.
• Culture [CUL]. Trice and Beyer (1991) focused on “how cultural leadership that innovates, by either creating or changing organizational cultures, is likely to differ from that which maintains organizational cultures” (p. 149). From their viewpoint, this cultural approach to leadership may provide insight on how leaders “influence the understandings and networks of meanings that others hold and express through their actions” (p. 150). The founder/leader is creating the organization’s culture must also recognize peoples’ uncertainties, remove ambiguity, and be able to communicate and convince them about the culture so that it becomes shared (p. 151). Trice and Beyer use charisma as subset of cultural leadership because its “one likely to produce cultural innovation” (p. 152).

• Of Interest [OI]. This category has a tenuous definition that allows the other leeway to include information that does not fit conveniently into one of the previously defined codes but provides material that, in the author’s opinion, is helpful to the overall narrative.

“Phenomenological analysis seeks to grasp and elucidate the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person or group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). Moustakas (1990) described five “phases” in the heuristic process of phenomenological analysis: immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis. Immersion means the researcher becomes totally involved with the phenomenon. Incubation allows for meaning and awareness to take hold as the individual steps back from the project. Illumination expands the researcher’s awareness and understanding of the situation. Understanding grows as themes and patterns surface and form. Explication allows the researcher to gain further insight through “focusing, self-dialogue, and reflection, the experience depicted and further delineated” (Patton, p. 487). Finally, creative synthesis has the researcher put all the pieces together that emerged, thereby showing the various themes, categories, and relationships discovered.

At first glance this phenomenological approach may pose a methodological contradiction with institutional theory as a theoretical framework. For this particular study it was necessary to go directly to the founders of ITU to determine what, if any, isomorphic influences were experienced by themselves as well as the organization as a whole. These experiences, at an individual and group level, shed light on whether or not institutional theory was applicable in this case.
study. The founders of ITU are the ones who would have experienced what institutional theory states causes homogeneity in organizations. Additionally, with the inclusion of organizational culture and climate as a variable the experiences of people were teased out. Therefore, it became necessary to use a phenomenological approach for this study.

Limitations

The researcher acknowledges the following limitations to the study and attempted to minimize them.

1. The sample is not to be used to generalize over all international federations, but rather is representative of itself (the study may be transferable, however).
2. When interviewing the participants misinterpretation of responses by the researcher may occur even after clarification is sought.
3. Not all founders of the International Triathlon Union and other organizations will agree to participate and/or be available for interviewing.
4. Not all documents pertaining to this research project will be made available for review.
5. Memory has been noted to be selective with differentiation occurring between perceived and experienced (Owens, 1996) and what is individual versus what is collective (Olick, 1999). This may mean the information provided by each participant may contradict other sources.

Delimitations

The researcher has delimited the study in the following ways:

1. All participants in this study are involved, or have been involved, with the sport of triathlon and/or its governance.
2. This study is looking at the timeframe of 1989-2000 because this when the International Triathlon Union was created, recognized, the having triathlon placed on the Olympic program and then debuting at the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter is arranged in chronological order beginning in 1985 and ending in 2000 (with some supplemental information from 2001). The story begins with the early attempts at forming an international sport federation before the creation of the International Triathlon Union and follows a year-by-year breakdown of what transpired. Large amounts of data, derived from magazine articles, newspaper articles, meeting minutes, personal communications, and interview transcripts are presented. In some instances sizeable amounts of text are presented to assist in the story telling component of the project. Additionally, this data has been included and incorporated into the narrative in an effort to highlight some of the personalities present within the story and to encourage the reader to formulate their own opinion.

All monetary amounts presented are in U.S. dollars unless otherwise specified. Finally, the International Triathlon Union awards triathlon world championships at several distances in addition to the sport of duathlon (run-bike-run). These distances range from the triathlon in the Olympic Games to events deemed long course in structure (approximately double the Olympic distance). The primary focus of this chapter is the so-called Olympic distance triathlon consisting of a 1.5 kilometer swim, followed by a 40 kilometer bike, and ending with a 10 kilometer run.

Several interviews were conducted and transcripts were created from the audio tapes. Using structured, semi-structured, and open-ended questions the interviews attempted to determine what influenced the leadership of the organization to follow the path it did. Secondary data consisted of meeting minutes from both the International Triathlon Union and USA Triathlon. ITU provided the author with unrestricted access to all meeting minutes for the organization from 1989 through 2001. USA Triathlon provided access to meeting minutes, court cases, and other written materials but did restrict access to some of the documents. Additional secondary data came from newspaper and magazine articles, personal correspondences in the form of letters, faxes, and e-mails. The variety of data was then arranged in a historical, longitudinal, linear format to walk the reader from the beginning of the organization’s creation, to International
Olympic Committee’s recognition of the organization as the international federation, and then to the sport being placed on the competition program for the Olympic Games.

Since a combination of personal communications, meeting minutes, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and interview transcripts were used, the following chart is provided to assist the reader in comprehending where the material originated from that forms the basis of this narrative. In many cases multiple sources apply to individuals and organizations in how data was obtained. For example, data for ITU President Les McDonald came from an interview conducted by the author, personal communications from McDonald to others, meeting minutes from both the International Triathlon Union and USA Triathlon, and various newspaper and magazine articles.

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Interview Transcript</th>
<th>Personal Communication</th>
<th>ITU Meeting Minutes</th>
<th>USAT Meeting Minutes</th>
<th>Magazine/Newspaper</th>
<th>Author’s Personal Experiences</th>
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61
The prestige of the Olympics also impacts organization. As inclusion in the Olympic movement is seen as the most coveted sign of recognition, players and managers of all kinds of sports endeavor to comply with the criteria set the International Olympic Committee. (Van Buttenburg, 2001, p. 8)

There is simply no better way to promote a particular sport than through membership in the Olympic program. New member nations in the global community are quick to establish National Olympic Committees and seek membership in the Olympic Movement. The cost of doing that is cheap; the benefits, in a relative sense, are enormous. (Bareny, Wenn, & Martyn, 2002, p. 279)

*Nous ne sommes pas les autres.* We are not like the others (Les McDonald).

These three quotes provide the starting point for this research project and demonstrate the perception of both the power and allure of the Olympics as well as the belief of the man who would become the president of the international federation for the sport of triathlon. They lay the ground work for using the Olympics to legitimize an organization’s existence (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Dacin, 1997; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2001).

Before continuing, it is important to be aware of the changes and challenges the International Olympic Committee faced during the late 1990s. The bid scandals of, first, Salt Lake City and then the realization that Sydney engaged in similar behaviors threatened to rock the foundation of the International Olympic Committee because of education scholarships awarded to children of International Olympic Committee members, lavish gifts presented to International Olympic Committee members, “grants,” and medical treatment provided to International Olympic Committee members, and the general sense of entitlement that existed among some members of the International Olympic Committee preceding and occurring during the International Triathlon Union’s beginnings provides additional insight to how business was conducted at the level of the International Olympic Committee as well as Local Organizing Committees and Olympic Commit-
tees for Organizing the Games (Burbank, Andranovich, & Heying, 2001; Jennings, 1996; Jennings & Sambrook, 2000; Lenskyj, 2000, 2002; Simson & Jennings, 1992). Ethical violations forced the International Olympic Committee to change the way it conducted business regarding the bid process. One might wonder how this corporate culture that existed, and the sense of entitlement that seemed to prevalent, impacted how a new world governing body might seek recognition.

**First Attempts at Forming an International Federation**

Before the creation of the International Triathlon Union (ITU), there were a couple of false starts in the early 1980s with regards to the formation of an international sports federation for the sport of triathlon. In 1982 Carl Thomas, one of the founders of CAT Sports, an event management and promotion company, which managed the Bud Light United States Triathlon Series and a member of what would eventually be called Triathlon Federation/USA, began promoting the idea of an international governing body. This new world organization would be called the Federation International Triathlon (FIT) (Johnson, 1988). The first general meeting of the Federation International Triathlon was held in Kona, Hawai`i, in conjunction with the 1984 Ironman Triathlon in October. Representatives from 11 countries showed up and elected Thomas as President. The Federation International Triathlon was a reality. That same year in Almere, Holland, U.S. representatives attended the first meeting of the European Triathlon Union (ETU), a confederation of Europe’s triathlon associations. Members of the European Triathlon Union also discussed “the need for a unified international body” but were leery of Thomas’ motives and viewed the Federation International Triathlon as a means for him to advance his “own private ambitions in the sport” (Johnson, 1988, p. 39). The “struggle for international political dominance in the sport was shaping up to be a USA-versus-Europe battle, with Thomas and his FIT on one side and the Europeans, consolidating under the ETU banner” (p. 39). Thomas represented “F.I.T. at the annual meeting of the General Assembly of International Sports Federation (GAISF) which [ran] October 17, 18 and 19 in Monte Carlo” (Federation International Triathlon press release, October 8, 1984). The European Triathlon Union, led by then president Con O’Callaghan of Ireland and Secretary General Joop van Zanten of the Netherlands, was strengthening its support in Europe (Johnson, 1988, p. 39).
According to International Triathlon Union President Les McDonald, International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch saw a triathlon on television in 1984 while in Los Angeles for the Summer Games and made the statement, “Get this sport into the Olympic Games” (Overington, 2000, p. 10). This sentiment carried over into 1985 as the International Olympic Committee itself was beginning to look at its competition program with an eye towards modernization. At the 90th session of the International Olympic Committee, Walter Tröger, then the Sports Director for the International Olympic Committee, told those in attendance:

Before concluding, please accept a final remark on the future Olympic programme. The IOC wishes and has open its door to new sports and the programme of the Olympic Games to new sports, disciplines and events. In no way does that mean that an extensive and unreasonable development should be possible….We have biathlon, pentathlon, heptathlon and decathlon. There are a lot of possibilities in between and every day new events are invented and new sports founded or developed….The revision of the Olympic programme, which I already mentioned, particularly the study on the limitations of entry numbers for most of the events, also serves the purpose of giving new events or sports a better chance…Popularity and all the other criteria from the “Olympic Charter,” should be a basis for admission, as well as the fact that newly admitted sports and events are only and completely controlled by sports organizations themselves. (p. 103)

The driving force behind creating an international federation for triathlon was to be included on the Olympic Games competition program. Mark Sisson, a former executive director of Triathlon Federation/USA and also the former Secretary General of ITU, offered this insight into the attempts in the early 1980s:

As I recall, and there were talks of, um, of creating an international federation I would say as far back as ‘84 or ‘85 and there was the knowledge that some of the European players were also attempting to create, uh, an international federation….With always the understanding that triathlon should become an Olympic sport. I mean that was the emphasis for ultimately creating an international federation…Early on that was the primary goal. You know in many respects that was [sic] no other reason to have an international federation. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)
Erica Koenig, who was heavily involved with the European Triathlon Union, offered a slightly different perspective on the formation of an international sport federation for the sport of triathlon. She said:

There were several attempts before 1989. Ifs already existed (TFI was one of them), but there was a big quarrel between Europe (the “engine room” for organized sports) and USA (the “founder” of triathlon – which proved to be wrong. Triathlon goes back to the 1920s and France). (E. Koenig, personal communication, February 26, 2006)

Valerie Silk, then race director for Ironman Hawai’i, saw the Olympics in the future of the sport, but suggested that those involved with this goal proceed with caution and remember the sport’s origins. She explained:

Even greater international awareness is certain, an Olympic status is on the horizon, but the through this inevitable growth process, I hope the original purpose of triathlons will be preserved. Primarily, the sport should provide an arena of fun and fitness for those who participate – whether triathletes, race organizers, sponsors, media or sanctioning bodies – so those involved can feel they’ve accomplished their personal goals and contributed something special to others. (State of the Sport, 1987, p. 66)

European Triathlon Union president O’Callaghan spoke about the push to create an international federation for triathlon:

The phenomenal growth of the sport in its first 10 years was based on its ‘Ironman’ image and the business acumen of the early entrepreneurs. Both influences are being whittled back – the shorter-distance race has already replaced in popularity the dawn-to-dusk event while the embryonic national governing bodies are guiding and policing current trends and developments within the sport.

Inter-continental communication and administration links have begun to be forged and will lead to the formation of a world governing body to whom all can readily pledge support. The institution of official world championships will foster this support and commitment and further pave the way to recognition by international sports federations, and in particular the admission of the triathlon into the Olympic movement. (State of the sport, 1987, p. 68)
By October of 1985, both the Federation International Triathlon and the European Triathlon Union made a joint presentation to the General Assembly of International Sport Federations (GAISF) for provisional membership status in the organization. However, in a GAISF report from that meeting the representatives of the Federation International Triathlon and the European Triathlon Union withdrew their application “because of the incompleteness of their submission and the expressed opposition to the UCI (Cycling) [and] on the advice of the GAISF General Secretary” (Unknown, personal communication, n.d.).

Both groups met in February 1987 in Dallas and a revised constitution was discussed. The organization’s new name would be Triathlon Federation International (TFI) (Johnson, 1988). The first general assembly meeting would take place in November of 1987. According to Johnson’s interviews, the summary, revisions and other materials arrived at Triathlon Federation/USA on October 1, only 45 days until the first Triathlon Federation International General Assembly. Representing Triathlon Federation/USA at the inaugural Triathlon Federation International meeting was Tri-Fed’s president. Thomas described the situation the American federation president, Dave Curnow, walked into there:

He went over there into a well-orchestrated and well-choreographed meeting by van Zanten and O’Callaghan, and basically got pressured into provisionally joining TFI which was being ruled with an iron fist by the two Europeans. It was a mistake to send anyone because there just wasn’t sufficient time to prepare, and there was too much at stake. (Johnson, 1988, p. 39)

McDonald described the meeting in terms of “good guys” and “bad guys” with the bad guys being Germany, Switzerland, and other European countries which wanted to control the sport and the good guys being Canada, Australia, France, Italy, Japan, and some South American countries that were more interested in democratic representation. Once the Americans were aligned with the founders of TFI, even though it was reported that Tri-Fed/USA had been pressured to do so, McDonald considered the Americans as already being “lost” (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).
Later that year the Triathlon Federation/USA Board of Directors elected not send anyone to the Vancouver meeting, but instead sent a memo identifying their “four areas of concern that must be addressed prior to our joining TFI: voting
rights, membership criteria, executive positions and world championships.” The U.S. was ready to play hard ball. (Johnson, 1988, p. 40)

Les McDonald was in attendance in Vancouver, as the president of Triathlon Canada, and was asked by the new Triathlon Federation/USA president Jon Noll to be an intermediary between the U.S. and the Europeans (p. 40). McDonald discovered the Europeans did not wish to address U.S. issues or compromises.

Triathlon Federation/USA had identified four areas of concern regarding Triathlon Federation International’s structure and governance: voting rights, membership criteria, executive positions and world championships (D. Curnow, personal communication, January 26, 1988). Under voting rights Triathlon Federation/USA wanted a representative form of government based upon annual membership of each national federation. Membership criteria was of concern because of the lack of definition of what charter membership meant as well as what to do with countries that had two national governing bodies. For executive positions Triathlon Federation/USA wanted officers to rotate positions “so that no continental block shall succeed itself in any given position” (D. Curnow, personal communication, January 26, 1988). Finally, concerning the issue of the 1988 “short distance” world championship Triathlon Federation/USA’s stance was not to host one because Triathlon Federation International was still organizing itself. Triathlon Federation/USA did feel that 1989 was a good time to host the newly created international federation’s first world championship. “With regard to 1989, we are in favor of permitting France to have the short distance championships because they will stage them at the 200th anniversary of the French Revolution in Paris and this will showcase the sport” (D. Curnow, personal communication, January 26, 1988). McDonald believed that obvious cracks had formed within Triathlon Federation International, and that the “Western Alliance” should break off and start playing by its own rules, perhaps even hosting its own world championships (Johnson, 1988). “A door closed in Holland in the face of the West” (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

European federations formed for triathlon…but not to get to the Olympics, they had no idea about the Olympics, but to go to Ironman….we thought it was a good idea so we went to Amsterdam.
[We disagreed] with the Europeans right away, the bureaucracies, the commissions, we went there and they were well organized….They wanted to take it over, but we didn’t know that. (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006)

In spite of these differences, there was much excitement when word got out that the International Olympic Committee was interested in the sport of triathlon.

Then in the spring of 1988 word circulated around the triathlon community that International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch had expressed an interest in bring [sic] triathlon into the Olympic family that talk of unity began. The significance of the triathlon entering the Olympic program was obvious – more exposure, more interest, more money, more races, more, more, more. (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 56)

Further increasing the developing tensions between some of the European countries and the “good guys” was when Canada hosted a self-declared, and unapproved by the European countries loyal to TFI, world championship in 1988. This would be just one of the many brewing issues that would cause a grudge between the two factions, and eventually escalate in to something much more hostile politically.

**Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon**

That April Samaranch approached Brigadier General Sven Thofelt of Sweden, then president of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon (UIPMB). According to McDonald, Samaranch suggested that triathlon enter into the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon to expedite this, and expressed that three successful world championships would need to be held prior to the 1992 Olympic Games.

Having the International Olympic Committee president take a personal interest in the sport and suggest that it become part of an existing international sport federation to expedite its place within the Olympic family pushed the founders of the International Triathlon Union in a direction it had not previously considered. With Samaranch’s invitation as the unifying force, the various national governing bodies that had been at odds with one another, thus causing the demise of Triathlon Federation International, set their past differences aside and met in an attempt to reach consensus on the structure of a new world governing body that would go about fulfilling Samaranch’s requirements for Olympic inclusion: affiliation with the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon and creation of a triathlon world championship in 1989 (Oli-
Additionally, Samaranch assigned an International Olympic Committee member to help the triathlon founders navigate the international sport system. Sisson explained that Samaranch assigned an IOC member to shepherd us through and that’s Gunnar Ericsson from Sweden. Gunnar was getting along in years, wanted a project, uh, very loveable, affable, charismatic fellow, uh, and Gunnar was at our side for several years in the process. Uh, he was our direct link to Samaranch so that if we wanted to get messages to Samaranch in between the IOC meetings. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

At the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon meeting in Stockholm, Sweden in August of 1988, triathlon representatives expressed concerns over triathlon’s autonomy within the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon. Thofelt “gave assurances that triathlon would be allowed complete freedom under the umbrella of UIPMB….UIPMB’s only motive in opening the door to triathlon was to allow its entry in the Olympic arena” (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 56). McDonald was one of seven members elected to form a working committee to draft amendments to UIPMB’s statutes, investigate financial issues, and “lay the ground work for elections to be held at the inaugural congress of triathlon NGBs sometime in 1989” (p. 56). This group of seven was known as the Working Committee.

In a meeting of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon executive board in Cairo, Egypt in October, vice-president Igor Novikov (Soviet Union) issued a proposal for the amending only those statutes that “are vitally important for adoption of a third sport [triathlon].’…This was a clear message from the UIPMB that the WC’s proposed amendments, the Red Book, weren’t acceptable” (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 57). Thofelt was president of the organization, but Novikov was the de facto leader (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006; italics added for emphasis). Olivares, Jr. reported that the Working Committee was “perplexed, but still optimistic” and hoped that at the next Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon election in November a “flexible, pro-triathlon type” would be elected as Thofelt was retiring and that a new person would keep the “anti-triathlon elements” at bay (p. 57). This optimism was conveyed in the popular press as Triathlete magazine reported:

On a world-wide scale, our sport has never been healthier. If so inclined, you could participate in a triathlon on one continent or another all year-round. And recently, headway
was made toward the Olympic dream at a meeting between triathlon national governing body leaders and officials from the International Olympic Committee and the Union Internationale Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon – the international governing body for the winter biathlon and modern pentathlon. (Olivares, 1988, p. 2)

One month later in Montecatini, Italy, those members of the Working Committee who had hoped for autonomy within the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon were to be disappointed. The chairman of the meeting, vice-president Novikov, allowed McDonald, serving as spokesman for the Working Committee, to speak prior to the body’s vote on whether or not to allow triathlon in the union (Olivares, Jr., 1989). In a shrewd political move that caught McDonald off-guard, Novikov immediately asked him if the triathlon group was willing to join the UIPMB under their unamended rules, the so-called Green Book (Olivares, Jr., 1989). McDonald realizing a “no” would turn the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon congress against triathlon in the upcoming vote, replied “yes.” The Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon “subsequently voted in favor of membership for triathlon. Novikov, however, announced that the acceptance was ‘provisional’” (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 57). Soon there after, in a surprise election, Novikov was installed as the new president of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon. McDonald watched in the background as the Russian and his allies took control of the meeting and eventually the federation (L. McDonald, personal communication, January, 29, 2006). The Russian then came to McDonald and told him that “he was looking forward to traveling to Avignon [France] in April, as the UIPMB rules allow, to chair the triathlon congress. Novikov also made it clear that the proposed elections in April would be against the UIPMB rules” (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 57).

Members of the Working Committee realized that Thofelt’s pledge of autonomy at the Stockholm meeting back in August had no bearing on the thinking of the new administration at UIPMB. Samaranch’s interest, however, in seeing the triathlon in the Olympic program had been continually restated to the WC through Gunnar Ericsson. Confused and somewhat embittered in the days and weeks that followed the Montecatini congress, the WC concluded the only way triathlon could become a member of UIPMB and maintain reasonable control over itself was if it negotiated from a position of power. This meant continuing talks with UIPMB officials
with regard to the rules and moving forward with the idea of April elections and formation of a new world governing body. (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 57)

Another example of coercive influence is demonstrated here as the new leadership of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon wanted the triathlon group to come into its organization on their terms. The triathlon group was being pressured to capitulate.

In February of 1989, the Working Committee held a meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia finalizing the agenda for the April congress. This would include elections, by-laws, world championships, and the problem with affiliating with the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon. The Working Committee would proceed with the elections with or without UIPMB’s blessing (Olivares, Jr., 1989a).

At the April meeting of congress in Avignon, political fireworks erupted in spite of Samaranch’s fax to the delegates asking for unity.

With great interest I follow continuously your efforts to join the Olympic family and in the future participate in Olympic Games.

My hope is that your congress will show that you’re united enough to create a base for reaching your goals.

I wish you the best of luck and success. (J.A. Samaranch, personal communication, March 30, 1989)

In his opening remarks, Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon President Novikov stated rather firmly that he was surprised that elections were on the agenda for the meeting, and that those proposed elections were in direct conflict with existing Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon statutes and that they would definitely jeopardize triathlon’s chances of becoming a full member of the union (Olivares, Jr., 1989a). Soon after, the assembly broke into an argument over examination of the credentials of certain delegates and proxies. The Working Committee, somewhat angered by the suggestion that their acceptance of certain credentials and proxies had been irregular, agreed to allow a representative from Belgium to review the letters of authenticity at the morning’s recess (Olivares, Jr., 1989a). The situation deteriorated further when the agenda of the congress came up for approval by the body.

In a surprise move, West German federation (DTU) representative Dr. Martin Engelhart made a motion to move the vote on affiliation with Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne
et Biathlon from the last item on the final day of the congress to the next up for consideration (Minutes from Triathlon Congress, 1989). This motion was an attempt to disrupt the congress, and one that would put the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon clearly in control of the proceedings (Olivares, Jr., 1989a). If the vote to join the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon was next, and if the floor voted in favor of affiliation, the rest of the congress would have been under UIPMB jurisdiction. In that instance, Novikov would take over as the chairman. There would be no elections, no by-law changes and no world governing body. The German federation also threatened to “leave the Triathlon Congress if the Congress votes not to affiliate to UIPMB” (Minutes from Triathlon Congress, 1989). “It became obvious that a vote on affiliation was imprudent without hearing about the findings and efforts of the WC in the period since the Stockholm meeting” (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 58).

At the conclusion of the day, the Triathlon Federation/USA representatives hosted a reception, at which International Olympic Committee representative Ericsson gave his report from the International Olympic Committee President Samaranch. Ericsson’s message to the triathlon was concise, “the charismatic nature” of triathlon could carry it to the Olympics independently of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon; however, that might take more than 20 years. The fastest road to the Olympic program for the triathlon was through the UIPMB (Olivares, Jr., 1989a). Then, in a moment that showed his views of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon’s recent roadblocks to triathlon’s progress, Ericsson pointed out that it was important for the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon to open the door to the Olympics for this new sport (Olivares, Jr., 1989a).

Once again the differences between the European national governing bodies and those of the “Alliance” became apparent. Some European delegations appeared to have “unconditional” support for the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon (Olivares, Jr., 1989a). The European group remained wary of McDonald “and his forceful nature”, and the Alliance feared the hidden agenda of the UIPMB and its supporters within the triathlon community (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 58).

Peter Coulson, a delegate representing the British Triathlon Association, provided additional insight to that meeting.
The 1989 Congress was held in the Palais de Papes in Avignon, France where I attended as the GB [Great Britain] Delegate with the brief from my organisation to support formation of a world body.

The Congress was held with the leadership of the Modern Pentathlon Federation in attendance as it had been suggested by the IOC that by allowing triathlon to become a 'section' within UIPMB then that would be the quickest route to Olympic inclusion. The leadership of UIPMB was all from Eastern Europe.

Obviously, McD, had other ideas and he floated his own view that a separate [sic] and self governing body would be the best solution. Because Modern Pentathlon was under threat from the IOC at that time - as it was perceived as an old sport - the view was that if this laison [sic] took place then triathlon would be simply rubbed out by UIPMB. McD's own knowledge of left wing politics was useful to facilitate the manoeuvring which was required when dealing with the various people at the Congress and particularly those from Eastern Europe. (P. Coulson, personal communication, August, 25, 2005)

The next day would change the direction of the sport of triathlon and those attempting to create an international federation. Political wrangling and maneuvering were the order of the day.

Engelhart led the discussion in favor of the UIPMB vote before elections. Arguments against the West German’s proposal were heard from representatives from most of the Alliance countries. As the verbal battle raged on, it became obvious that the Engelhart faction was trying to block the elections, principally to prevent McDonald from assuming power as the sure-to-be-elected president, and that they also were trying to lock out any disruption of their hidden agenda with the UIPMB. (Olivares, Jr., 1989, p. 62)

The setting at meeting was described in this manner:

In a moment of unlikely irony, Carl Thomas agreed to the vote on UIPMB affiliation with the amendment that the UIPMB accept the by-laws that had been approved by the congress the previous day. Engelhart put the question to Novikov. Would he and the UIPMB accept triathlon with its by-laws? Novikov, a bear of a man at close to six and
half feet tall and more than 260 pounds, lumber up to the microphone and, in essence said, “Nyet.”

Novikov had made the fatal error. Faced with the opportunity to say, “Well, I really can’t make that kind of decision here, but I’ll take it back to the executive for consideration,” the Russian alienated the entire room of triathlon supporters with his patented answer, “No rule changes, no elections, no nothing!”

Novikov’s comments had turned everyone, even the triathlon officials that had originally been in his camp, against him. Now the entire room wanted to hold the vote for UIPMB affiliation immediately; they wanted to give their own “Nyet.”

Peter Boll of Sweden, a longtime triathlon politico and another one of the key peacemakers in the wake of the TFI troubles, said what was on the minds of everyone. “I came to this congress in good faith and hoped to join the UIPMB under favorable conditions. I understood the problems and the issues. After Mr. Ericsson’s yesterday of ‘opening doors,’ I looked for some sign of willingness, just a little compromise. However, your inability to offer triathlon even a little bit makes it impossible for me to vote in favor of affiliation.” Boll’s speech received a standing ovation.

At 6 p.m., the vote was taken. Les McDonald states the motion in a quiet tone: “The motion before the floor is a vote for affiliation with the UIPMB. All those in favor, please signify by raising your green card; those opposed, please raise the red card.” The record would show a 28 to 3 vote defeating the motion for affiliation, with four abstentions. (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 58)

Erika Koenig provided a different view as to what to place that day:

USA formed one block together with Australia/NZL/Asia against Europe. The IOC on the other hand saw that triathlon could replace the unloved Modern Pentathlon on the Olympic Program and wanted by all means that triathlon become a part of the Modern Pentathlon federation. At the “founding congress” of the ITU 1989, the decision to merge with Modern Pentathlon should be taken – but McDonald gave all a “demonstration in active democracy” (direct quote) and had the congress 1 hour earlier than scheduled. All those who were against an own federation came too late. Congress voted for an own federation. (E. Koenig, personal communication, February 26, 2006)
With the decision made not to affiliate with the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon the meeting became somewhat chaotic. The triathlon group then needed to come to terms as what this decision meant to them and to the direction of the sport at the international level.

There was an air of relief at that point in the session. The central issue of dispute had been put to rest. Triathlon would not join the UIPMB under adverse conditions, but would continue to negotiate some kind of settlement with the group that represented the clearest, quickest path to the Olympic program.

When it was realized that the only item left was the elections, what little decorum remained fell apart. Several of the European countries had come to the congress with no intention of having elections, believing that they would squelch it with an early vote for UIPMB affiliation. They were unprepared to make viable nominations and saw the WC’s “unity slate” as too heavily slanted toward the Alliance, not to mention the fact that it included Les McDonald as president.

The allied European delegates mounted a futile effort at provisional or interim election rather than permanent elections. They were hoping that over the five-month period to the next congress, held the week prior to the Avignon World Championships, they could undercut McDonald’s base of support and develop a slate of nominations that was a little more to their liking.

It was an emotionally charged issue that ended with several of the Europeans walking out of the room in protest of the elections. They felt that the unity slate had been unfairly lobbied and that the whole thing was a little too-well orchestrated. Martin Engelhart said before leaving that he did not come to congress with a mandate from his NGB to vote in elections.

Some of the Alliance representatives defended themselves later by saying that they were playing the same game that the Europeans had played at the Amsterdam congress of TFI. They argued the fact that the elections were [held should] by no means [be] a surprise to any of the delegates. (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 58)

Coulson, commenting on the split within the delegation, added that:
At this point there was a considerable opposition from numerous Federations - Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Belgium and others - who would have preferred a liaison [sic] with UIPMB. There was also 'history' between certain people and McD from previous attempts at formation of a world governing body.

The vote was for a body for world triathlon separate [sic] from UIPMB - International Triathlon Union - which would seek affiliation to the IOC. (P. Coulson, personal communication, August 25, 2005)

Ultimately, the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon and the triathlon representatives could not come to terms. The meeting minutes reflected this development by indicating

The end result of these communications & meetings is that UIPMB President Mr [sic] Novikov, on behalf of UIPMB will not consider any agreement with Triathlon and that if individual NGBs [sic] of Triathlon wish to apply for affiliation to UIPMB, they should do so before August 15th, 1989. (Minutes of Triathlon Congress, 1989; underline in original text)

In his report to the 95th International Olympic Committee Session in 1989, Sport Commission chairman Tröger stated, “These organisations could not reach an agreement, and the triathlon had therefore decided to take its own direction by forming the ITU (International Triathlon Union)” (p. 20). Triathlon would have its own individual international federation and would not be a part of any existing sport organization. Sisson provided a partial explanation about the failure of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon and triathlon to meld. Sisson provided additional thoughts about that meeting.

It was, the early discussions about to get triathlon into the Olympic games centered around as you said a, an acknowledgment that it was so difficult to start a federation and then wait 30 or 40 years to become large enough to have a shot at getting into the games. That maybe the best way to put triathlon into the games was as a multi-sport version of another organization UIPMB. So there were really discussions with…a Russian guy by the name of Novikov who were running UIPMB. Uh, and some of the early triathlon, international triathlon players attended a meeting of UIPMB and a presentation was made whereby it was proposed that triathlon be an Olympic sport and quickly they realized that
these guys just didn’t get it. That they were proposing that the swim be on day one, the biking on day two and the run be on day three.

[T]he concept of having, uh, a modern pentathlon through UIPMB to govern this sport was quite quickly erased by the understanding that these guys just didn’t get it. And so, it was, that was the primary reason that the US federation and the European federations that had been battling for control just decided to put their heads together to get together to establish an international federation with the sole, literally the sole purpose at the time of getting into the Olympic games. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

In a letter to International Olympic Committee member Ericsson, McDonald wrote about the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon split.

In retrospect, the uncertainties posed by the marriage, “ménage a trois,” with Modern Pentathlon and Biathlon, was at the root of our dilemma. I hope that history will judge us kindly. I’m afraid the marriage was not exactly made in heaven, as they say. (L. McDonald, personal communication, September 29, 1989)

To further justify, and to alleviate possible perceived repercussions held by member governing bodies, McDonald sent out a memo in November of 1989 to all Executive Board members, member national governing bodies and all International Triathlon Union committees describing that the split was for the best. “There was a split in the I.O.C. over the decision to persuade triathlon to affiliate. The I.T.U. decision to go independent was correct. The decision was not detrimental to triathlon. U.I.P.M.B. is now happy with the status quo ante” (L. McDonald, personal communication, November 29, 1989). The end result was the International Triathlon Union was created after the failings of Federation International Triathlon and Triathlon Federation International and the ill fated attempt to become a part of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon. The triathlon founders, led by Les McDonald, would attempt to create an independent international federation on their own.

**Forming the International Triathlon Union**

While this group of people could come together and form a self-proclaimed world governing body, they cannot simply then just ask the International Olympic Committee to put triathlon on the Olympic competition program. The International Olympic Committee has its
own set of guidelines and timeline for the recognition of an International Federation. Rule 29 of the Olympic Charter indicated at the time that:

In order to promote the Olympic Movement, the IOC may recognize as IFs international non-governmental organizations administering one or several sports at world level and encompassing organizations administering such sports at national level. In order to be recognized, these organizations must adopt and implement the World Anti-Doping Code. The recognition of IFs newly recognized by the IOC shall be provisional for a period of two years or any other period fixed by the IOC Executive Board. At the end of such period, the recognition shall automatically lapse in the absence of definitive confirmation given in writing by the IOC. As far as the role of the IFs within the Olympic Movement is concerned, their statutes, practice and activities must be in conformity with the Olympic Charter. Subject to the foregoing, each IF maintains its independence and autonomy in the administration of its sport. (p. 51)

The previous section applies only to the “application” process for a potential recognition by the IOC of the IF. The process for “applying” for inclusion of the sport in the program of Olympics, Rule 52 of the charter (p. 80-83) included:

1.1 To be included in the programme of the Olympic Games, an Olympic sport must conform to the following criteria:

1.1.1 only sports widely practised by men in at least seventy-five countries and on four continents, and by women in at least forty countries and on three continents, may be included in the programme of the Games of the Olympiad;

1.1.2 only sports widely practised in at least twenty-five countries and on three continents may be included in the programme of the Olympic Winter Games;

1.1.3 only sports that adopt and implement the World Anti-Doping Code can be included and remain in the programme of the Olympic Games.

1.1.4 sports are admitted to the programme of the Olympic Games at least seven years before specific Olympic Games in respect of which no change shall thereafter be permitted.

Accordingly, the founders of the International Triathlon Union knew at the initial stages of its formation what was required to become the recognized international federation for the sport of
triathlon. To be recognized, and to be in a position to lobby for inclusion on the competition program for the Olympic Games, international federations must follow what is described within the International Olympic Committee Charter.

In an address to the International Triathlon Union at the 1993 Triathlon World Championships in Manchester, England, the British Olympic Association president provided his own suggestions to the leadership of ITU as they moved closer to fulfilling their Olympic dream.

1. You need the correct number of members of ITU (75 NGBs) and in all the continents;
2. You should be a sport practised by men and women;
3. You should impress as many members of the IOC as possible, in the knowledge that it is impossible to impress them all;
4. You should try to impress the members of the IOC Executive Board. They are pretty important to your ambitions. That is the way the IOC is presently structured, do not underestimate the influence of the IOC Sports Director;
5. You should try to impress the IOC President. His opposition to your aspirations would be very damaging. (C. Reedie, personal communication, May 15, 1993)

Once again, the founders of the International Triathlon Union knew exactly what to do to before receiving recognition from the International Olympic Committee. The milestones are in place and it is up to the leadership of the ITU to reach them. As stated earlier in the Introduction section of this paper:

The International Olympic Committee bestows legitimacy on an international sport organization by recognizing it as the international federation for a sport. Recognition as the IF of a sport grants an organization monopoly-like power over a sport because the action effectively hinders rival organizations from forming. Thus, a new self-proclaimed world governing body might want recognition as soon as possible and be granted this sense of legitimacy.

Legitimacy can come in a variety of forms and may include corporate sponsorship, media coverage, higher quality events and so forth.

The Olympics would do just that, says Scott Zagarino, Director of Pro Services for USPAC [US Professional Athlete Commission], the new Tri-Fed committee that repre-
sents the pros. “The Olympics mean respect from the media and the corporate community,” argues Zagarino. “It means a broader base of support for the professionals, young and not so young. The revenue base will increase to the point that professional event producers with strong credentials can look to the sport to support themselves; thus translating to more and higher quality events. Olympic acceptance means that the sport will be strong enough to survive its evolution intact. We will all be able to breathe a little easier, knowing that every four years we will have a showcase for our athletes and our sport, and that the world will view us as a legitimate competition, not the refuge of those who couldn’t make it as swimmers, cyclists or runners.” (Graham, 1990a, p. 38)

Sisson stressed the importance of the International Olympic Committee Charter and the requirements for recognition and then program inclusion.

[Y]ou have, uh, certain requirements that have to be met which we diligently attempted to meet including 75 countries with organized federations, um, with the concept of universality, having competitions held on all five continents, uh, with a fair distribution of men and women. All these requirements were, uh, uh, kinda written in the IOC constitution. But we took them very seriously. So seriously that in the early days, much of our time, much of [McDonald’s] time, and I was involved in some of this as well, was actually dedicated to establishing national federations in other countries. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

The International Triathlon Union viewed the charter seriously, even to the point of including women in positions of leadership. ITU policies were to have “equal prize money and women’s participation” (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2005).

In his second critical review of the International Olympic Committee, Andrew Jennings wrote about triathlon and the progressive stance the International Triathlon Union regarding money and leadership regarding women.

Triathlon is a new sport with new attitudes and most importantly new structures. The triathlon federation set up a women’s commission in 1990 with a brief to establish gender equality by 2000. By 1992 two out of the six members on their executive board were female. Free air tickets offered by race organizers are shared between male and female athletes: that equality of opportunity at the start line. They lobby the media for balanced re-
porting of male and female event’s and fight for the same prize money. (Jennings, 1996, p. 220)

A former member of USAT’s Board of Directors and a one-time employee of ITU said “at first, the way to the Olympics was thought to be as a discipline of a pre-existing [international federation]. Ultimately we decided that even though it would be much harder, it would be better if triathlon controlled its own destiny and got in as separate sport” (Carlson, 1995, p. 40). Similar sentiments were echoed by Coulson, who was a member of the British delegation at the first world congress. Coulson wrote:

The task ahead for [McDonald], and he was a huge driving force, was the Olympic Games. His battle cry at all World Championship which followed was ‘how many flags have we got’[?] The obvious reference being to achieve the requisite number of countries to meet the IOC’s criteria. (P. Coulson, personal communication, August 25, 2005)

In an effort to increase the legitimacy of the new self-proclaimed world governing body and bring the disgruntled European national governing bodies into the fold, International Triathlon Union leadership “stated that only full members of ITU will be allowed to participate in the August 6th Avignon World Championship…[and] have shown critics and supporters alike that, personality likes and dislikes aside, ITU can and will act in the interest of the sport of triathlon and its constituency, the triathletes of the world “(Olivares, Jr. 1989a, p. 62). Note that the International Triathlon Union’s inaugural Triathlon World Championship was being held just over a week from the August 15 deadline imposed by Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon for individual national governing bodies from applying for membership.

On August 6, 1989, the first official world championship for the first unified world governing body for the sport, the International Triathlon Union was held (Olivares, Jr., 1989b). Forty countries were represented that day in Avignon, France. Nicknamed the “unity congress” this gathering established

the biggest sign of the feeling of prosperity surrounding Avignon was the mood at the ITU congress, held on the Friday before the event. This second meeting of triathlon governing body representatives from around the globe was far more pleasant for all concerned than the April congress….Never before had the differing blocs of allied powers come to so much consensuses on so many issues. (Olivares, Jr., 1989b, p. 30)
At that inaugural congress McDonald was named president of the new, self-proclaimed, international federation. According to Sisson, because of all of McDonald’s previous work and efforts, the outcome was expected.

Yeah, all by acclaim. I mean he was. It was going into the first world congress I don’t think there was anyone else that was running for President. Uh, you know it had been predetermined that he would be the President of this organization for the first term. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

There were, however, a couple of glitches that would impact the event (and would seem to act as a harbinger for future events and congresses). There was pre-existing distrust between some of the European governing bodies and McDonald. In an effort to keep the peace, Sisson was a bit too open-minded according to McDonald. McDonald and Sisson had differing views as to what transpired as to who did what.

According to McDonald, at times gathering of triathlon muckety-mucks, the Congress almost didn’t get off the ground after McDonald butted heads with the Europeans over the layout of the meeting. McDonald claims they were attempting a power grab; by controlling the meeting format they could control the meeting. Sisson, says McDonald, tried to compromise with the Europeans when compromise was ill-advised.

“Mark walked in and he wanted to be Mr. Nice Guy, the white knight on a white horse parting the troubled waters,” says McDonald, who was subsequently elected ITU president at that meeting.

Sisson sees the incident differently. The Europeans were angry with McDonald. In a last-ditch effort of after-hours diplomacy, Sisson says he simply talked them back to the table.

“There was no compromise; I had nothing to offer,” says Sisson, who walked the Avignon streets with the Europeans until 1:30 in the morning. “All I did was try to convince them to come to work the next day.” The Europeans agreed. (McAlpine, 1991, p. 45)

ITU’s new congress mandated equal prize purses for both men and women for all events under its jurisdiction. In spite of this, the local French organizing committee had decided to pay 20 deep for men and 15 deep for women. For this first Triathlon World Championship the Inter-
national Triathlon Union initially agreed to this, but then the professional athletes found out. A
number of athletes, both men an women, gathered before the event at the International Triathlon
Union Congress and pressed their point that prize money must be equal now. Through their ef-
forts and others, the prize purse was restructured for the inaugural Triathlon World Champion-
ship (International Triathlon Union Minutes of the August, 1989 Congress, p. 9-10). Part of the
culture of the new organization was to promote the female athlete and involve women in admin-
istrative positions. Equality was placed in the constitution of the organization and the organiza-
tion was able to convince the local organizing committee that equal prize money meant amount
and depth.

The new International Triathlon Union Congress also put its stamp of ownership on its
member national federations by passing, unanimously, a resolution that “N.G.B. affiliation with
U.I.P.M.B. shall preclude membership in ITU” (International Triathlon Union Minutes of the
August, 1989 Congress, p. 5). At the end of the first International Triathlon Union Congress,
McDonald asked International Olympic Committee member Ericsson to provide the closing re-
marks. According to the meeting minutes Ericsson noted “with pleasure the difference in atmos-
phere in this Congress and the one held in April. He urged everyone to remember that first and
last, our role is always for the athletes” (International Triathlon Union Minutes of the August,
1989 Congress, p. 15). The minutes also show he received a standing ovation.

Providing foreshadowing of things to come regarding event logistics, at first glance the
swim times for the 1.5K swim were slow. It was discovered later that the athletes had been
swimming against the current in the river. Sisson put it simply, “what happened was there was a
current in the river that they hadn’t planned on.” One unique organizational aspect of the inau-
gural Triathlon World Championship was that it allowed age group competitors and elite com-
petitors to race, a trend that was, and still, is unique in the world of international sport. “It’s non-
egotiable” McDonald said referring to the presence of age group competitors at all World
Championships meaning that age group competitors will be a part of the organization’s world
championships (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

Avignon was a “big success” according to McDonald, “but then everybody left.” Even as
others were returning to the reality of day-to-day living, McDonald explained “we can’t stop
now. We gotta keep going.” In many ways those associated with the event and the fledgling or-
ganization were naïve and innocent, according to McDonald (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

After hosting the Triathlon World Championship in 1989, the International Triathlon Union’s next step was to receive provisional affiliation to the General Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF). Membership in GAISF is recognition by all international sports federations of the International Triathlon Union’s independence and jurisdiction over triathlon and its related multi-sports. This led the way for the International Triathlon Union to apply for Olympic recognition and program status from International Olympic Committee Programme Commission (Graham, 1990, p. 36). At the International Triathlon Union’s Executive Board meeting in October 1989 in Kona, Hawai‘i, the members voted to create a women’s commission “to encourage and promote the participation of women in all aspects of I.T.U.: triathlon and administration” (Minutes of the Executive Board, 1989, p. 11). There was little basking in the afterglow of the Triathlon World Championship as the political divisions within the International Triathlon Union were becoming apparent to those not involved with the organization. In a letter from Roger Jackson, then President of the Canadian Olympic Association, he wrote to McDonald “I did receive a number of comments from Mr. Ericsson and Walter Tröger concerning the ITU and some of the existing political issues, and would prefer to discuss those with you over the telephone” (R. Jackson, personal communication, September 29, 1989). In the margin’s McDonald jotted “[Sture] Jonasson speaking out of turn!” Jonasson was an ITU Executive Board member.

However, not everyone involved in the sport during the 1980s viewed the goal of the Olympics in a positive light. This former professional triathlete asked what the cost might be in loss of individuality (and a move towards homogeneity) as an organization desires Olympic recognition and program inclusion. He stated “to be an Olympic sport, you have to be like every other Olympic sport. You have to be controlled tightly by a central international governing body” (Carlson, 1995, p. 39). Another professional triathlete stated:

Why is so much time, effort and money being spent on getting triathlon into the Olympics? There are many sports we don’t even hear mentioned except every four years. Why do we think that being in the Olympics will bring more ‘legitimacy’ to triathlons? U.S. swimming has been an Olympic sport for years and I know of medalists in not-so-distant
Olympics that are struggling to make financial ends meet. Joe Montana was never in the Olympics. Can’t we learn something from this? Our sport is better the way it is. (Graham, 1990a, p. 38)

Concurring, yet another professional triathlete at the time retorted:

The Olympics might help the growth of the sport, but is it worth the bureaucratic garbage? Shouldn’t we strive to make the sport a viable profession that might support a couple hundred pros? Millions of youngsters dream of playing baseball in the big leagues; not on the Olympic team. If triathlon could become a more viable professional sport capable of providing a living for more athletes, more people and corporations would get involved, as in golf and tennis. (Graham, 1990a, p. 38)

Even the editors of *Triathlete* magazine in 1987 had their qualms about the sport chasing the Olympic Dream.

We would like to see the triathlon become an Olympic event; our major reservation has to do with the fact that Olympic involvement tends to create a nasty combination of sports and politics, power-plays and personalities. Triathletes and their organizations in 40 different countries are also trying to get the sport into the Olympics. Perhaps we don’t have to try so hard – especially if the effect is to seriously damage the sport here in the United States.

The triathlon is a strong, healthy sport, with some of the best international competition consistently available anywhere in the world. The Olympics should be courting the triathlon as much as the reverse. The Olympics may not need the triathlon, but perhaps the triathlon doesn’t need the Olympics either. (State of the Sport, p. 76-77)

Regardless of what views had been expressed in the past, 1989 was the year that the International Triathlon Union was created and held its first Triathlon World Championship. The organization was now a reality and the founders would follow the IOC Charter.

ITU’s next step was to receive provisional affiliation to the General Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF), an important stepping stone to the Olympics. (Membership in the GAISF is recognition by all international sports federations of the ITU’s independence and jurisdiction over triathlon and its related multi-sports.) This led the way for the ITU to apply for
Olympic recognition and program status from IOC Program Commission. (Graham, 1990a, p. 36)

International Triathlon Union representatives were extended an invitation to attend the October 1989 General Association of International Sport Federations congress as “observers” (Scott, G., 1990). The ITU Executive Board delegated Les McDonald, Secretary Sture Jonassen and Information Committee member and Triathlon Federation/USA Board member, Mike Gilmore, to attend the assembly. While at the GAISF congress the ITU Constitution and Technical Rules were presented to the GAISF for approval and an informational booklet distributed to the delegates representing 72 international federations, plus sports media and IOC members.

Besides lobbying the delegates to support triathlon’s case for IOC recognition, the objective was to also affiliate with GAISF. The vote for provisional affiliation of ITU with GAISF was unanimous. The success of the Budapest General Assembly attests to the universal support triathlon has from the International Sports Federations.

Since the GAISF congress, ITU attention has now shifted to the next step, that of IOC recognition. ‘Sport recognition’ is governed by the Olympic Charter. The official procedure for recognition requires that ITU submit an application to the IOC “Commission for the Olympic Program.” Sports which are accorded IOC recognition can be included in the Olympic Program, or continental and regional games under the patronage of the IOC (for example, the Pan American Games). National Olympic Committee Recognition (USOC recognition in Tri-Fed/USA’s case) can follow quickly for NGB’s whose house is in order. (Scott, G., 1990, p. 8-9)

Triathlon had progressed enough as a sport that that the creation of an international federation was warranted. There was a mixture of national sport organizations, in various levels of sophistication, representing the sport of triathlon at a country level. It was time to bring in, under one umbrella organization, the various National Governing Bodies and National Federations around the world together to create a legitimate world championship rather than those events that proclaimed themselves as such and begin the process of lobbying the International Olympic Committee for placing the sport on the Olympic program. Now what was lacking was mainstream recognition of the sport and acceptance that it was indeed a sport. At the beginning there
was little or no legitimacy for the organization because it lacked cognitive legitimation. According to Aldrich and Fiol (1994), “one can assess cognitive legitimation by measuring the level of public knowledge about a new activity.” People know who you are and what you do. In 1989, if you were to ask someone what the word triathlon meant, you would probably receive a response pertaining to Ironman. Ironman Hawai’i had been featured in a 1979 *Sports Illustrated* article and had been broadcasted annually by ABC beginning in 1980 (Mione, 2003). It was the 1982 broadcast that showed Julie Moss collapse just before the finish line after completing a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, and then a marathon. She crawled, under the eyes of the cameras, to the finish line and triggered the first boom in the sport (Mione, 2003). The International Triathlon Union, as the fledging world governing body, had to overcome the “gruelathon” image of Ironman and replace it with the image of a much shorter event. For the International Olympic Committee to consider the sport for inclusion into the Games, the distances would have to change (Overington, 2000). People were not knowledgeable about the sport or most organizations associated with it.

**1990**

The organization’s first big break came in January of 1990 when the sport debut on the competition program for the Commonwealth Games held in Auckland, New Zealand (Graham, 1990a; Scott, G., 1990). This was the sport’s first foray into a multi-sport festival format. It also showed the International Triathlon Union’s interest in pursuing placing the sport in regional competitions.

When ITU began to grow and expand its influence, individuals with education, experience, and credentials in areas such as event management, marketing, television, and officiating brought their own socialization roles into the organization. Some of this was accomplished by copying what other organizations had done. Sisson commented that “when we went from being a bunch of people to an institution in Avignon, uh, you know we, we copied UIPMB’s constitution. That was a mistake ‘cause there were a lot of glitches in that that came back to bite us” (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005).

As the International Triathlon Union moved forward on its own as the newly formed international federation, it looked to USA Triathlon (then called Triathlon Federation/USA) for assistance and guidance. USA Triathlon officially came into existence in mid-1985 (Triathlon
Federation Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 1985) and therefore had already been operating for several years before the creation of the International Triathlon Union. In an example of mimetic isomorphism, and experienced first hand by the author, ITU adopted USA Triathlon’s 1989 rulebook. Referring back to the “glitches” discussed by Sisson regarding UIPMB’s constitution, USA Triathlon had decided in late 1989 to begin rewriting its rulebook because of what were perceived as serious flaws in it (i.e., appealing judgment calls by officials, due process for sanctioned athletes, further defining the draft zone). The author was personally involved with this reworking of the rulebook, along with members of USA Triathlon’s Legal Committee and Officials Committee. A high ranking USA Triathlon official described the USA Triathlon/International Triathlon Union relationship in the beginning this way:

ITU was learning a lot from what we were doing and how we were trying to function. And it’s interesting because that was also a very tough time for Tri-Fed too. We were trying to grow and trying to really develop a national sports organization. Uh, we’d been around since ‘83-’84 so we to were experimenting with new ways of doing things and new ideas, uh, but even in that early time frame the USA was still seen as being in the forefront of triathlon and we were respected as the country that had the most money, the most power the most ability to influence the rest of the world. (Personal communication, July 30, 2005)

In early 1990, members of the International Triathlon Union and USA Triathlon met in Las Vegas for ITU’s winter conference. Part of the agenda was devoted to the International Triathlon Union’s new rulebook. Having been involved with the rewrite of USA Triathlon’s rulebook, the author was asked to speak at the meeting about what he perceived as possible and potential problems that were in the inaugural International Triathlon Union rulebook. Initial comments about the rulebook were not well received by President Les McDonald and, as the author’s memory recalls, the issue was tabled until ITU Technical Delegates and USA Triathlon officials could meet to work on the issues. Of particular concern from the author’s point of view was the ability of an athlete under International Triathlon Union rules to appeal a judgment call made by an official. In the sport of triathlon, at that time, drafting was illegal. Drafting occurs when one cyclist was less than two bicycle lengths directly behind another cyclist (under the U.S. rules). Much like a traveling call in basketball or a holding call in football where the official must ob-
serve the infraction, drafting was determined by the motorcycle draft marshal observing the action. The 1990 rules of the American national governing body also did not require any audio or visual cue to notify an athlete that he or she had been penalized. A competitor would not know of a penalty until after the race had been completed. This retroactive penalty assessment was put into place to allow the Head Referee to debrief every draft marshal and weed out any perceived weak calls. This format also had the possibility of causing confusion as the first person crossing the finish line might not be the winner.

Under the International Triathlon Union system, at the time, of draft enforcement an official had to provide a verbal and visual cue indicating that the athlete was at risk of being penalized. A yellow flag/card/pie plates and a whistle was the warning. The pie plates, small plastic picnic plates with one yellow plate glued to one red plate, were the most economical and safest of the initial visual cues created (imagine dropping a flag attached to a wooden dowel at 25 mph in front of a bicycle). If an athlete did not abide by the warning a red flag/card was to be displayed. Should a draft marshal fail to display the visual cue and/or provide an audio cue, the call was subject to appeal. An athlete could appeal to the Technical Committee in hopes of having the penalty overturned. It was incumbent for the American officials assigned to understand the differences between domestic and international rules.

The remainder of the year would be focused upon the 96th International Olympic Committee Session in Tokyo, Japan and the second annual Triathlon World Championships in Orlando, Florida. Both events would take place within the same week in September; news from each would be disappointing to the International Triathlon Union. There was also, however, ITU recognizing that one of its own had a self-declared world cup event. A member of the International Triathlon Union’s Technical Committee was also the race director for the Gold Coast World Cup triathlon in Australia. The Executive Board of ITU then decided to revoke his Technical Committee credentials and have McDonald write him a letter expressing the organization’s concerns (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting Minutes, 1990, p. 7).

First, reports from Tokyo made their way to Orlando regarding the International Olympic Committee meeting. The IOC was concerned about the increasing size of the Games, especially the increase in number of events. International Olympic Committee member Tröger was concerned about this but also how to balance the need to manage the size of the Games and increase
female participation (Minutes of the 96th International Olympic Committee Session, 1990, p. 122-123). Because of this the “Executive Board [is] to review sport-by-sport of programme to see if all comply with charter & report at the next IOC Session” (Minutes of the 96th International Olympic Committee Session, 1990, p. 13). International Olympic Committee member and Programme Commission chairman Smirnov indicated in the meeting minutes:

As far as IOC recognition of IFs were concerned, the commission had recommended the World Golf Association and International Triathlon Union for recognition, but this would be postponed pending the settling of questions regarding the popularity and legal status of these organizations. (p. 13)

Additionally, the International Olympic Committee would consider increasing the standards of the Olympic Charter (i.e., number of countries, number of votes needed for recognition and inclusion). This review by the International Olympic Committee meant that triathlon would have a more difficult time in being placed on the competition program for the 1996 Summer Games.

The International Triathlon Union had hoped to be placed on the 1992 Barcelona Summer Games competition program as a demonstration sport, but the International Olympic Committee had decided to eliminate demonstration sports after Barcelona. Consequently, the International Triathlon Union Executive Board decided not to lobby for inclusion for Barcelona (Scott, G., 1990). ITU would need to both wait until the next International Olympic Committee meeting in 1991 for possible recognition and continue to lobby IOC members. However, the second International Triathlon Union Congress was active and instituted “strict drug testing and anti-apartheid measures” in addition to establishing a World Cup series and awarding Australia the 1991 Triathlon World Championship and Canada the 1992 Triathlon World Championship (Sisson, 1990, p. 3).

Perhaps an even bigger disappointment than the news from the IOC was the Triathlon World Championships held at Disney World. Initially, USA Triathlon planned on bidding for the 1991 Triathlon World Championship, but when ITU did not receive either a multitude of bids or quality bids, the Americans were approached to host the second world championship (Graham, 1991). This decision was made in December of 1989 so the U.S. national governing body had nine months in which to hire a race director, secure a venue, find sponsors and raise the
money necessary to pay the International Triathlon Union sanction fees and have the necessary $100,000 professional prize purse. The event would be wrought with challenges on all levels.

USAT’s Board of Directors’ meeting in late October of 1989 discussed ITU’s request and who might be able to direct such an event. The Americans knew the importance of the event but also were aware of the challenges posed by such a late bid. Reflected in the meeting minutes:

The Board of Directors discussed the bids that had been received by the Federation for the conduct of the world championships. It was recognized that the conduct of the world championships in 1990 had been thrust upon the Federation by the ITU, because of the lack of willing applicants to conduct the event on such a short notice. It was recognized that conducting a world championship each year would be an extremely important aspect of the ability of the sport to achieve Olympic status with the International Olympic Committee, and therefore of the Federation to achieve National Governing Body status with the United States Olympic Committee. The Board further discussed the fact that because of the relatively short period of time between the award to the Federation to conduct the event and the time of the event, that there will be a limited number of persons or firms willing to bid on the conduct of the world championships in 1990. (Special session meeting minutes of the Triathlon Federation/USA Board of Directors, Attachment A)

A joint venture between CAT Sports (co-owned by Carl Thomas the founder of Federation International Triathlon and one of the founders of USAT and a current member of ITU’s Executive Committee), the owners of the Bud Light United States Triathlon Series, and Dave McGillivray Sport Enterprises (DMSE), a New England based event management company, whose owner was a member of USAT’s Board of Directors and who had been involved in the technical delegate side of ITU, was created for the Triathlon World Championship. The joint venture quickly found out how difficult it was to secure sponsorship and deal with Disney World. In an interview after the 1990 event in Triathlete magazine, McGillivray stated:

We were restricted when it came to sponsorship acquisition. We had to stay away from all the companies, some 60 to 70, that Disney had acquired, and any that were those sponsors’ competitors. We were really hoping that Disney-participant sponsors would come through. For their own reasons, only one, Delta, got involved. That was a crusher. (Graham, 1991, p. 36)
McGillivray offered some additional insight to what he experienced as the race director for the Triathlon World Championship.

Certainly up until that point in time, any time I put on an event, it was my event and existed on my own rules if the sport had rules you followed those but your point is well taken when you say that I had two masters. That was difficult. I mean it was a balancing act to try to, uh, first gain an appreciation and understanding as to what each organization needed and wanted. And then to try to execute that in a fashion where you could balance it all and it wasn’t going to come back to hurt me financially as well as organizationally.

Um, so considering what was a very significant challenge, um add to that the challenge of both conducting an event on, you know, Walt Disney World property, I mean I was, I would argue that my biggest challenge was just that, not dealing with ITU, not dealing with Tri-Fed, but dealing with you know, the nuances of putting on an event on the Disney property. I think the first time any outside organization was awarded the opportunity to do that. And trying to deal with all the different complexities of trying to find sponsorship that would be hosted on their property. And then it was kinda like a mini-Olympic game scenario because I couldn’t get sponsors that were in direct conflict their, um, corporate sponsors. So if I went to, if I wanted to get, I think Coca Cola at the time was a sponsor of Walt Disney World, if I wanted to go get Pepsi, I couldn’t. So if I went to Coke and they decided to take a pass, then I was, I mean that particular area of industry was gone for me. So the constant struggle for me to try to find corporate sponsors of the event because of the different parameters we had to hunt for them. Um, financially certainly wasn’t paying, um, a windfall by any stretch of the imagination. (D. McGillivray, personal communication, October 13, 2005)

Because of these sponsorship challenges, USA Triathlon had to ask the International Triathlon Union that all sanction fees be waived and that the professional triathletes’ prize purse be cut in half to $50,000. These two requests were granted. The next challenge facing the event was the design of the bike course itself.

In April of 1990, the author, while working for USA Triathlon in the position of Officials Coordinator, looked at part of the proposed bike course in Orlando. Upon returning to the headquarters of USA Triathlon in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the author used the cliché that the
course was “flat as a pancake.” Adding to the problem of a flat course was that it would be filled with world class athletes of both sexes. Then there was the challenge that the International Triathlon Union did not have its own trained officials and had adopted USA Triathlon’s 1989 rule-book which had been reworked. Thus, in the opinion of the author who was tasked with helping create the officiating team for Orlando, the world championships would be using a flawed rule-book and American officials who may or may not appreciate the differences between the rules of the national governing body and the rules of the international federation.

Reporting for *Triathlete* magazine, Richard Graham led off a story entitled “Sophomore Jinx” with these initial paragraphs:

As soon as the first athletes began crossing the finishing line at the 1990 ITU World Championships, a Tri-Fed/USA official approached Dave McGillivray, race director and co-producer of the event. The news was not good.

“He told me I was going to get slammed,” McGillivray remembers. Drafting on the bike course on Disney World property had been rampant. Huge packs of cyclists clogged the roadway, making it impossible for drafting marshals to get past them to make their calls.

“I almost broke down when I heard that,” McGillivray said. “Nine months of work, and the first thing I hear is that I’m going to get slammed.” (January/February 1991, p. 36)

All sorts of reasons were given for the drafting that took place. Narrow roads and flat bike course, world class athletes coming out of the water bunched together, TV camera crews on motorcycles impeding the flow of traffic, draft marshals on motorcycles hindering the movement of the riders, and even accusations of cheating. The author, having been one of the draft marshals, believes all of the above were factors in this “sophomore jinx.” An International Triathlon Union Technical delegate provided this explanation: “The solution is the rule, not the geography. As levels of ability on the bike improves, riders are going to bunch up” (Graham, 1991, p. 35). It was, in the opinion of the author, “Tri-Fed’s Waterloo in terms of its officiating program.” The American officials were not prepared for the quality and number of athletes on the bike course, in the judgment of the author.
Regardless of reasons, ITU had, in what would not be an isolated incident, a black eye associated with the event. In spite of this, race director McGillivray indicated:

No, I mean obviously the course flat and fast and there wasn’t a lot of controversy, you know again with these events what happens is in the heat of the battle you know people might overreact, or knee-jerk on certain issues or cases, but when the dust settles, I think you can go back and look at the totality of what the event was and the magnitude of trying to pull one of these off. And they tend to become a little bit more sort of understanding. Um, I think that, um, everybody in the sport, not that they need to cut you so much slack that you know you are negligent but I think that people have to understand that these things aren’t easy to pull off. And uh, you know, the dynamics of a triathlon is very complex and to do it flawlessly, uh, is almost next to impossible, you know given all the different things that could happen and so, um, in those early years, I think for the most part people were understanding and didn’t realize that this again was a first time event, things, again, that’s one of those things when you put on one you do it again and it seems a shame that be the case because that’s a lot of work for just one event. You don’t get an opportunity to improve upon it. (D. McGillivray, personal communication, October 13, 2005)

Further adding insult to injury, after the event McGillivray was billed a substantial amount of money by the people at Disney for services rendered for the TWC. Thousands of dollars were billed for creating the race logo, clean up, and even for the sand that was “lost” from the beach as the competitors exited the swim and moved into the transition area.

Interestingly, after it was all over, um, I actually received a bill personally from Walt Disney World to the magnitude of $350,000 and, um, what happened [was] that I requested, and in a payment and in our meetings that we had never agreed to that I would pay, and so I had to respond and reply to them with, in fact, a 30 page document…It’s amazing that you can be billed for $350,000 on one hand, then on the other hand just to eat [it] like it’s nothing. (D. McGillivray, personal communication, October 13, 2005)

That November the USA Triathlon also hosted the Duathlon World Championships in Palm Springs, California. The International Triathlon Union awarded the Dessert Princess
Duathlon the world championship designation in early 1990 in what some would consider a no bid contract. USAT’s Board of Directors responded to a criticism leveled at it and ITU.

Dan Honig questioned the propriety of the process by which Tri-Fed sanctioned the Desert Princess Run-Bike-Run as the 1990 World Duathlon Championship. Honig would have liked to have had an opportunity to bid for the championship and believes that all duathlons should have been given an opportunity to bid for the world championship. Mark Sisson explained that Les McDonald, President of the ITU, selected the Desert Princess as the preferred race for the world championship. Tri-Fed is not paying any fee to the ITU for the privilege of holding the world duathlon championship in the U.S. (Tri-Fed Board of Directors meeting minutes, 1990)

McDonald’s leadership is evident again as he is attributed to making the decision to place the 1990 Duathlon World Championship in Palm Springs. The Duathlon World Championship went off without controversy, although the author did get to experience the appeal’s process for a judgment call when he cited an elite athlete for drafting.

1991

While 1990 ended with mixed results, 1991 would be the year the International Triathlon Union had its next big break though. In April International Olympic Committee President Samaranch sent International Triathlon Union President McDonald a letter regarding action the IOC’s Executive Board action. “May I inform you that at the meeting of the Executive Board which took place in Barcelona last week, it was decided to recognise the International Triathlon Union as an International Federation” (J.A. Samaranch, personal communication, April 23, 1991). Executive Board endorsement certainly helped the International Triathlon Union’s cause but the entire IOC membership needed to vote on the subject of recognition.

At the June meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Birmingham, England the International Triathlon Union was officially recognized as the international sports federation for the sport of triathlon by the session (Minutes of the 97th International Olympic Committee Session). “Gunnar Ericsson [the designated guide to IOC recognition] came over and said, ‘Welcome to the family,’” recalls ITU President Les McDonald. “It is a family, and it’s good to be on the inside rather than the outside” (Moore, 1991, p. 6).
Held in conjunction with the International Olympic Committee General Session, the International Triathlon Union convened a council meeting. When the announcement of the IOC’s decision to recognize ITU was made, the council attendees carried a motion to give Ericsson the title of Honourary President of the International Triathlon Union for “his outstanding work on our behalf” (International Triathlon Union Council Meeting, 1991, p. 1). Also discussed at the council meeting was the relationship between the International Triathlon Union and the Ironman Corporation. In plain, simple and civil language the organization carried a motion “that ITU endeavour to reach agreement with Ironman based on the above criteria, and produce harmony we all desire for the good of Triathlon” (International Triathlon Union Council Meeting, 1991, p. 9). Of the 10 items listed as criteria, two dealt with the term “World” in Ironman’s title and marketing. ITU would “suggest to the Ironman Corporation, as a gesture of our desire to reach a mutual agreement” that they drop the self-declared title (p. 9).

In his monthly Executive Director’s column for USA Triathlon’s publication Triathlon Times, Sisson wrote how important this recognition was for both the International Triathlon Union and the American federation as well as how difficult the task was.

One small step for triathlon; one giant leap for triathlonkind. O.K., it does sound corny but it’s the truth. After nine years of diligent hard work, one small step – often backwards –after another, Tri-Fed’s membership in the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) is now official. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) granted the sport of triathlon recognition at its summer General Assembly meeting in Birmingham, England June 15, making good our conditional USOC membership as an Affiliated Sports Organization (ASO)...Looking back now it was a giant leap indeed.

In retrospect, the path we followed could appear to some to have been logical, straightforward and unobstructed. In truth, that path has been at times unclear, frustrating and full of wrong turns and dead ends. And the fact that we are now a legitimate member of the USOC and entitled to the rights and privileges of that esteemed group should not be idly tossed off as the predictable or inevitable outcome of the growth of triathlon. Never before has a sport so young come so far in such a short time.

...But like some blindfolded relay team competing in a timeless labyrinthine political chase, where the rules seem to change just when you think you understand them,
this Triathlon Support Team has sought to understand the requirements for Olympic membership and then attempted to carry them out.

…Here in the U.S., membership in the USOC has been the plan since the earliest days of Tri-Fed and its predecessor the United States Triathlon Association. But, however certain we were that triathlon was the greatest sport in the world and truly espoused the Olympic ideal, however impressed the USOC was with the sport of triathlon, the fact remained (per the USOC charter) that our membership at home was entirely depended on the IOC recognizing the sport and our International Federation first. (1991, p. 2)

Mike Gilmore, a member of both USA Triathlon’s Board of Directors and the International Triathlon Union’s Board of Directors reaffirmed Sisson’s views. International Olympic Committee recognition of the international federation had direct and immediate impact on USA Triathlon and its standing within the United States Olympic Committee. Gilmore wrote:

Olympic recognition offers triathlon an entirely new level of competition. Through the efforts of the International Triathlon Union and its’ 80 member countries, triathlon is instantly being considered for medal sport status in prestigious international competitions including the Pan American Games, the Commonwealth Games, and the Asian Games. Upon acceptance, that means millions of spectators and television viewers will see triathlon for the first time. And the events will all be conducted at the Olympic distance – 1.5K swim, 40K bike, and 10K run.

…Olympic recognition brings considerable stature for national governing bodies in every country. Here in the U.S., Tri-Fed/USA has already been granted Affiliated Sports Organization status by the United States Olympic Committee, offering the chance for grant money for juniors programs and coaches clinics. In many countries, Olympic recognition means direct funding for the sport. For example, China will now send a fully funded team to the World Championships in Australia. I am familiar with a dozen countries with similar situations – less than one month after recognition.

…But when will triathlon be on the Olympic program? When will our best athletes storm into the Olympic stadium for the final meters of the race? I can’t answer those questions. It’s the quest that ITU President Les McDonald has been in pursuit of with the same fury that made him one of the best triathletes in his age group.
They told us that triathlon would never be recognized, because it is just a combination of three existing sports. Triathlon was recognized more quickly than any sport before it. We’ve been told that triathlon will never make it on the Olympic program. But you can rest assured that the fat lady hasn’t yet begun to sing!

…Olympic recognition means that triathlon has been accepted as a sport by the international sports community. It means that triathlon will be receiving a level of support from National Olympic Committees, sponsors and television that we’ve never seen before. It means that now you have a focused way of giving something back to the sport you’ve so enjoyed – by helping the young people in your community to try triathlon with the Olympic dream in mind. (Gilmore, 1991, p. 27)

Meanwhile, USA Triathlon and the International Triathlon Union were also working together to get the sport of triathlon on the competition program for the Pan American Games. McDonald and a USA Triathlon Board member went to Cuba to lobby the Pan American Sport Organization (PASO) for inclusion. As reported in USA Triathlon’s Board of Directors meeting minutes:

[A USAT Board member] and Les McDonald, President of the ITU attended the Pan American Games in Cuba and made presentations to PASO for the sport of triathlon to be recognized and be placed on the Pan American Games program. A minimum of 12 triathlon National Governing Bodies must be recognized by their respective Olympic bodies to qualify to be recognized by PASO. The short term goals are recognition and inclusion on the 1995 Pan American Games program. (USA Triathlon Board of Director Meeting Minutes, 1991, October)

As 1991 came to close, the International Triathlon Union had accomplished its first major goal of gaining International Olympic Committee recognition as the international federation for the sport and had taken the next step towards its Olympic dream, but once again had event troubles at one of its world championships. The 1991 Duathlon World Championships were held in Palm Springs in November. The author was assigned to the officiating team for the event. For this particular race the age group competitors would go first and complete their contest. After they finished the professional field would go. During the age group competition a massive windstorm tore through the bike course. Winds were so strong that a power line fell onto part of the
bike course causing the route to be modified. A sandstorm blew throughout the morning. The Honda Gold Wing motorcycle club volunteering to serve with the draft marshals refused to continue. With the winds howling, a group of ham radio operators using mini-SUVs were commandeered to drive the draft marshals during the professional race. Through no fault of its own another International Triathlon Union sanctioned world championship event experienced challenges.

1992

With International Olympic Committee recognition, the International Triathlon Union’s president now had more access to IOC members. In 1992, McDonald would attend both International Olympic Committee meetings. The first gathering in February dampened the spirits of those within the sport as the newly appointed IOC Programme Commission chairman Gilbert Felli reported that “the programme of sports and disciplines accepted by your Session in June in Birmingham will be maintained” (Minutes of the 98th International Olympic Committee Session,1992a, p. 157). This ended the International Triathlon Union’s hope that triathlon could be placed on the competition program for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic Games. Sisson reported that ITU had hoped the sport would debut in Atlanta.

[W]e initially tried to get on the program for Atlanta, because, uh, we were hoping that even though we formed in ‘89 and there is a seven year window in which, you know, to get put on the program. Uh, we were hoping that that we could get into the Atlanta games by virtue of the fact that it was a U.S. sport and Atlanta and we’d worked with …the guys who ran the Atlanta games and knew them to the point that had they wanted to put us on the game on the program as a as a exhibition sport they probably could have (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

In an interview in 1992, McDonald clarified ITU’s position on the Atlanta Summer Olympic Games.

In our discussions with Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch [president of the IOC], he said, “Keep going. You have not made any mistakes up to now. Keep going.” Our plan then, is to shoot for the year 2000 and work backwards. We have never asked anyone about 1996—it’s a delicate situation. As far as the Atlanta Organizing Committee is concerned, they’d have us in the Games tomorrow. But they aren’t the ones who decide. It is the
IOC which decides, and that is where we are concentrating our efforts. (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 26)

As 1992 was the year of the Barcelona Summer Olympic Games, McDonald attended the 99th International Olympic Committee session held in conjunction with the Games. The Programme Commission noted in the meeting minutes that “…the Commission agree that the Games need modernity and quality” (Minutes of the 99th International Olympic Committee Session, 1992b, p. 99). It was this modernity and quality the founders hoped to demonstrate to the IOC. McDonald reported about his time in Barcelona:

One of the most significant aspects of the trip was that I managed to speak to every single member of the IOC—and there are 92 of them—for the first time. For me, Barcelona was a watershed. I now know every member of the IOC, and in turn, they each know the story of the triathlon. And more importantly, I have not heard anyone who has a negative feeling about our sport. Everyone I spoke to said, “Yes, you’re going to be on the program. I support you.” (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 26)

However, with the hope of the sport of triathlon being placed on the Olympic competition program sometime soon, the International Triathlon Union still struggled to hold a world championship that was without controversy. ITU’s 1992 Duathlon World Championship held in Frankfurt, Germany had even more troubles.

At the Executive Board meeting held before the Duathlon World Championship in Frankfurt it was noted that the German federation had not yet paid the International Triathlon Union the $10,000 event sanction fees and that a loss of DM30,000 was expected (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting, 1992, p. 1). This would be just part of the event’s irregularities.

Event logistics for the Frankfurt Duathlon World Championship were problematic. The author was one of two Team USA managers present at the race. Rather than have completely separate events for age group competitors and elite athletes, the local organizing committee staggered the wave starts for each field. Elite athletes then began mixing with age group competitors, which was awkward as the draft zones for each group was different. Then the German draft marshals covering the event did not abide by the International Triathlon Union’s procedures of audio (horn/whistle) and visual (yellow card/red card) as they monitored the athletes. Marshals
“simply displayed a red card to a group of athletes and then drove off” (Phelps, 1992, p. 11). Because of this breach in procedure, the French head referee, chose to toss out all the drafting citations lest he be subjected to an endless appeals process as allowed under ITU rules. Once again, the International Triathlon Union’s lack of a formalized and structured officiating program negatively impacted a world championship. The author wrote that “most of these groups and/or people realize that both triathlon and duathlon cannot hope to be considered a serious sport of the world Championships continue to have problems” (p. 11). At the awards ceremony that evening ITU President McDonald was visibly agitated and curt when he addressed the crowd as noticed by the author. In a later interview McDonald indicated his displeasure with the German triathlon federation.

Well, because of that event, we’ve issued a statement that we’re not going to Nuremberg next year for the Triathlon World Championship. The major reason is that they’ve breached the contract. They haven’t paid us yet for the rights. Other reasons are that the course is as flat as a pancake. After what happened in Frankfurt with Duathlon, we realized these guys are not serious. They aren’t well-organized, and they don’t understand the enormity of the event.

We’re saying to all NGBs that the World Championships are now open to bid. If Germany still wants to bid under the new conditions, it can. The course is very important. The Germans didn’t listen to us concerning the duathlon championships. (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 27)

In the days preceding the DWC at the World Congress, ITU’s Competitions Committee proposed a resolution for the next world congress regarding the self-declared world championships and world cup events. The resolution read:

*Whereas it is the right of the World Body to award World titles; and*

*Whereas this is a direct threat and infringement of the rights and property of a recognized international sports federation,*

*Therefore, be it resolved that this Congress severely criticise the promoters of “self-declared” “world” events, and further that Congress instruct the in-coming Executive Board to take appropriate action to end this practice. (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting, 1992, p. 7)*
Later that year a scathing report issued by the Duathlon Commission at the Muskoka, Ontario Congress, held in conjunction with the Triathlon World Championship, heaped further disdain towards the German organizers.

The organisation of this event was below the standard established for other ITU sanctioned competitions. It was poorly planned, badly executed and a disgrace to ITU. What was to be our premier event of the year turned out to be a fiasco.

…I would recommend that ITU think hard about awarding another World Cup or World Championship event to the German Federation. Their arrogance is only surpassed by their incompetence. (International Triathlon Union Minutes of the 5th Congress, 1992, p. 13-14)

The report touched off a terse response from the Netherlands triathlon governing body (NTB) complaining about the undiplomatic language used and urged the International Triathlon Union leadership “to apologize to all NGBs and Congress delegates for this unacceptable way of communicating” (R. Dulmus, personal communication, December 11, 1992).

The 1992 Triathlon World Championship was held in Muskoka, Ontario and it was marred, yet again, with drafting and officiating problems. Once again the “men’s field was tainted by pack riding and incompetent officiating” (Justice, 1992, p. 43). With nearly every world championship tarnished by the specter of poor officiating and drafting, whispers were heard that may be drafting should be allowed at the elite level. McDonald was posed this question and had a two part response.

In the future we will put only athletes with proper qualifying times on the front and in the first wave. To be honest with you, we got a very serious fight from the NGBs regarding qualifying times. But we’re going to bite the bullet on this issue. We’re only going to use the 50 or so best men and women. Why? Because that the way it is in the Olympic Games, the way it is in other sports.

I haven’t made up my mind. I know people are talking about it, and I think there still must be much debate about it because there is so much conflict. The simple answer is not to do what some Europeans have said to me, which is to get rid of all the age-groupers. They want to reduce the national teams to maybe just two per country. Sure,
that would fix it. But that would change the sport utterly, and if that happens, that’s when I quit. (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 27)

McDonald supplied further reasons for considering the change in an interview with the author. Television was a large part of the equation. In conversations with NBC executives before the rule change there was concern about “having two guys on bikes” being shadowed by several motorcycles with the officials waiting to penalize them (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006). Additional input was provided by the International Olympic Committee as McDonald indicated an event must “be done in two hours to televise it” and that you cannot produce an event with motorcycles swarming around the athletes (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

Triathlon had been established as a competition like that of the cycling’s individual time trial; it is the athlete against the clock and the athlete cannot receive outside assistance in the form of drafting. This is one of the deeply held core values that originated with the sport. This value would be shaken in 1993. Also being shaken would be the relationship between the International Triathlon Union and USA Triathlon.

Not all the news was bad for ITU in 1992. Three other multi-sport festivals agreed to place triathlon on their competition programs. First, the World University Games would place triathlon on its competition program for the June festival (Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Directors of Tri-Fed/USA, 1992). Next, as reported in his Executive Director’s report to the Board of Directors, new Executive Director Steve Locke wrote:

On the international front, Carl Thomas reported early on the Executive Committee of the BofD [Board of Directors] that the Pan American Sports Organization (PASO) had recognized Triathlon. PASO is the organizing body for the Pan American Games. The next step is to negotiate with the Local Organizing Committee in Argentina to allow Triathlon on the schedule. Verbal agreement has been obtained and ITU apparently is confident enough to indicate that triathlon will be in the games through news releases they have been releasing dealing with other topics. (Locke, 1992c, p. 3)

Locke also noted that “Incidentally, Les McDonald mentioned to me while we were in Columbia that the International Olympic Committee had rescinded their objection for triathlon to participate in the Goodwill Games. Les is now pursuing that opportunity” (Locke, 1992c, p. 3). Fi-
nally, the Pan American Triathlon Championships took place in San Andres, Columbia in May. At that competition the Pan American Triathlon Confederation (PATCO) held their first meeting (Locke, 1992c, p. 3). ITU and USAT had succeeded in placing the sport of triathlon on the Pan American Games competition program and received permission from the IOC to place the sport on the program of the Goodwill Games.

1993

March of 1993 was when the announcement that triathlon had been placed on the Pan American Games competition program for 1995 in Mar del Plata, Argentina was made. In a press release issued by the International Triathlon Union, President McDonald said the Pan Am Games were “another big step for the sport” (ITU, personal communication, March 8, 1993). This inclusion meant that Pan American member countries, such as USA Triathlon, could now apply to become Group A members of their National Olympic Committees. Group A status meant a higher level of funding from the National Olympic Committee to the national governing body as well as access to training facilities and services.

Manchester, England hosted the 1993 Triathlon World Championships after the International Triathlon Union pulled the event from Nuremberg, Germany because of contractual problems (Locke, 1993a). Three years earlier, Dr. Engelhart had faxed the 1990 ITU World Congress in Orlando guaranteeing a prize purse of $100,000 and now the event was gone (International Triathlon Union Minutes of Congress, 1990, p. 15). Drafting concerns would not trouble the event but other issues would. The original elite men’s winner was disqualified for tossing his helmet in the transition area from bike to run; “the equivalent of racquet abuse in tennis” (Pryde, 1993, p. 27). After other elite competitors complained to the International Triathlon Union officials at the event, the winner was reinstated. “If triathlon is still trying to get itself taken seriously, then petty disqualifications in a world championship for the sake of officialdom is surely not the message the sport wants to send out” (Pryde, 1993, p. 27).

It was the age group competition that provided the torment to International Triathlon Union officials this time. Former USA Triathlon Deputy Director Tim Yount commented on the age group race in Manchester and the impact it had on both USA Triathlon and the American age group athletes.
In Manchester, Great Britain we had athletes that finished that crossed the line, crossed what they thought the final timing mat, but there was another mat that was at the back end of the finish line chute that they had to cross before it was officially official. Well, they didn’t say that in the team managers meeting. They never did communicate to us that that was going to be the rule, that was going to be the place, you had to cross both mats, so what happened is Steve Lock, Executive Director of USA Triathlon, Tri-Fed at that time, myself and Loreen Barnett spent about two and half, three hours the night of the awards ceremony, which had to be delayed, huh, by hours, as we went through each of the age groups where American athletes claimed they had finished because preliminary results had been posted and our athletes were just livid that they were listed as 14th or 15th when they know for certain that they were 1st, 2nd or 3rd so we fought and fought and fought on behalf of our athletes and unfortunately the best they could do in some age groups was to say “well let’s, you know this, um, who can corroborate that person saying that person saying they were in second, who was around them and have that person come in as a witness.”

So we would have to go back downstairs to try to find that person ‘cause they were all waiting for the awards ceremony patiently so everybody was there and bring them up individually and interview them and then if Loreen felt it was a strong enough argument that she would reinstate that person in 1st, 2nd or 3rd place which are the medal positions at a world championship for age groupers.

Uhh, [it was] very frustrating. We probably had 65% of the athletes reinstated. The other 35%, uh, in probably many situations never returned for another world championship. You can image what message that sent to age group athletes back here in the U.S. You come back to the United States you talk. “I got screwed by ITU. Uh, I didn’t get a medal that I earned. I will never do another race as a matter of fact I may not even come back to USA Triathlon again as a result of this horrendous situation because I did not get the support that I think I should have gotten from Steve Locke, Tim Yount and some other people,” which obviously they didn’t really understand how many hours we were in the women’s bathroom. The women’s bathroom, which they had to shut off, which was
the funniest thing ‘cause there was no other place to meet and, and fought on behalf of the athletes (T. Yount, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

The year’s Duathlon World Championship also had troubles, to the point that the event almost did not take place. ITU was faced with the possibility of having to cancel the race but USAT offered to host it on short notice. Yount pointed out that Switzerland was supposed to get it [in 1993] and it fell through again. We talked about the contracts, not knowing what was gonna happen at the last minute. Well, this is months before, uh, just a few months before we were to go to Europe for duathlons worlds in Switzerland, fell through the cracks. [They] cancelled the event. Jack Weiss, down in San Angelo, Texas at that time, said “we’ll do it.” So they did step up, Sean, in [1993] and host a championship. It was won by Greg Welch. It was a good event for only having two months. But again we still got criticized for that production because it wasn’t up to ITU standards even in the early ‘90's. (T. Yount, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

These world championships, and related challenges were isolated incidents, were the crown jewels of the International Triathlon Union at the time. This is not to say that 1993 was year of dismal efforts. There was much progress towards the Olympic goal as ITU kept lobbying the International Olympic Committee for program inclusion. In his monthly column, the USA Triathlon Executive Director Steve Locke wrote:

What’s up in the Olympic World? Quite a bit. Recently in Switzerland, the International Olympic Programme Committee met to consider proposals from a number of sports wishing to be introduced on the Olympic Programme in the year 2000. Triathlon was among the sports considered. The International Triathlon Union President Les McDonald, along with USA’s Mike Gilmore and Britain’s Sarah Springman made the presentation. As the process continues, the IOC Programme will make a confidential recommendation in early 1994 to the IOC Executive Committee.

During the latter part of 1994, the IOC will announce the sports to be on the programme for the 2000 Olympics. Incidentally, the two leading cities bidding for the 2000 Olympiad, Sydney, Australia, and Beijing, China, have included triathlon on their bid documents. (Locke, 1993, p. 6)
Locke had reason to be optimistic because the rapid acceptance of triathlon and the International Triathlon Union’s recognition as the international federation meant that USA Triathlon would be formally recognized by the United States Olympic Committee as the national governing body.

On March 9, 1993, the sport of Triathlon was placed on the official programme for the 1995 Pan American Games to be held in Mar Del Plata, Argentina. The inclusion to the Pan American Games means that Tri-Fed/USA may proceed with the membership application process to become a Group “A” member within the IOC. (Phelps, 1993, p. 14)

It was 1993 that the sport of triathlon changed at the elite level. With the variety of problems at many of ITU’s world championships, the organization discussed allowing drafting at the elite level only in its Olympic-distance Triathlon World Championships. Sisson explained the rationale behind this choice:

Well when I talk about how triathlon got to be in the Olympic Games and the fact that there were certain personalities and certain things that happened within a political structure that had they not happened that way we might never had gotten into the games. And I am quite clear that had we not taken the steps, and a drastic step, in 1993…if I had one lasting contribution to the sport of triathlon, good or bad, is that I am the guy that finally stood up and said ‘hey, we can’t continue this way.’ It’s impossible. Um, I gave Sean Phelps $160,000 a year to try and fix triathlon and it just can’t be done. That was the epiphany that we had at that meeting that pretty much changed triathlon for good. In a good way, at least at the elite ranks. Uh, had we tried to go to the Olympic Games with enforcing a no drafting rule it would have been a total travesty. Had we even gotten into the Games it would have been one or two events before we had gotten laughed out of the Games. There was no way to take 50 of the best athletes in the world who all came out of the swim within 30 seconds of each other. Who all hop on a bike and then expect them to maintain any amount of distance between themselves. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Regarding the existing ITU rules that were not being enforced at world champions, Sisson said [Y]ou know the reality was that even a 10 meter draft rule is still drafting. It is just you’re putting a limit on it. Um, and yet you coach drafting in the swim, and you coach drafting in the run. Now you automatically are disqualified. It was, it never made any
sense. So that was, but again that was the board consisted of people in those days it was basically Les who ran the board and who whenever there was a vote everybody agreed with what Les had to say. Very few people were outspoken within the board. Um, for whatever reason, some of it had to do with a language issue. Les spoke very quickly and with a bit of an accent so that a lot of the Europeans and a lot of the Spanish speaking board members couldn’t understand so a lot of stuff got ushered through really quickly without anyone knowing what they just voted on. But the bottom line was very few people were in a position or willing to stand up in those days. We could have easily gone another couple of years without addressing this serious, serious issue. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Sisson provided further justification for the proposed rule change.

Well, just, and by the way this was ultimately the biggest problem that people had with it, is it changed the sport and it did so entirely for the purpose of getting us in the Olympic Games. That was the reason for the drafting, the allowing drafting rule change, was to get us into the Olympic Games. So many people around the world said hey we don’t care about the Olympic Games. We care about our triathlon and the way it has always been done and they got up in arms and I lost the support of my own federation for six years over that. To the extent that I had to go to some extreme measures to get to get nominated for re-election in ‘96. Like I had to join the Mexican federation. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

In a magazine interview in 1995 Sisson quipped:

You can pin the drafting rap on me. Drafting was never applied evenly, and it looked stupid on TV. It had its chance as a popular sport. Now we need to create loop races with drafting packs to create excitement. (Carlson, 1995, p. 40)

Leadership codes are applied to these paragraphs as Sisson discussed the need for a change in the rules in spite of the expected backlash that would result with a draft legal format at the elite level. Sisson saw that to get into the Olympics something had to be done to deal with the problems associated with the drafting issue.

The year ended with USA Triathlon in dire financial straits which resulted in the loss of almost the entire office staff. Program coordinators lost their jobs and their duties were out-
sourced to volunteers or contractors. Relationships that had been built at a lower level between USA Triathlon personnel and their ITU counterparts were now gone.

1994

Since the International Triathlon Union was the recognized international federation, the organization began to assert itself in areas that had been previously been regulation free. The use of the terms “World Cup” and “World Championship” were viewed to be owned by ITU and not to be used without permission. As the international federation of the sport the International Triathlon Union must demonstrate it has control of the sport to the International Olympic Committee. Member national governing bodies that allowed their own sanctioned events to use these titles or non-sanctioned events claiming these titles incurred the wrath of ITU. In July 1994, McDonald took umbrage at an Australian event called the World Cup Gold Coast. McDonald suspended three American professional male triathletes for competing in this triathlon from any 1994 International Triathlon Union sanctioned event. McDonald said that

The athletes are Mark Allen, Mike Pigg and Scott Tinley. There was a possibility of resolving this issue if the race had agreed to be sanctioned by the Australian Triathlon Federation (ATF). The fact of the matter is that we had a signed agreement that he would stop using the word, “world,” and he has not lived up to it. Race organizers have understood that to use “world” produces the impression that it is a world event. A world event, however, is when national federations send their athletes to compete in their event. The act that the race existed before ITU is a matter of semantics. I’ve spent many years trying to resolve that situation. We’ve identified the Olympic-distance event. We’re not trying to challenge the event, either. We have an agreement with Ironman that ITU would create an official long-distance championship in Nice. We could have done it without their permission. But the athletes banned would never have gone there. So the ban means nothing. (Transition Area, 1994, p. 8)

When questioned about the Olympic goal and how the International Triathlon Union was governing the sport, the race director for the World Cup Gold Coast replied:

At what price the Olympics? Can the rank and file compete there? Of course not. The age groupers are not thought of as elite by the ITU, and hence are not even included in the ban. The reality is that if triathlon is given Olympic program recognition, then all
those nameless, faceless bureaucrats that allegedly run our sport will have millions to spend on congresses and meetings, and cocktail parties and administration. But will it be spent on the athletes of the sport? I hope so. There are many fine people who are in administrative positions within our sport; let’s hope that the right decisions are made.

(Transition Area, 1994, p. 10)

In another interview the race director added:

We were not contacted by the ITU or any of their affiliates. The situation was the same in early 1992 when a similar directive was issued. We did not receive a copy but were in fact notified by *Triathlon Sports* magazine. Triathlon Australia faxed us to organize a meeting regarding the ban. Considering they had already convicted us without a trial, it wasn’t high on our list of things to do. (Newbound & Southwell, 1994, p. 8)

At the September 1994 Paris meeting of the International Olympic Committee, the sport was placed on the competition program for the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games as a *provisional* sport (IOC, 2004a; Olympic Sports, 1994; italics added for emphasis). International Olympic Committee President Samaranch provided the letter that the International Triathlon Union leadership had longed for going back to the days of Federation International Triathlon and Triathlon Federation International.

Please accept my sincere congratulations following the decision of the IOC Session in Paris on 4th September to include triathlon on provisional basis to the programme of the Games XXVII Olympiad, 2000 in Sydney. (J.A. Samaranch, personal communication, September 5, 1994)

In a span of five years the International Triathlon Union had gone from creation as an organization, to recognition as the international federation for triathlon and then having the sport placed on the competition program for the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games. ITU issued a press release highlighting the historic International Olympic Committee vote. In it McDonald stated:

Triathletes have captured the imagination of the IOC members with their charismatic style and athletic performances. Over the last five years the National Federations affiliated to ITU have worked tirelessly to have their dream of inclusion on the programme of
the Olympic Games realised. This is indeed an historic moment for the 2 million Triathletes world-wide. (ITU, personal communication, September 4, 1994)

It should be noted that the sport was placed on the program on a provisional basis. Provisional status meant the sport would be re-evaluated after the Sydney Olympic Games to determine if it warranted remaining on the competition program.

With all the exuberance surrounding the inclusion of triathlon on the Olympic competition program the pending tempest between the International Triathlon Union and the World Triathlon Corporation was continuing to develop regarding Ironman. Before the vote was taken to add triathlon to the competition program, a document was distributed to IOC members that contained a variety of information but also included almost a warning to ITU.

As for triathlon, “recognised” by the IOC, it is knocking at the Olympic door but not all agree on its type of exercise. Originally, its notoriety and success were the result of television’s exploitation of the suffering men and women entered in an almost inhuman event: 6 kilometres of swimming, 180 of cycling followed by a running Marathon, alone considered extreme. (IOC, personal communication, 1994, p. 195)

The International Olympic Committee had concerns about the Ironman-distance as a form of competition. Ironman had concerns about the International Triathlon Union.

In a letter to the International Triathlon Union before the International Olympic Committee vote in Paris, Ironman president David Yates wrote:

I want to make it very clear that certainly from my own personal perspective, and I also believe from the perspective of everyone else involved with the [Professional] Tour, that there is no desire to go to “war” with ITU. Nobody wants this, as we all recognize that the governing body system is certainly one of the requirements for moving into the Olympic arena. We all wholeheartedly support the Olympic movement, and very frankly, we would be crazy to not support this movement. What we don’t support however, is an international governing body that does not allow for fair proportionate and direct input by the individuals that make up the sport, specifically, the athletes and the event directors.

…Although the United States might have hundreds of triathlons, hundreds of race directors, and thousands of triathletes, it receives one vote on ITU related issues, just the
same as the governing body of Bolivia that may have ten triathletes. This is obviously unfair, disproportionate, and flies [sic] in the face of everything that American stands for, which is democracy and one person, one vote. With communism and socialism falling around the world and being replaced with democracy, I am amazed to see that ITU seems to be going in the opposite direction.

…It’s obvious that the line has been drawn in the sand, and if we can not find a way to resolve the problem, it will continue to escalate….I have always believed that if reasonable minds sit down, that reason will prevail. (D. Yates, personal communication, March 1, 1994)

Yates wanted a representative form of government with voting power in the International Triathlon Union based upon number of triathletes and race directors in a country rather than the present one governing body/one vote used by the international federation. Another issue besides the use of the word world had been introduced causing further consternation for McDonald.

Even with triathlon now being a medal sport in the Olympics not everyone was delighted with the news. Because of the possible rule change of allowing drafting in elite events at the Olympic distance, a number of professional athletes and administrators stood in opposition to this new format. Many were Americans who were adamantly opposed to any legalization of drafting (Smyers, 1995). Mike Gilmore, then International Triathlon Union’s Marketing Director, explained the rule change in an interview in *Triathlete* magazine.

Mark Sisson has struggled for years to find a way to enforce the drafting rule fairly. He came up with the idea of the stop-and-go penalty. But he realized that was like a band-aid on a hemorrhaging wound. He pushed to train marshals. His conclusion was to allow drafting like we did in the beginning, and he led the lobbying to get Les McDonald to try it. We are still in an experimental stage. My opinion is that the best athletes still win if they know how to race. The fourth element we added is race strategy. Strategy is much more complex than when you theoretically could not draft. But I have been to many races, and I never saw one in which you could not draft. It has a big time effect. (Questions put to the ITU, 1995, p. 14)

As 1994 came to a close, the British triathlon magazine 220 printed a highly critical editorial accusing the International Triathlon Union of selling out the sport of triathlon to achieve
the Olympic dream of a few “blazers sitting around a desk” (Maclaren, 1994, p. 66). One of the
talking points was the draft-legal issue. McDonald quickly replied to his Executive Board by
addressing each item. Regarding the drafting issue he wrote:

   Yes, Les McDonald has always been opposed to people drafting on his back wheel, and
they always did. But occasionally, the president of ITU is wrong. (No, often). The
change of mind came with the realization that we were deluding ourselves with a veneer
of hypocrisy if we thought the drafting problem would disappear of its own free will. It
hasn’t and it won’t. so [sic] we are experimenting, with ITU Congress approval, with
some of the ITU events again in 1995. many [sic] of the athletes who were originally op-
posed have now changed their mind. The World Cup is sponsor-TV driven. There are
thousands of triathlon events world-wide for athletes to chose from, let them decide. But,
take time out and watch the bike section of a triathlon. Chose one where the organiser
has paid an appearance fee, plus travel and hotel accommodation for a couple of star at-
tractions from a foreign exotic land, like Colorado or California, and is hell bent on get-
ting his promotional financial return with guaranteed victories. Try it. I have. It is de-
grading. And listen to the bitter complaints of one athlete against the other, for drafting.
I have, and its [sic] very sad. (L. McDonald, personal communication, December 29,
1994)

   McDonald provided additional rational for adopting the draft-legal format. He indicated
that the seed was planted after a conversation with cycling great Eddy Merckx about why the
need for draft marshals when it was not an individual time trial. McDonald said, quoting
Merckx, “you’ll never get anywhere doing that” (L. McDonald, personal communication, January
29, 2006).

1995

   The draft-legal issue threatened to infuriate the Americans, Ironman officials were an-
noyed with the self-proclaimed world label, and the European Triathlon Union continued to fume
over issues with the International Triathlon Union. At the beginning of 1995, European Triath-
lon Union President Peter Boll wrote to McDonald expressing his concerns over a variety of is-
sues. Some included the perception that McDonald sought to weaken the European Triathlon
Union and continue to grab power for himself.
[Y]ou are certainly aware that I stepped out of the ITU in the early days because I didn’t feel comfortable with the way you were treating people and using them to reach your (personal) goals. And you certainly know that I was right a lot of things I told you already those days.

Anyway when I came back last year I thought that with the success you had meanwhile and the position you reached things might have changed. Unfortunately they didn’t. You still claim to have control and power on everything, you still just accept people around you which are completely in line with your ideas and you try to destroy everybody else, and – last but not least – you are still not interested to accept any strong regional bodies in the world. And because there is just one existing you try to destroy it. I think it’s easy to understand that – as long as I feel responsible for ETU – I can’t accept your policy on this matter. (P. Boll, personal communication, January 4, 1995)

In between these skirmishes, the organization continued to pass milestones on the way to its Olympic debut in Sydney. The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) confirmed membership status to the International Triathlon Union in April. Additionally, ITU also had to go about the business of maintaining the bureaucracy with the development of its World Cup series and its regular meetings. In his President’s Report at the Cancún, Mexico Congress, McDonald praised his ITU volunteer workforce in Vancouver (this would need to change because of Revenue Canada and would be addressed at the upcoming Executive Board meeting in January of 1996). Cancún is also were USA Triathlon attempted to have the president of Ironman be allowed to attend and address the Congress. The motion was defeated. This set the stage for the first of several trips to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) for the International Triathlon Union.

Further discontent was being expressed by a sports agent who was involved in the sport. Murphy Reinschreiber was the agent for both Greg Welch and Paula Newby-Fraser. Welch would win an ITU Triathlon World Championship title, a Duathlon World Championship title as well as Ironman Hawai‘i. Newby-Fraser would win Ironman Hawai‘i a record eight times. Reinschreiber said that the International Triathlon Union sees the Olympics as a be-all and end-all. I see the sport as much more than that. Sure the Olympics are a powerful tool, I don’t think you can impose a whole economic system on the
sport because of it. Look at Ironman Germany…the Bliss race in Rio. Triathlon’s happening and it has nothing to do with the Olympics. We have the potential to be a 365-days-a-year sport. I just say that we shouldn’t throw the whole sport on the rocks for the Olympics. (Silverman, 1995, p. 56)

1996

ITU held its “Summit Conference” in Vancouver, British Columbia in February of 1996. The Summit Conference had International Triathlon Union Executive Board members present as well as the organization’s regional representatives. In an effort to temper the escalating feud with Ironman, Sisson proposed a resolution that would allow Ironman to continue to use the word world because of historical precedence. The conference attendees would not go that far, but after discussion the resolution stated “that ITU, although still opposing self-declared ‘world’ events, lift the ban on athletes competing in the Hawaii Ironman, only” (International Triathlon Union Summit Conference, 1996, p. 9; underline in original text). This resolution passed unanimously.

Inclusion on the Olympic Games program was not a panacea for the International Triathlon Union. Even putting aside the pending battle with USA Triathlon over the draft-legal format, 1996 would prove to be the year of triathlon’s discontent. ITU’s relationship with USA Triathlon would curdle to the point that the American national governing body would run their own candidate for the presidency of the international federation, the arguments pertaining to the terms “world championship” and “world cup” would escalate and put the American governing body in the middle of a dispute between ITU and Ironman, and a rival professional tour would surface. As this combination of events involved USA Triathlon they are addressed in the upcoming section ITU and USA Triathlon later in this chapter.

ITU announced in February 1996 that its World Cup and World Championships offered a $1 million total prize purse, split evenly between men and women (Carlson, 1996a). McDonald had great hope and enthusiasm for the World Cup series. The International Triathlon Union had signed a contract with Pacific Sports Entertainment (PSE) that helped fund the prize purses. PSE was an Australian subsidiary of Rupert Murdoch’s world-wide news group.
McDonald, in a letter to Engelhart, the president of the DTU and a member of the ITU Executive Board, discussed the World Cup Series, its *raison d’être*, and the responsibility of the athletes.

The fact of the matter is the ITU World Cup is the most successful, the most polished, and the best series of races ever created. And it has made some of our opponents extremely jealous. It will be even more spectacular in 1997 with more prize money, and given our new relationship with the Rupert Murdoch News Corp., television exposure will be spectacular beyond imagination. Athletes who wish to participate in the World Cup Series will, as we agreed at the Cancun Executive Meeting, be sponsored partly by ITU for travel, hotel and food, with immediate payment of prize money, and with massive exposure on television for their particular sponsors and the sponsors of their national federation. As we agreed in Cancun, if athletes are not prepared to abide by the particular rules of their national federation regarding uniforms, and if athletes are not in good standing with their national federation, then they will not be allowed to compete. The choice is theirs. I can assure you that the decision of the Executive Board, which was agreed to unanimously by everyone, will be enforced.

As a long time member of the International Ski Federation (FIS), and the organiser of several World Cup Ski events myself, it would be impossible to imagine for one moment that a competitor from Switzerland, Germany, Austria, France, Italy or Canada would ever start in an international event unless they were in “good standing”, and in possession of a card or license, which was current with their national federation. We are simply going to apply the rules which have been used by every other sports federation since the beginning of time. If athletes wish to rebuke that choice and go it alone, that is their decision, but it could get awfully lonely for them. (L. McDonald, personal communication, December 31, 1996)

A rival tour called the International Triathlon Grand Prix was created by another Australian company and promised large signing bonuses to men who committed to the new tour (Carlson, 1996a). To entice both elite men and women to compete on the International Triathlon Union World Cup circuit, the organization offered travel stipends “that cover airfare, hotels and food if you commit to the series and get results” (Carlson, 1996b, p. 12). The new International Triath-
lon Grand Prix countered by signing several top men to guarantees worth as much as $100,000, but did nothing for top female triathletes (Carlson, 1996a). The founder of this rival tour had previous experiences in “league-style war” having formed an independent cricket series in Australia (Kogoy, 1996, p. 50). Further convoluting the mix was the World Triathlon Corporation’s decision to increase its prize purse at Ironman. Presenting ITU’s point of view concerning the World Cup Series, Sisson stated:

A good sponsorship puts more on the athlete’s bottom line than the prize money. The sponsors are wise to the fact that they will not capitalize on the sport by selling more widgets to a small triathlete population. Rather, they will do better selling mass-market products to a mass-market TV audience. (Carlson, 1996b, p. 14)

McDonald, taking a more hard line approach to the competing tour, indicated:
Athletes aligned to the proposed [ITGP] breakaway organisation face possible expulsion form the World Championships and the Olympics. There is really no need for [the organizer and sponsor to be] sticking their noses where they don’t belong

There is also a real danger that if the schism we now find ourselves in isn’t re-

solved we could well see this sport dropped not just from the Olympic program in Syd-
ney but the Commonwealth Games in 2002. (Kogoy, 1996, p. 50)

With the World Cup Series in place, the International Triathlon Union still had problems with its own Triathlon World Championship. This time the race was held in the United States and once again there would be financial problems associated with the event, so much so that ITU would find itself in the Court of Arbitration for Sport seeking relief from the American promoter. The International Triathlon Union was left with unpaid bills, had to find its own hotel rooms and transportation and pay prize money to athletes when the race director reneged on his contract. Contained in the minutes of the ITU’s Executive Board meeting that November of 1996 in Cancún, a report claimed “the intention is to get our money back and an acknowledgement that the event was an embarrassment to ITU” (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting, 1996, p. 4). CAS would eventually rule in ITU’s favor against the American promoter in August of 1999 (ITU, personal communication, August 4, 1999). However, the promoter’s former event management company was named in the decision, which had since folded, and not the
promoter himself. The result was the $60,000 owed to the International Triathlon Union was never collected.

Also addressed at the Cancún meeting was the relationship between Ironman, USA Triathlon and the International Triathlon Union. At what point could the international federation dictate to a member national governing body what events it could sanction? Sisson stated “that a timeline for negotiation with Ironman should be established after which the USA Federation should not sanction the event in Hawaii” (p. 10)

After the Cancún Executive Board meeting, European Triathlon Union President (and ITU vice-president pro-tem) Didier Lehénaff sent McDonald a five page letter detailing the regional federation’s stance on an assortment of topics. Most issues dealt with the lack of communication, or miscommunication, between and among the two organizations that seemed in place since the creation of the International Triathlon Union. Lehénaff closed his correspondence with this sentiment:

Finally, may I say how sorry I am that you seem to perceive ETU as a hostile party to ITU. It is certainly not the intention of the current ETU Board, which was originally elected to heal the rift created by the previous administration. Let’s hope we can exorcise the ghosts of the past. (D. Lehénaff, personal communication, December 8, 1996)

McDonald noted at the end of the letter “correspondence received and filed – no change in my position or the ITU Executive Board.”

1997

Before the 1997 season began, the International Triathlon Union announced the uniform rules for 1998 and the qualifying criteria for the 2000 Sydney Summer Games. Feeling the athletes had little voice in how ITU operated, yet another athlete representative group was created. A variety of short-lived attempts had been made since the mid-1980s to form a professional athlete alliance. The Association of Professional Triathletes, the International Federation of Elite Triathletes and the International Professional Triathlete Association were all previous failed attempts at organizing professional triathletes into some sort of collective unit and provide a common voice (within USAT a recognized professional athlete advisory council did exist).

The Professional Triathlete Guild (PTG) “was formed in response to a series of rulings from the International Triathlon Union (ITU) – the governing body of the world cup, world
championship and Olympic triathlon – which many pros oppose vehemently” (Carlson, 1997b, p. 10). Guild president Mark Allen, the inaugural International Triathlon Union Triathlon World Champion in 1989 and who was also banned for the 1994 season for racing at a self-proclaimed world cup race, criticized ITU for its rules pertaining to the size of an athlete’s sponsor logos and the new Olympic qualifying procedure. Concerning the uniform policy International Triathlon Union Managing Director Mike Gilmore replied

Our uniform standards are among the most liberal in any international sport. Although Michael Jordan has a Gatorade sponsorship, his Bulls uniform does not have green Gatorade stickers. Steffi Graff [sic] is sponsored by Opal cars, but the Association of Tennis Professionals only allows a small logo on her playing outfit and one on the hat. The same rules apply in golf, and yet Tiger Woods has no problem attracting sponsorship. (Carlson, 1997b, p. 10)

Gilmore also said about the Professional Triathlete Guild: “We see them as more of a club and they are free to associate in any way they wish. But we do not officially recognize them” (Carlson, 1997b, p. 10). The Executive Board went as far as to take the position that “ITU not recognise the PTG or communicate with them in any form” (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting, 1997, p. 2).

The creation of the Professional Triathlete Guild was yet another attempt by the athletes to control their own destinies within their sport, much like the various players associations within the so called “Big Four” North American professional team sports. Spencer Smith, a two-time Triathlon World Champion, felt the efforts of the Guild would be moot if the athletes were willing to take a stand against what they perceived to be as grievances with the International Triathlon Union. “They say the athletes are interchangeable, but there is no show if the athletes have balls not to race when [the ITU] doesn’t listen to us. For once we have to stick together” (Carlson, 1997b, p. 10). Taking a stand against the International Triathlon Union meant eschewing the travel stipends provided by ITU to elites committed to the World Cup series and the Triathlon World Championship and, more importantly, risking not obtaining enough points to be one of the 50 men and 50 women who would qualify for the sport’s Olympic debut.

The qualifying procedures for the Sydney Games differed from the traditional American trials system where the athlete who wins the race goes to the Olympics. ITU, with the Interna-
ternal Olympic Committee’s blessing, passed a qualification process that could force athletes to start competing for one of the 50 spots at the starting line for both men and women for the 2000 Games as early as 1997. An athlete would need to accumulate enough points to be eligible to compete in Sydney and then abide by their national governing body’s and National Olympic Committee’s qualification procedures. Points earned at ITU World Cup and the Triathlon Championships were initially worth .67 in 1997, .80 in 1998 and 1.0 in 1999 and 2000. Gilmore indicated the qualifying procedure

has been developed over several years and was approved by a vote of the ITU Congress….In addition, we merely wanted to make athletes meet a minimum standard of performance. We don’t want any Eddie the Eagles qualifying. Once an athlete meets the standards, the national federation chooses the athletes. (Carlson, 1997b, p. 12)

Athletes were required to chase qualification points and calculate when they race with regards to the value of the points awarded. Only 50 men and 50 women would qualify for Sydney.

By the summer of 1997, the Professional Triathlete Guild claimed that “triathlon and its pro athletes are in a state of emergency” (Carlson, 1997c, p. 10). Greg Welch, a leader in the Guild, indicated that

the ITU tried to force him to sign a contract prior to the first ITU race of the season in Japan limiting his sponsors’ logos on his uniform, which would “nullify…all my sponsorship contracts.” When he refused to sign the contract, he was “cursed at by an ITU Executive Board member.” (Carlson, 1997c, p. 10)

Accusations that the International Triathlon Union was attempting to force Jackie Gallagher, a trustee of the Professional Triathlete Guild, by withholding travel stipends from her among other things.

Gallagher added she was disturbed to be presented with the ITU contract limiting sponsorship logos, 48 hours before the Ishigaki [Japan] race, that had not been submitted to any national governing body prior to being presented to the athletes. She was also disturbed to note an ITU official cheering another competitor for beating her. (Carlson, 1997c, p. 10)

In response to the “state of emergency” for professional triathletes, a former professional triathlete who was then working in broadcasting stated
“athletes…at the ITU events…seem to be satisfied with the races themselves, the prize money…and the travel stipends.” She likened the ITU travel stipends to a form of sponsorship and said that the ITU withholding them from PTG athletes was justified, much as Coke would be justified for withholding endorsement money if a Coke-sponsored athlete drank Pepsi.

“Just like any sponsor, the ITU…has certain rights over the races it organizes and owns, and can demand certain requirements of athletes competing,” wrote Davis, who added that athletes were not prevented from competing if they wanted to pay their own travel. (Carlson, 1997c, p. 10)

The banter between the International Triathlon Union and the Professional Triathlete Guild continued throughout the year. Guild president Allen felt the proposed rule changes, once again the drafting issue, as well as a new one concerning the length of aero bars in the draft legal race was “ridiculous” (Carlson, 1997d, p. 24). Allen also leveled the charge that:

The ITU has set itself up not as the governing body of the sport for the Olympics but rather as a business trying to use its position as the gatekeeper to the Olympics to gain a monopoly hold on athletes and promote the ITU World Cup Series. (Carlson, 1997d, p. 24)

Like so many labor disputes, each side staked out its message and territory. However, 1997 would wind down with one piece of good news and one piece of bad news. In late October the proposed Olympic course for triathlon was given preliminary approval by the International Olympic Committee.

The course begins with a 1.5K swim in Farm Cove next to the eye-catching Opera House, 40K looped-bike leg going from the Opera House around the harbor foreshores followed by a 10K run through the city’s streets and the Botanic Gardens.

“The course is fantastic. Today I believe that, if all things are going right, it should remain,” said IOC official Gilbert Felli. “It was good, because we were able to go around on foot and see some of the course.”

Felli added, “[Triathlon] is something that will fit in very with the Olympic agenda.” (Carlson, 1997e, p. 10)
At the Stockholm Executive Board meeting, the International Triathlon Union was ready to put USA Triathlon on notice regarding the Ironman triathlon. In the meeting minutes, Sisson reported:

Options were given to USAT to solve the problem of the Ironman self-declared World Championships. They, the Ironman Company, will determine which name change they have chosen. If they do not change their name from Triathlon World Championships, the USAT will not sanction the Ironman event in Hawaii and will align itself with ITU.

This agreement changes the nature of ITU’s relationship with the Ironman Corp. and will create harmony. Les McDonald stated that we have strong allies in the International Sports Federations who confirm they will never tolerate a self-declared ‘World Championship’ in their sport. We are following a well trodden path.

The Executive Board agreed that USAT will not be issued a letter of ‘Good Standing’ if this situation is not resolved. (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting, 1997, p. 3; bold and underline in original text)

With the animosity increasing between the International Triathlon Union and the World Triathlon Corporation, parent company of the Ironman, using the term “world championship” in its title, WTC filed suit against the international federation. The story broke in this manner:

Precipitating the lawsuit was the threatened last-minute de-sanctioning of the Hawaii Ironman by USA Triathlon (USAT), supposedly under pressure from the ITU. In the lawsuit, filed in U.S. Federal Court, Tarpon Springs, Fla., the Florida-based WTC says the ITU threatened to remove the good-standing status of USAT – which would have resulted in loss of funding from the U.S. Olympic Committee and possible exclusion of U.S. triathletes from the Olympics – if the Ironman sanction was not withdrawn. The ITU objected to the WTC’s use of the trademarked name “Ironman Triathlon World Championship.” To keep the race sanctioned, WTC dropped the word “Triathlon” from the title.

In a Sept. 13 press release, the WTC says it doesn’t blame the USAT for not putting itself in jeopardy by ignoring ITU’s decree, but accuses the ITU of trying to gain a monopoly over the sport of triathlon, a charge long made by many athletes and event organizers. The WTC points to this year’s no-logo athlete uniform policy, delayed until
January ’98, which would have made it difficult for pros to obtain individual sponsorship, and the ITU’s four-year Olympic qualification system, which effectively forced pros to race ITU events each year to qualify for the Olympics. The WTC hopes its lawsuit will protect future opportunities for athletes and events according to WTC President Yates.

“We’re one of the few organizations left in the sport that has the resources to take a stand,” comments Yates. “Many events already are gone or remain at risk.”

He added that the WTC fully supports triathlon’s need for legitimate federation system. At the same time he notes that “this lawsuit deals with a substantive issue that ultimately will affect the sport’s future” and that “ITU re-buffed WTC’s effort to resolve this issue amicably.”

Calling the ITU’s name game “absurd,” Yates points out that ITU first tried to prevent events from using the term “world,” in any way, and are “now telling us, the best-known triathlon in the world, to stop using the word ‘triathlon’ in our name to allow USA Triathlon to sanction us as a triathlon.”

“We are asking a court to determine the boundaries of their governance, so that we can manage our business accordingly.” (Wallack, 1997, p. 12)

Addressing the USA Triathlon/Ironman issue at the International Triathlon Union Executive Board meeting in Perth, Australia in November, McDonald reported in the meeting minutes:

a) During discussions with Anita DeFrantz [sic] (IOC) (USOC), she stated that ITU should forget the Ironman conflict and proceed to develop the Olympic path.

b) Concern was expressed about the perceived conflict of interest position which Sharon Ackles, as an employee of the Ironman Corporation, is on the USAT Board.

c) Rick Margiotta stated that Ackles is the race director of the Ironman. She was re-elected to board, but is not standing for president.

d) The World Triathlon Corporation (Ironman) has filed suit against USAT, and their lawyers are looking into it. USOC is aiding USAT in the suit.

e) The major issues are marketing and copyright laws. USAT wants to settle the lawsuit and keep ITU out of it.
f) A press release was sent out by the Ironman corp. to the Australian press the week before the World Championships announcing their intention to start legal action against ITU.

g) Good standing: USAT can assume that they are in good standing (International Triathlon Executive Board, 1997)

The International Triathlon Union and Ironman disagreement now also involved the United States Olympic Committee because it was assisting USA Triathlon with the Ironman lawsuit and the International Olympic Committee as an interested party in the dispute.

1998

Spring of 1998 saw the International Triathlon Union having to scale back its World Cup Series because the marketing company it had hired a few years earlier, Pacific Sports International out of Australia, could not secure the sponsors needed for the series. Karen Williams, writing for Triathlete, summarized the situation:

The short version, however, is this. ITU signed a 10-year deal in 1996 with an Australian company, Pacific Sports International, to handle all the marketing, sponsorship and television rights for all World Cup properties. The arrangement seemed to benefit ITU more than PSI: PSI would lay out all the money that ITU needed for a $1 million World Cup campaign, plus cover all ITU operating expenses. In return, PSI would make its profit on money coming its way via television and sponsorship.

The deal turned out too good to be true. About six months ago, just before the World Championships in Perth, the two partners were at tremendous odds. PSI had been unable to land the global sponsor that would bring both the income to it, and credibility to ITU.

…The part that got left out of the version, above, is the nasty meeting between ITU and PSI in March. ITU described the parting in its release as “amicable and hospitable,” but it’s obvious the two chief officers from PSI, president David McCann and chairman David Culbert, will not be seen in the sport anytime soon.

ITU was able to announce its Cup intentions only after reacquiring the rights to World Cup from PSI. The get back price was $2.75 million – the amount for all that PSI had fronted since the start of their relationship two years earlier. The arrangement was
that $1 million was paid at the time of the announcement and with the remaining $1.75 million paid by December 21, 2000).

The ITU’s McDonald and Mike Gilmore, its managing director, aren’t saying where the financing came from to pull off the deal. But PSI, on its way out the door confirmed that it comes in the form of an unconventional “loan” from the International Olympic Committee. Apparently, the ITU has been advanced $1.3 million against the $3 million that the federations will receive as its share of the television profits from the 2000 Olympics.

It is expected that the balance owed to PSE – parent company for PSI, as PSI actually closed shop within a week of the agreement – will also come from this Olympic TV revenue distribution from the 2000 Olympics.

It’s money that, if weren’t for this past debt that ITU incurred just to unlock itself from its partnership with PSI, could have gone toward development of the sport as it moves toward 2004 and the next Olympics. (Williams, 1998, p. 34-35)

In another interview, ITU General Manager Gilmore explained the reasoning for originally hiring PSI:

The ITU originally hired PSI because they wanted “to find a major global media partner that could take triathlon from a third-level sport to something higher,” according to Michael Gilmore, ITU’s managing director. “We felt they [PSI] offered a huge television base for us to broaden the scope of the sport.” The ITU then agreed to the exclusive, 10-year agreement. And why did ITU want to end it? “The expectations weren’t met,” Gilmore said. (Stein & McMahan, 1998, p. 6)

Sisson provided additional details as to what transpired with the International Triathlon Union’s agreement with the marketing company. He said

[L]ater on when we decided we were, we needed to be an international player and start to either have an international marketing company and, uh, agencies like that we entered into some pretty bad deals all across the board. And, uh, the dates escape me now but you can get this part of the historical record but we got a deal with PSE, the Pacific Sports Entertainment….They wound up going belly under and so promises of money there were not forthcoming….We would up having to buy our rights back from that com-
pany for about $2,500,000 and we the, the ITU executives caught a lot of flack on that deal. The truth was that we couldn’t grow the sport in the prior three years without their money so if in the worse case scenario you only look at it as a loan that we were repaying it was still, still left us in [debt].

Samaranch lent us some money. The IOC lent us some money to help pay back which we then paid out of the [television distribution] fees from the 2000 Olympic Games. But we scraped by on a year-to-year basis. We scraped by somehow never running into the red but never really finding an international sponsor. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Samaranch did agree to loan ITU $1.3 million to buy back its marketing and TV rights from Pacific Sports Entertainment. “Personally, I am in favor of agreeing to his request, which will enable large numbers of athletes begin their competition season in the best conditions” (J.A. Samaranch, personal communication, March 9, 1998).

As the International Triathlon Union revamped its own World Cup schedule, the New York version of the Goodwill Games was scheduled for late July of 1998. While not an ITU specific event, it nonetheless was a highly visible event with international television and a combined men’s and women’s prize purse of $100,000 (Klinginsmith, 1998). Although it was not an International Triathlon Union individual event, it nonetheless experienced operational snags as three of the male competitors were inadvertently directed off course during the run. The race director for the event, who had directed the 1996 Olympic marathon and race walking events in Atlanta and is also the director of the Boston Marathon, was Dave McGillivray who was the race director for the 1990 Triathlon World Championship. “[I]t all came down to a confused, innocent person thinking they were doing something right by moving a few cones. Imagine that? It doesn’t take much, does it?” (Klinginsmith, 1998, p. 62). McDonald, in another interview, stated “athletes should have known where to go...this sort of thing is part of the sport” (Goodwill runs out in triathlon, 1998, p. 41).

Meanwhile, Ironman floated a settlement proposal to the International Triathlon Union in March of 1998. Seventeen items were presented to ITU for the organization to agree to as a condition for Ironman dropping its lawsuit against the international federation. The proposal was submitted to Mark Sisson from Alvin Chriss, who had previously been hired by USA Triathlon
to work on ITU issues in 1996 and who was now working for Ironman as an advisor. Some of the points included a guarantee that McDonald would not run for re-election in 2000 and input in the Olympic qualifying process. Sisson replied to the items presented by Ironman and staked out the International Triathlon Union’s stance that the international federation controls the sport of triathlon on a global scale, that ITU is willing to work with Ironman on some issues but that it is up to Congress to determine who is elected to what position within the governing body (M. Sisson, personal communication, March 26, 1998). Chriss countered with “concessions” that the International Triathlon Union not impede its sanctioning relationship with USA Triathlon, that ITU limit the number of World Cup events to no more than eight a year and that only one ITU Triathlon World Championship be held annually and that no ITU event take place either two weeks before or after Ironman (A. Chriss, personal communication, April 22, 1998). On May 15, President McDonald announced to the International Triathlon Union Executive Board that an agreement had been reached with Ironman; “la guerre est fini” (L. McDonald, personal communication, May 15, 1998). The international federation agreed to not label Ironman a self-proclaimed world championship, not sanction athletes for participating in Ironman or penalizing USA Triathlon for sanctioning the event. The World Triathlon Corporation would recognize, acknowledge and support the “Olympic aspirations of the sport of triathlon and will exercise its best efforts to insure the success of the sport of triathlon at the Sydney Olympics in the year 2000” (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 15, 1998). The lawsuit was withdrawn by the World Triathlon Corporation against ITU. Détente had been reached, for now.

Mr. Lew Friedland, the new President of the WTC negotiated in good faith, and I believe truly understands the role of ITU as the international federation responsible for triathlon on the Olympic Programme, and a united one at that – with affiliated NFs worldwide. (L. McDonald, personal communication, May 15, 1998)

1999

In 1999, both the International Olympic Committee and the International Triathlon Union were dealing with a multitude of problems. The IOC was embroiled in the Salt Lake City bid scandal which spilled over into the upcoming Sydney Games. At ITU’s Executive Board meeting in Lausanne (the home of the IOC), International Olympic Committee member, and ITU Board member, Chiharu Igaya apologized for the actions of his International Olympic Commit-
tee brethren (International Triathlon Union Winter Executive Board Meeting, 1999, p. 1). IOC member Gunnar Ericsson also spoke to the International Triathlon Union Executive Board. According to the minutes, “the IOC is the godfather, and we must trust that the reform is in good hands” (International Triathlon Union Winter Executive Board Meeting, 1999, p. 2). When asked whether or not the bid scandals had any impact on the International Triathlon Union, McDonald succinctly said “Too bad for them. It had no impact on us” (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

McDonald had his hands full once again with the German triathlon governing body. Munich had been awarded the Triathlon World Championship previously, but by early 1999 the German federation withdrew its support for the event. Problems with the event surfaced at the International Triathlon Union Executive Board meeting held in January. It was noted that the venue was changed, the race date was changed because of television and that DTU had returned the marketing rights to ITU (International Triathlon Union Winter Executive Board Meeting, 1999, p. 2). The International Triathlon Union awarded the 1999 Triathlon World Championship to Montreal, Canada.

At the 12th International Triathlon Union Congress held in Montreal in September of 1999, International Olympic Committee member and International Triathlon Union Honourary President Gunnar Ericsson provided the closing statement. In the meeting minutes Ericsson is attributed the following sentiments:

With only one year to go to the Olympics he emphasized the need to prepare to ensure that our sport stays a feature on the Olympic programme. We must show the world we are united and work as a team without forgetting free debate. Athens must become a priority. Despite the problems we have may have, we are equipped with the tools to make the impossible possible. Les McDonald has proved this. Ambitions big – resources so small he made things happen. We must all have his self-confidence. (p. 10)

Coming to a conclusion in September was the Spencer Smith positive drug test. Smith had tested positive at Ironman in 1998, a USA Triathlon sanctioned event. The positive drug test was supposed to result in a suspension of the athlete from competition. In March of 1999 the British Triathlon Association refused to recognize the results due questions concerning chain of custody. Chain of custody is the term to describe the procedures used to obtain an athlete’s
sample, secure the sample, store the sample, and then test the sample. When USA Triathlon pressed the case, Smith petitioned to an International Triathlon Union appeals panel. The “ITU panel cited inconsistencies in international doping reporting procedures and believed it had insufficient evidence to conclude that a doping violation occurred” (ITU, personal communication, September 22, 1999). In the same press release, USA Triathlon Executive Director Steve Locke expressed his frustration with the process, stating “as of today, neither panel in these two hearings has yet addressed the fact that the laboratory analysis clearly demonstrates the presence of a significant amount of nandrolone” (ITU, personal communication, September 22, 1999). However, USA Triathlon would appeal the decision to Court of Arbitration for Sport with support from the International Triathlon Union’s anti-doping committee.

2000

As the year 2000 dawned, there were high hopes for triathlon’s Olympic debut that September 16th in Sydney, Australia. With it being the first major medal competition of the Games on opening day, named a Prime Event Limitation by the International Olympic Committee meaning that only 140 IOC ticketed officials could attend the event, and having the Sydney Opera House serve as the backdrop for the event, expectations were high (Muir, 1999). “One of the top ten memories of the Games will be the wide shot of triathletes diving into the water to begin the swim,” said Dick Ebersol, president of NBC Sports at the time (Brant, 2000, p. 2). Then again, nearly nine months would pass before the excitement and charm of the Sydney Olympics would be experienced. Nine months proved to be quite enough time for another series of challenges to surface and impact the International Triathlon Union.

In March, ITU headquarters staff sent out an information packet for the upcoming Triathlon World Congress and Triathlon World Champion to be held in Perth, Australia in late April. Under the “Nominations for ITU President” a list of six names, including incumbent Les McDonald, was included (ITU, personal communication, March 6, 2000). In an Olympic year with the sport poised to be one of the shining moments of the Games, the International Triathlon Union became embroiled in an election faux pas as well as yet another problem with its marquee event. That year’s Triathlon World Championship in Perth featured “the inexcusable oversight resulting in the women running more than 2km less than the supposed 10km” (Triathlon, 2000, p. 32).
Summarizing the challenges the International Triathlon Union had over the years with its Triathlon World Championships, Sisson provided a blunt and honest answer.

[Those mistakes] cost us tremendously in the world press….It was frustrating for us ‘cause these were all things that shouldn’t happen and its, you know, you go out and measure the course, uh, you find a course marshal who knows what the measured course is and lead you on that course.

We could find ways to fuck it up. And it did not suit us as well as, uh, in some of those earlier events. World Cup events I think went, went quite well….our television got better and better it became we were able particularly with the drafting rule change we were able to put loop courses on urban locations. That really changed the television factor substantially. Now we’re able to, to showcase towns and we were going to get cities to, to a help underwrite the costs to put on world cup events because we were able to showcase cities. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

The short run course and the impact it had on the selection process for some teams would pale in comparison to what transpired during the World Congress. International Triathlon Union President McDonald was up for re-election and there was a feeling that he might be vulnerable this year because of a growing rift between McDonald and members of the European Triathlon Union (Magnay & Evans, 2000). This schism meant as many as five challengers would seek the presidency from McDonald, although reports from insiders considered only two candidates as posing a real threat to McDonald’s position (Magnay, 2000; Magnay & Evans, 2000). Austrian Erika Koenig-Zenz, the European Triathlon Union’s secretary general, and France’s Didier Lehénaff, an International Triathlon Union vice-president [who was also the head referee at the 1992 Frankfurt Duathlon World Championships] were the two supposed contenders.

Those members of European Triathlon Union who were at odds with McDonald had a litany of reasons for wishing to elect someone else. According to the meeting minutes from Perth the adoption of the previous meeting’s minutes were being challenged. In the minutes Koenig-Zenz indicated “that a number of discussions were omitted from the minutes…also informed the meeting that ETU was taking legal action against ITU for falsification of minutes” (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting Minutes, 2000, p. 1).
Some of the reasons were historical going back to the days of the failed attempt with the Triathlon Federation International. Some of the reasons were the financial situation that ITU was in because of the Pacific Sport International fiasco and having to pay back nearly $3 million to re-obtain the organization’s marketing rights. Another financial reason was McDonald had balked at an offer by WorldSport Networks to fund member federations with payments of $60,000 annually and a share of the company’s initial public offering said to be worth up to $25 million (Magnay & Evans, 2000). McDonald had concerns about sponsor exclusivity and intellectual property rights. An unnamed International Olympic Committee source also indicated that a change of leadership during an Olympic year would send the wrong message to the IOC (Magnay & Evans, 2000). Of the pending election and the potential for a hostile congress, McDonald said:

Someone in my position would say that, but it’s true. Samaranch is fond of saying the Olympic ship is full and if someone wants to get on, someone has to get off. We have to fight to stay on board. I got triathlon into the Olympics. I don’t want to be the man who got it kicked out. (Magnay & Evans, 2000)

A hostile congress it was in Perth that late April. The impediments began immediately as to who would be allowed to attend congress as a voting member and what exactly were the requirements for membership. At the heart of this issue was the legality of the member national governing bodies not sending delegates but using proxy voters to represent them. Sisson provided his view.

It was going to be a fairly heated election. The head of the European Triathlon Union, Erika Koenig-Zenz was mounting a very a substantial campaign. She, because the election was being held in Australia we had a geographic advantage, um, in that getting to Australia is expensive and so the wealthier countries could afford to get to Australia but the less, the less wealthy countries could not. And there was a discussion about who do you assist going to an act of congress particularly for an election? Um, the opposing candidate chose to find citizens living in Australia; citizens of other countries living in Australia to come vote on behalf of those countries. Uh, and that hits the nature of the proxy voting. So there were people who showed up at congress for registration who had dual citizenship. Who had an Australian passport and, uh, a Costa Rican passport who
were there to represent Costa Rica. Um, and there may or may not have been members of the Costa Rican Federation you don’t know but they clearly were not the intended delegates of the Costa Rican Federation. They were not living in Costa Rica at the time. They were driving a cab in Sydney or they were driving a cab in Perth. But enough of these people showed up and as to cast suspicion on who was attending congress.

So the, what do you call them, the people who scrutinize credentials, the credentials’ committee became very divided and on the one hand we had, uh, Henny Muller who was an officer in the European Triathlon Union that was a big supporter of Erika Koenig-Zenz who was an a member of the credentials committee and Shelia O’Kelly a devout Les McDonald supporter arguing the different, uh, perspective on some of his credentials so we had fight within the credentials committee as to who was in and who was not. So eventually it came down to closing the doors and excluding by choice, I should say one step intervening when it came to our attention that there were several countries that did not have known representation. That did not have their traditional delegates who would normally be attending congress, um, we convened an emergency meeting of the executive board and essentially examined the credentials of everybody and, um, and admitted some and excluded others and we did so based on what limited information we had. Then we held an election based on who was allowed in to vote. We eventually got sued by the Costa Rican Federation but it was financed by the losing faction of Erika Koenig-Zenz and her group. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

In an e-mail to a now defunct website *Triathlon Digest*, journalist Katherine Williams wrote about her observations at Perth having been banned from attending the proceedings of the ITU Congress.

With security guards blocking the entrance to the Terrace Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Perth, even a press photographer was escorted from a public area when he attempted to take pictures of one of “The Perth Nine”, David Rudd, the delegate for Venezuela, as his path in to the Congress hall was barred. An ITU official manning the door then instructed the security guards to prevent the photographer taking pictures of the barred delegates even as they discussed their situation with other representatives as they
queued to enter the Congress. (K. Williams, personal communication, April 27, 2000)

According to the minutes of the International Triathlon Union Executive Board on April 27, the previous day’s scene was described this way:

Les McDonald opened the meeting with the announcement that a number of improprieties had occurred during Congress registration the day before. Acting according to Section 5.5b of the ITU Constitution, “the Executive Board supervises and gives guidance to the Standing Committees”, he recommended that the work of the Credentials Committee be suspended and that this meeting of the ITU Executive Board make a final ruling on delegate status for a number of federations.

Loreen Barnett outlined the incidents that occurred as follows:

a) During registration, David Rudd (Canada) appeared several times trying to register from Venezuela. He was given an official Congress registration form and asked that it be completed and signed by the President or Secretary General of the Venezuelan Triathlon Federation.

b) At approximately 15 minutes before closing time, a group of local Australians gathered around Jorge Mejia, Columbia and President of the Pan-American Triathlon Confederation (PATCO) who distributed documents allegedly from NOCs in Latin America. Jorge Mejia’s intent was to register the local Australians as delegates (some of who were immigrants from Latin America countries). None of the IFs in question had sent an official Congress registration form to ITU Headquarters, and several of the countries were not affiliated to ITU. (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting Minutes, 2000)

It should be noted that the minutes were recorded by Barnett.

The fallout over the Perth election spilled over into the realm of the International Olympic Committee. IOC President Samaranch was contacted by the secretary general of the Asian Triathlon Confederation in early May of 2000 regarding the outcome of the election. Responding to the individual’s protest of what took place in Perth, Samaranch simply replied in writing

As you are aware, the International Olympic Committee fully supports the President of the ITU, Mr [sic] Les McDonald, who was democratically elected by his peers and who, I am sure will continue to serve the Union to the best of his abilities. (J.A. Samaranch, per-
Others began to rally around McDonald and offer their support. The president of the national governing body Triathlon Canada wrote to McDonald pledging his support.

Following Congress in Perth, I spoke briefly to Anne Marie Geshwend, the newly nominated regional representative to ITU for Europe. I expressed to her the collective disgust by all of the members of the Canadian delegation attending Congress with respect to the sad comments and immature behaviour of Erika Konig-Zenz, the defeated Presidential candidate. Ms. Konig-Zenz clearly demonstrated to all delegates present that she lacks the maturity, wisdom, skills and basic “common sense” necessary to lead any international sports federation. Her personal attack on you following her defeat was utterly disgraceful.

Furthermore, what was particularly galling to Triathlon Canada was the farce of this so called “opposition” (led by Ms. Konig-Zenz) in presenting David Rudd, a Canadian and former member of the Triathlon Canada Board of Directors (and one who has done nothing for our sport in over five (5) years, as the official delegate from Venezuela!! It is truly unfortunate that this group would stoop to such lows to achieve their collective goal. (W.J. Hallet, personal communication, May 11, 2000)

Providing some additional on-the-ground insight, then USA Triathlon Executive Director Locke added his thoughts to what happened in Perth.

Well after I ran against Les, he does have a tendency to piss people off. And, uh, I think that what happened is that Europeans developed, they became pretty unhappy for many of the same reasons that we were unhappy with Les and his abusive behavior and that sort of thing. He wasn’t collegial at all. It was all intimidation, uh, and so I think the Europeans felt that they had a pretty good block vote. With I think 54 votes, 54 countries at that time. They can probably have a legitimate opportunity to beat him in the election so they ended up running Erika Koenig-Zenz.

And she was they would have won probably had they had a legitimate candidate….One of person that, uh, is not, not a real good politician and that she was a damn good athlete for her country and that was pretty much it. And she ran her campaign and
she did the best she could and I think she ended up I think she ended up with 24 votes and Les ended up with 36 votes I think.

And had there been a good legitimate candidate Les would have lost. I think Les knew he was in trouble and I think that he was, uh, very careful every step of the way to be sure to blunt every movement they were making, the other side was making. Uh, the instance was the proxy vote situations that were set up and, uh, he ended up very lucky on that. And that he didn’t lose the election but he was concerned enough where he was, that was as political congress that there ever was. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

In the end, McDonald was re-elected to another term by an official vote of 36 to 20. With emotions still running high, his re-election did not end the controversy surrounding the congress. “McDonald kept us out of the Congress because he knew we were going to vote against him,” David Rudd [a Canadian] said, acting as the Venezuelan delegate (Powell, 2000). Seven countries then decided to pursue the results of the election through the court system. Koenig-Zenz was quoted in a newspaper article accusing McDonald of “doing anything to cling to his power” (Powell, 2000).

The Congress also passed a resolution which could have been named the “Mark Sisson Rule.” Previously, ITU had no residency requirements for individuals seeking elected positions. Sisson had joined another national governing body several years earlier at a time when USA Triathlon would not support him. Now any “candidates for office must be a citizen of the country nominating him or her” (International Triathlon Union Congress Minutes, 2000, p. 6). Sisson, who was up for re-election as the ITU Secretary General. His opponent was German federation (DTU) President Engelhart. Sisson was re-elected as Secretary General.

The late April election, and bickering between members of the International Triathlon Union and McDonald, caught the attention of the International Olympic Committee. In a Sydney Morning Herald story, an unnamed IOC source indicated that triathlon could be removed from the Olympic competition program immediately after the Sydney Games. “If McDonald is ousted in what is a simple political play, then there is no place for the sport on the Olympic program,” the source said (Magnay & Evans, 2000, p. 30). Since triathlon was a provisional sport, meaning
that it would be re-evaluated after Sydney, anything remotely associated with a negative image was of concern for the leadership, especially McDonald, of the International Triathlon Union.

Still chafing from McDonald’s re-election in Perth, a resolution was introduced at the European Triathlon Union’s Congress in July. According to Williams’ reports to Triathlon Digest the resolution was introduced by the Irish delegation, which had been barred from the Perth Congress, to declare those elections null and void. The resolution read:

Be it resolved, by all the national federations present, that all elections conferred at the ITU Congress in Perth in April 2000 be classified as null and void because of the undemocratic and unconstitutional method in which they were arrived. (K. Williams, personal communication, July, 2000)

The European Triathlon Union’s Executive Board, understandably wary of once again skirmishing with the international federation issued a statement to distance itself from the views of its member organizations. ETU President Lehénaff said “This was not something for the ETU board to consider. It was a question for the national federations.” The national federations have the opportunity to call for an ‘Extraordinary Congress’ of the ITU by securing 1/3 of the membership to support the request (K. Williams, personal communication, July 2000).

Lehénaff was culpable with regards to the entire Perth election problems in the eyes of the president of the French triathlon federation (FFTri), who was also a member of the International Triathlon Union’s Executive Board. In a two page letter to ITU President McDonald and ITU Secretary General Mark Sisson, Jacques Laparade provided his views on the events leading up to Perth, during the Congress, and the aftermath. Laparade wrote:

Prior to the Congress in Perth, the Federation Française de Triathlon received a number of messages criticizing the way ITU was conducted and claiming that time had come to replace the Board members who were all more or less incapable to administrate the ITU. Furthermore it was alleged that there was a possibility that embezzlement could have occurred.

No documents of any kind was produced to prove this.

These letters were issued in particular by members of the European Triathlon Union led by its President Didier Lehenaff.
He approached me, asserting an important IOC member had asked him to constitute a replacement team to take over ITU, and seeking support. At the same time Mr Lehenaff as the French Federation board for appointment to election which was denied by the board. He looked then, for appointment from another NF eventually affiliated to ITU. This was extremely badly perceived by the French Ministry of Youth and Sport of which Mr Lehenaff is an executive, and strong remarks were made by me when in Sydney for the test event by the French Embassy Olympic Attaché.

All these manoeuvres started time before congress, and we incidentally learned, that in order to break unity in the ITU family, they planned to name for election at the head of the ITU, as well as in Committees numbers of members of their federations none of them had ever taken any interest in working for unity and development of ITU. The german [sic] Federation showing the way with an important number of candidates. The call for Congress testifies to this sudden interest.

During the Perth Congress, it became immediately clear that not being able to prove any of their previous allegations, the anti ITU party would try to disturb the congress possibly in order to obtain an adjournment.

The constitution of the group leave no doubt on the lobbying ETU President and Secretary General had done on some European and South American NFs. Pointless discussions, irrelevant remarks, misreading of the ITU constitution were use to disguise their opposition.

The President of the German Federation made attempts to upset the agenda with irrelevant speech.

More recently during the ETU congress in Stein the same NF’s led by Martin Engelhardt President of the German Federation presented a resolution to void the results of the election in Perth. We did not support this resolution and voted against. The President’s double vote was needed to pass that resolution. This shows that many European NFs do not support their leading team on the matter.

At this crucial moment of our associating life, when disinterested efforts of so many have brought us to the supreme goal, the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, I can only tell my profound contempt facing such unnamable behaviour.
As the President, and on behalf of the Fédération Française de Triathlon I state formally that the Congress held in Perth was conducted according to the principles and followed all sections of the ITU Constitution and was supported by a large majority of delegates attending.

Our Federation stands proudly by the elected members and support the policy led by President Les MacDonald, for the best of the sport and the athletes.

We will not accept this “coup d’état” (J. Laparade, personal communication, August 29, 2000; bold in original text)

By late July of 2000, the German Triathlon Union filed a petition with the Supreme Court of British Columbia, supported by five other NGBs, that the Perth elections violated the International Triathlon Union constitution. Germany, Ireland, Costa Rica, Cook Islands, Poland, Honduras and Venezuela were the six national federations contesting the election. Three members, Germany, Ireland, and Poland, are members of the European Triathlon Union. ITU had wanted the Court of Arbitration for Sport to hold the hearing but the lawyers representing the six national governing bodies were able to have their grievances heard in British Columbia, the home province of the International Triathlon Union.

At the Executive Board meeting held in conjunction with the Sydney Olympics in September, the minutes reflect numerous discussion points.

a) The writ by Martin Engelhardt, DTU is due to be heard in court on 2 October 2000.

b) Congress 2000 is the main focus, with alleged violations of the constitution with regards 20% women and the admission of delegates.

c) Our main argument will be the BC court has no jurisdiction. We have had to hire a Canadian law firm.

d) $15,000 has been allocated from the budget. It will cost a lot more.

e) Negative PR seems to be Mr. Engelhardt’s objective.

f) We are on top of it, but we have a lot of work to do.

gh) Annemarie Geschwend stated that it is important to note that Erika Köing-Zenz, Secretary of ETU is acting on her own, not on the behalf of ETU.
h) Those NFs who have taken action against the ITU Constitution should be expelled.

i) President McDonald stated the constitution clearly states the action that can be taken.

j) Should we apply the constitution? It was decided that in cases where the NF was suspended, this would not impact the eligibility of the athletes.

k) Mark Sisson announced that we are pursuing channels through the Court of Arbitration for Sport. Mathieu Reed, CAS has given us a letter stating CAS would hear the case. We will show the BC court that CAS is in agreement to have all disputes go before CAS.

l) Annemarie Geschwend stated that we need one competition rules and one constitution for ITU and all regions.

m) The Executive Board agreed that ITU will suspend all NFs who have filed the writ – Carried unanimously. (ITU Executive Board Meeting Minutes, 2000, p. 3)

Thus, the year 2000 ended with the sport of triathlon making its Olympic debut with the Sydney Opera House serving as the backdrop. The year also ended with the International Triathlon Union facing legal action by several of its member national governing bodies.

When asked to define the International Triathlon Union, Sisson said

Oh, I think we became, we became exactly like the others. And again not to pass judgment, it’s not good nor bad but, um, the nature of the organization was such that in the early days we had to do that required more liberal interpretation of the rules, uh, certainly the number of federations that we created. Uh, if you were to go and look in the financial records of every federation we created and historical documentation of every federation that was created for ITU, not all of them would, would fit the concept of a true national federation in that within the prescribed rules and regulations of the IOC. Um, it didn’t negatively affect us. But had anyone gone in and said I think this federation that you got running out of this guy’s garage, uh, in Ivory Coast is probably not really a federation. Uh, we could have been called on that. But we had athletes. We had international representation. We started a world cup series that gave us cachet and gave our athletes an opportunity to compete on world scale, uh, so we had again but other federations did the
same thing. We are not like the others but we created a world cup. I mean that’s what a lot of other federations do. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 29, 2005)

However, Sisson waxed a touch nostalgic and offered this analysis of the International Triathlon Union’s creation and development:

I can summarize it by saying that it was, that it was a wildly successful effort on the part of a handful of people: a handful of dedicated people. Um, in, in doing what no one had ever done before and that is creating an Olympic sport out of basically thin air. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Post-Sydney

The lawsuit filed against the International Triathlon Union by six national federations was more than just a squabble within an organization. Because the suit had been accepted by the Supreme Court of British Columbia the International Olympic Committee took an interest in the ongoing problems of ITU.

The ITU had originally maintained that the civil court did not have any jurisdiction in the matter, which they wanted heard at the Lausanne-based Court for Arbitration in Sport. But Justice Gill ruled against the ITU in this matter, saying that the world governing body’s constitution did not have a proper appeal procedure, and as such gave no opportunity for the petitioners to take their protest to the sports court (a ruling which CAS itself has confirmed). (Downes, 2001)

In May of 2001, ITU and the European Triathlon Union’s General Secretary Erika Koenig-Zenz exchanged barbs because of a letter written by her that was highly critical of ITU (Elford, 2001). The following month, with the results of the court case looming on the horizon, International Triathlon Union President McDonald traveled to London to meet with International Olympic Committee Sport Director Felli to discuss a possible end of hostilities between ITU and the petitioning national governing bodies at odds with the international federation (Downes, 2001). In a fax to McDonald dated June 15, Felli reiterated just how high the stakes were for the two warring parties, the International Triathlon Union and the German Triathlon Federation (DTU).

In this negotiation, I have the feeling, even though both the ITU, orally to the IOC President and the DTU, through a letter, have asked the IOC to settle the difference of opinion
between both parties, both parties want to use the IOC not to give proposal for a settlement but to impose their own views. This is probably why the DTU is very reluctant to withdraw the Court case as they have got the feeling that as soon as the Court case has been withdrawn, any other discussions will be stopped.

So, as the President of the ITU, I leave you the responsibility to make sure that the sport of triathlon remains in order, as we do not want to have any problems during the period preceding the Olympic Games in Athens. (G. Felli, personal communication, June 15, 2001)

There was concern that a negative ruling against the International Triathlon Union by the British Columbia Supreme Court might weaken the Court of Arbitration for Sport’s ability to handle disputes. In USA Triathlon’s “Weekly Report” dated December 15, 2001 there were rumors being floated that triathlon could be removed from the competition program for the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics if the lawsuit proceeded. In the report it was written:

McDonald and the ITU had been under fire most directly because they had failed to respond to two letters from the IOC this year asking for explanations of complaints against the ITU from South American and European triathlon individuals and organizations.

New IOC President Jacques Rogge of Belgium was reportedly upset by political power struggles within the ITU and three months ago wrote to the ITU warning that the sport risked being expelled from the Olympics unless the disputes were resolved. He demanded that a “clear resolution to the pending disputes” be presented before the IOC’s executive board meeting December 12 in Lausanne. (USA Triathlon Weekly Report, 2001)

European Triathlon Union President Lehénaff wrote to McDonald pledging his support to ITU but warned that other factions might not cease opposition. Lehénaff had his own troubles within ETU having been ousted in a no confidence vote in November of 2001 led by Koenig-Zenz, the European Triathlon Union Secretary General. That action wound up before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Empfield, November 30, 2001; USA Triathlon Weekly Report, 2001).

On December 4, 2001 Secretary General Mark Sisson issued a memo to the International Olympic Committee President and the IOC Executive Board. Titled “Health of Triathlon,” Sisson sought to alleviate their fears and ask for assistance in disseminating the information to
the media. Sisson reviewed the lawsuit that had been heard in British Columbia and wrote that “unfortunately, the case was submitted to a civil court and a judge accepted jurisdiction rather than allow the case to proceed through CAS” (M. Sisson, personal communication, December 4, 2001). He noted that several of the national federations that had originally filed the suit had withdrawn from the case, including the Germans. Concerning the relationship with the European Triathlon Union, Sisson acknowledged that leadership within ETU was divided but that “we are confident that relations with ETU will continue to improve in the coming months.”

By January 2002 the court case had been resolved. The International Triathlon Union was vindicated by Justice Madam Gill of the British Columbia Supreme Court but received a rebuke from the Justice in issuing her opinion (Downes, 2002). Justice Gill was critical of the way the Perth Congress handled the issue of proxy voters, that McDonald overruled the credentials committee before Congress met, that previous Congresses had allowed proxy voting, and that the ITU Constitution was inconsistent (Downes, 2002). The case was over and the International Triathlon Union was now able to look towards the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and attempt to heal the wounds and divisions that had troubled the international federation since its formation in 1989.

**Leadership and the ITU**

*Nous ne sommes pas les autres.* We are not like the others. If the International Triathlon Union has a motto this would be it. McDonald’s quote has even been placed on ITU publications. Sisson, the former ITU Secretary General, explained

It tried to convey an image that we’re not going to be the heavy-handed bureaucratic, uh, old guard where the federation is run by people who have never done the sport or people who don’t care about the athletes but in fact care more about whatever kind of side deals they can make. That was kind of the perception at least Les had of other federations. Uh, we were clearly the hip younger energetic good looking charismatic federation or athletes. We come from an age group background all of us within the administration inside the sport to this day Les still holds the record for, um, I think he’s the only age grouper who had never to have been beaten in his age group in any triathlon. Um, maybe there is one or two now but we all come, we were all athletes so we all knew what we were talking about in terms of what the athletes wanted. That was one aspect that was we are not
like the others. Um, ironically I think he also wanted to convey that we were going to be a totally democratic organization, uh, in how we handle our business but in fact we turned out to be less democratic than he perhaps thought we were. I mean he was very idealistic in that regard. And that’s not to say, that, that’s not to cast judgment on it, but I don’t think we’re as democratic as he fancied us being. Um, but nevertheless we considered ourselves not like the others. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Les McDonald has been the only president the International Triathlon Union has had since its formation in 1989. His involvement in the sport began in the early 1980s as a competitor. Sisson had this to say about McDonald:

He was running point quite early….but Les was the one who they all immediately identified as having the most time available, the most energy the most number of contacts and probably the most experience. He had been a trade union negotiator. [He] was used to long hours of pressing the flesh. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

From his early work in trying to mediate the differences between the U.S. and some of the European governing bodies as the Federation International Triathlon attempted to coalesce (Johnson, 1988), McDonald was involved intensely in creating an international federation for the sport of triathlon. Former British Triathlon Association delegate to the inaugural International Triathlon Union World Congress, Coulson wrote that McDonald “was very visionary at that time and was clearly very single minded in his mission to create an international body for triathlon” (P. Coulson, personal communication, August 25, 2005).

Before continuing it may be helpful to know something of the McDonald’s background so that information provided later on will provide the reader with some points of reference. Coulson wrote:

First let me give you some views based on my association with Les McDonald from my own knowledge and from that that has been written.

He was originally from the North East of England where I come from and indeed he was a member of the same Scout Group although I was younger and my involvement was at a later period. The basis of that Scout Group was outdoor activities such as mountaineering, canoeing, rockclimbing and skiing [sic] in which I also took part so we had a common interest.
McD was an electrician by trade and worked on Tyneside in the 1950's where he was, I understand, an active member of the British Communist Party and a member of the Electrical Trade Union. The Electrical Trade Union was strongly influenced by communist party members at that time...The modus operandi of the Union during that period of the early 50's is described in an Obituary of the then President Frank Chappell, published last year in The Times, as intimidation, vote rigging and violence which he moved successfully to eradicate.

McD is reported to have emigrated to Canada in about 1954 where he continued his work as an electrician and, as I understand, with his involvement with Trade Union matters. I also believe that he became involved with Canadian skiing in some way.

He had cemented a strong relationship with Juan Antonio Samaranch, the IOC President, who appeared very keen to see triathlon on the Olympic Programme and many of the letters McD sent to him and received from him confirmed that. It was rumoured that Samaranch's [sic] son was viewing this new sport as a vehicle to move his own career in sport forward! (P. Coulson, personal communication, August 25, 2005)

Multi-sport journalist Mike Plant described McDonald in a 1989 article as “a compact, ruddy-faced Scottish expatriate from Vancouver, a former ski-racer and a heck of a triathlete (in 1987 he set the existing Bud Light Ironman 50-54 age group record of 10:55:32)” (Plant, 1989, p. 18). Another journalist echoed Plant’s description.

McDonald, a ruddy-faced Canadian who was born in Northumberland, a country in the northern section of England, has been indefatigable in his efforts to organize the sport worldwide, and to gain the sport’s inclusion in the Olympic Games. Working part-time in the electrical industry, the 57-year-old McDonald spends most of his time at the office of H.A. Simmons VCR, an international engineering company which allows McDonald to use its fax machine to send and receive a never-ending stream of correspondence about triathlon from around the world. (Graham, 1990a, p. 35-36)

McDonald described his background in a magazine interview:

I’ve been involved in sport ever since I was a kid growing up in England. We have a long tradition in our family. My grandfather, for instance, was a British boxing champion and my grandfather’s brother was a racing cyclist. When I was a kid, I was a boxer
and soccer player, and when I was in my teens, I was heavily involved in rock climbing, since that was the big thing in Britain after the war. By the time I was 18, I’d climbed the Matterhorn – the east face; I’d been on the Eiger and climbed new routes in Norway in the Alps. When I came to Canada, I came as a professional soccer player. In fact, when people say I know nothing about the professional aspect of this sport, they’re wrong. I’ve been a professional athlete like them, and I’m familiar with their point of view.

I was on the ski team in Canada, and after I quit racing – I was a downhill specialist – I came back to Canada to coach. I helped form a club that coached kids in skiing, running, cross-country skiing and other events – a true multi-sport club. In 1982, when we first heard of triathlon, we thought it was a good idea. And it was natural to the kind of training we were doing. I organized the first triathlon in Vancouver, the first in Canada, I believe. Since then I’ve won every single triathlon I’ve entered, including Hawaii Ironman, in I won my age group five times.

My background has been as a trade union leader, a leader of an electrical workers union. My specialty was organizing unemployed people and organizing people in low-areas – particularly women. I organized some pretty big strikes, but never as a paid official. As the president of my union, those questions – the questions of women’s rights and racial equality – you must deal with at the very core. If you’re going to be a trade unionist, you find out right away that everybody’s the same. (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 26)

Just before the Sydney Olympic Games, Sydney Morning Herald reporter Caroline Overington wrote about McDonald and his determination to see triathlon in the Olympics.

[During the 1980s] the main event, though, was the Ironman, a massive test of endurance comprising a 3km swim, 180km bike race and a marathon, held in Hawaii’s searing heat. McDonald himself competed seven times, which is why he now says nothing will ever kill him.

The Ironman was the event most triathletes wanted to win. Actually, most just wanted to finish. But, however much the athletes loved the Ironman, there was no way the IOC was going to let such a monster into the Olympics. They already had a marathon, after all. Something would have to be done, and the someone to do it was a snowyhaired
Scotsman who is now president of the International Triathlon Union. McDonald dropped out of school at 14, worked in a shipyard until he was conscripted to the British Army and migrated to Canada to be with a woman he loved.

Triathlon was not his first sport. It isn't even held in his preferred weather. McDonald is obsessed with snow skiing and mountain climbing. One memorable afternoon when he was much younger, he took a chainsaw into the mountains outside his home and cleared his own crosscountry path. (Overington, 2000, p. 10)

Former USA Triathlon Executive Director Steve Locke described his first meeting and impressions of McDonald.

[T]he first time I met Les McDonald, uh, was in Columbia for the organizational meeting to create PATCO [Pan American Triathlon Confederation]…. We met at St. Andreas Island and [I] met Les for the first time and, and he was an interesting, blustery kinda character that really dominated and browbeat everyone there at the meeting. And because he wanted some things done in a certain way and included was the establishment of PATCO as a regional federation and it be done properly. And when you're dealing with a lot of Latinos it became a macho exercise and prolonged and very frustrating to him I remember. We finally got it done and we became good friends actually during that first meeting because I was willing to sit there and listen and for hours to him pontificate and so it was pretty interesting listening to him what he had to say. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

McDonald had organizational skills having been a union leader, he had a varied background in sport ranging from competitive skiing to mountain and rock climbing to triathlon, he wanted a democratic organization, and he had a strong personality. His lobbying and networking skills were most helpful to the young organization.

It was the stories and the ability to “press the flesh” that made McDonald a persuasive lobbyist. Sisson provided examples of his persistence.

This was for Les, it was a never ending challenge, uh, a pursuit that he was not going to take lightly or ever give up on. Uh, he quickly learned the names of every IOC member, learned about their wives, their families, learned about their backgrounds, learned about their countries’ history. It was quite interesting to watch Les go into a bar and talk to
some IOC member from Eastern Europe and start to educate that IOC member on the history of his own country. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

He added that there was something that drove him towards this goal of creating an international federation and getting triathlon in the Olympics.

I think the things that Les had going for him more than anything else is paranoia - a real strong paranoia. Paranoia that things are not going well. Paranoia that, that, yeah, we’re in the Games one time but we could be kicked off tomorrow. Paranoia that, um, that this upcoming elections will go drastically wrong. And it’s been that paranoia that’s been, again in my opinion, been a major driving force. But in a good way because it, whatever it takes to motivate someone. Les is clearly a very motivated person and people have said, well you know, Samaranch’s support with Gunnar Ericsson’s backing with the way things happened triathlon probably would have gotten into the Games without Les McDonald. And my response is I don’t think so.

I think Les is, you know, you had to say single handedly, but had Les not been there and, and any one of the number of people, influential triathlon people, that I can think of, had been at the helm, probably wouldn’t have made it. Les was, you know, the driving force. And it all got down to, you know, he was retired. He owned his own house. He wasn’t rich but he was self-sufficient. He had the time. He had the energy. He had the drive to, to and the willingness to glad hand and meet people and talk to people and spend countless hours educating people. One of his strengths was the amount of time he spent individually with each board member. Individually educating each board member on what had happened the last several months. You know, before a, before an executive board meeting would happen you would arrive at the hotel at any point in the day and there’s Les in the lounge with, uh, a bowl of peanuts in front of him holding court, and he will greet you at the door and say and before you can check into your hotel room he’s already downloaded you on all that is going on and all the who’s who in the zoo and what’s happening who’s voting which way and who you have to go talk to swing your vote. So he was very politically astute and still is very politically astute that way. I think that’s what happened now because we’re in the Games. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005; italics added to show speaker’s emphasis)
Others further identified McDonald’s drive and determination.

The ITU has been a driving force behind the growing strength of triathlon, bringing organization and stability that the sport has sorely been lacking. “Les has brought more progress to the sport than any other person that I can think of,” says Bill Leach. “The difference with Les and the rest is that he has made the sport bigger than himself and has kept that perspective. As even he says, ‘Someone had to do it.” (Graham, 1990a, p. 37)

A member of the British triathlon delegation to the Sydney Games provided additional accolades regarding McDonald’s perseverance.

McDonald was the driving force who knew how to jump through the Olympic hoops to get into the Games. Many purists in triathlon did not think the Olympics were important but he did. It is phenomenal to think that, in 22 years, we have gone from nothing to the Olympics. (Powell, 2000)

McDonald, however, deflected such accolades, especially when he suspected there are ulterior motives by those providing them. In a brusque memo to Lehénaaff, who was an International Triathlon Union vice-president and the president of the European Triathlon Union at one time, who had asked McDonald to speak at a sports symposium after yet another round of skirmishes with the European Triathlon Union, McDonald wrote:

1. Please remove my name from the introduction to the INSEP Symposium. I am opposed to cronyism in all its forms. I am violently opposed to the ‘cult of the individual’ whether in politics, sport or life in general.

2. No single person should be identified as having more important than anyone else, ‘and particularly president Les McDonald’ in Triathlons successful debut in the Olympic Games.

3. Incidentally, there are names on the list of invitees who, quite frankly, have a record of hostility towards ITU. Some we have specifically discussed in Executive Board meetings and others are scheduled to testify for the Ironman Corporation against ITU in a very serious legal action against us.

4. Your political insensitivity is confusing at best. (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 30, 1998)
He is also willing and able to respond to any criticism leveled at him and/or ITU that he feels is unwarranted and malicious. *Australian Triathlete* magazine interviewed Alvin Chriss who was helping the Professional Triathlete Guild (PTG) organizing (Chriss was also involved with USA Triathlon and Ironman in positions that put him at odds with the International Triathlon Union). The Professional Triathlete Guild had all but disappeared by 1998 and the interview with Chriss provided information about its demise. McDonald responded to the article’s author with a 10-point, two page memo outlining errors and observations (L. McDonald, personal communication, March 14, 1998). In another *Australian Triathlete* article, former International Triathlon Union World Champion Simon Lessing was interviewed and was critical of ITU. McDonald wrote the magazine a four-page response, addressing each claim Lessing made.

There is also the optimist and dreamer within McDonald. When asked in 1992 what is goals were for ITU, McDonald replied

To organize the world’s national triathlon governing bodies to a higher level, so that the sport is consolidated and elevated in each of those countries. That means that we have to get the guys from our technical committee out here and show them how to organize a race.

Secondly, in each of those countries we must organize junior training programs, so we’re not accused of stealing athletes from track and field and swimming and cycling, federations and so that the IOC, the sponsors and the individual governments, who can provide funding, can see that we’re not just a bunch of guys having fun.

My job is to go to the government in this country, right now, and say, you saw how popular it [the World Championships in Muskoka] was. Help us with funding. I’m taking to the mayor of this town—who can says his town made $3 million from this event—to tell the government that we need money right now for a junior development program. We need to get full-time coaches in every country in the world, like they do in every other sport. Only through these programs will we continue to attract serious athletes.

The second thing we must accomplish is to make the World Cup Series work for the professional athlete. We have go to prove to the world—to the Simon Lessings of the work, the real young heroes who are coming up—that they shouldn’t leave us. They
should stick with us because we’re going to make it easier for them to make a living out of this sport. (A conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 26)

It was this desire and determination that came to define McDonald in the eyes of both supporters and detractors. In a magazine interview several individuals commented about McDonald’s almost singular focus on the Olympics. One professional triathlete said:

Les’ number one goal from the beginning was to put triathlon on the Olympic program. To his credit, he achieved it against insurmountable odds. But to be an Olympic sport, you have to be like every other Olympic sport. You have to be controlled tightly by a central international governing body. You need a vast, enforceable set of rules, and you have to be somewhat spectator friendly for TV. Les’ mission has been to take the individualistic and independent sport of triathlon and alter it to fit through the eye of the needle. He has done that.

As far as the Olympic opportunities—50 people will benefit from that every four years but who pays the price? To be in the Olympics requires gross standardization of rules and proliferation of drafting, which changes the fundamental nature of the sport.

Now the banning of Mike Pigg, Mark Allen and me for competing in the Surfer’s Paradise World Cup last year in Australia should be looked at in detail. I feel it was a way for the ITU to flex its muscles and show the IOC it controls the professional aspect of the sport. (Carlson, 1995, p. 39)

Sisson, in the same article, stated:

We lucked out when we picked Les as president of the ITU. No other person could have done it as brilliantly as Les in the big picture. And no one would have spent so much of his own money and worked 52 weeks a year, 80 hours a week over the last seven years.

Is Les a dictator? Nothing further from the truth. Much of the direction the ITU took, Les fought. But like any good leader, the buck stops with Les. He takes the heat for all of us. (Carlson, 1995, p. 40)

An American with ties to professional triathletes, and who would become the North American representative to International Triathlon Union, pointed out that

Les took abuse for a vision that nobody could believe in the beginning. I remember in 1988, Les was talking about having a world cup of triathlon. He told me about a series
where athletes are flown in for free and there is an average of $40,000 prize money. Last year I found myself in Osaka, Japan, saying “Holy s*#@, it’s here.” He did that sleeping on the floors of people who would serve on the federations of emerging countries, and he helped them organize their first national governing bodies. The fact that anyone would detract from his efforts is beyond me.

It was tough getting the Euros and North Americans and Australians together. Then Les told them: First you will pay women equally or there won’t be a world championship. That spoke of his integrity. He risked everything to take that stance. In the end, the difference that defines Les from everyone else in the sport is that Les did what he did solely because he thought he was doing the right thing. (Carlson, 1995, p. 41)

In the beginning, through the demise of Triathlon Federation International, McDonald was credited as being a diplomat. In January of 1989, USA Triathlon was trying to recover from a tumultuous previous year as the governing body was on the verge of imploding due to infighting among members of the Board of Directors, the Executive Director and national office staff (Plant, 1988a, 1988b). At a Board of Directors meeting McDonald assumed the role of peacekeeper between some of the factions. The “impromptu forum” consisting of some of the warring factions could have either been one of silence and disdain or histrionics, but neither situation arose in part because of some civility between the parties.

[However, it was] also to the presence of Triathlon Canada’s Les McDonald, who sat between Thomas and Kidder and held forth with a stream of side-splitting stories – parables, really – most of them shrewdly applicable to the business at hand, rendered in voices from McDonald’s seemingly inexhaustible library of far-flung accents…As president of Triathlon Canada, and therefore the single neutral party in St. Louis, McDonald played the role of Henry Kissinger, chairing most of the meeting and shuttling back and forth behind the scenes, arguing, cajoling, bargaining and keeping the focus of the session where it belonged: consensus. (Plant, 1989, p. 18)

McDonald is a prolific storyteller and many of his tales are more parables rather than just being informative or entertaining. As the author found it is quite challenging to keep him on task as he meanders and weaves his way through history and culture before returning to the initial question, having answered it in much more detail and meaning than a contemporary sound-bite.  McDo-
ald incorporates enough historical, and at times, obscure references to keep most people on their toes just to keep up as the author discovered through the course of interviews. Tales about the French war in Algiers, the Russian Revolution, political systems, ancient family feuds, and apartheid were included in the discussions.

As triathlon’s self-appointed diplomat and lobbyist, not everything went according to plan. Those lobbying efforts include missteps, comedy and some disbelief. Like the time he “spent $100 buying double scotches for a distinguished looking gentleman at the hotel bar at an IOC meeting in France who, after several drinks, agreed that triathlon was a fine sport and should be in the Olympics, which was nice except he had nothing to do with the IOC” (Overington, 2000, p. 10). “He was the waiter,” McDonald explained, “and while all this was happening a group Australians were watching and laughing” (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006). The Aussies pointed him in the right direction.

Whenever and wherever he had the opportunity to lobby for triathlon he did and credentials were optional. At one early lobbying effort, McDonald was unable to enter the building where the International Olympic Committee was meeting because he did not have credentials. After all, the International Triathlon Union was simply a self-proclaimed international federation. However, IOC member Gunnar Ericsson knew the importance of McDonald attending this meeting and getting to know other IOC members. To circumvent the security, Ericsson went into a men’s bathroom, opened a window, and McDonald squeezed through the window. Ericsson gave McDonald his credential and McDonald spent the rest of the meeting wearing the IOC credentials of another man (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

Koenig offered this interpretation of the process:

Wherever an IOC session took place, a triathlon took place. McDonald was superb in organizing this. The IOC delegates always “fell over” triathletes when entering congress room. They must have thought that this is “the” sport. Done everywhere. (E. Koenig, personal communication, February 26, 2006)

McDonald traveled the globe meeting, lobbying and doing whatever was necessary to advance the cause of both the International Triathlon Union and triathlon becoming a part of the Olympic family. Never one to miss an opportunity to work a room, McDonald was in attendance
At the Beijing International Triathlon in late May of 1990. The situation was described in this manner:

At the front of the room was a long table where VIP’s sat. Les McDonald, president of the International Triathlon Union, sat next to He Zhenliang, president of the Chinese Olympic Committee and a vice-president of the IOC. McDonald was in China for more than just the race. He hoped to convince He Zhenliang to vote for the inclusion of triathlon into the ’96 Games. Time was running out for McDonald’s (and the sport’s) hopes for 1996; the IOC vote on triathlon’s request for inclusion in mid-September of this year. McDonald, having lobbied for a year and a half, had just three months to sway the final two IOC board members he’d not yet received a promise of support from: He Zhenliang, and Vitaly Smirnov of the Soviet Union. According to McDonald, he’d gained the support for triathlon from every member of the IOC board, but there was no blueprint for gaining Olympic acceptance, he’d have to operate on the assumption that one negative vote would mean the end to triathlon’s Olympic aspirations, at least until the year 2000.

…At the end of the ceremony, Mexico’s Ricardo Gonzalez told McDonald he wanted to get the autograph of He Zhenliang. McDonald told him, “When you do, ask him if he will vote yes for triathlon.” Gonzalez came back with the answer McDonald wanted to hear, and the Canadian quickly moved toward He Zhenliang

“I understand you told Mr. Gonzalez that you will support triathlon’s inclusion on the Olympic program,” McDonald said. “Is that true?”

“Yes, yes, of course,” answered He Zhenliang.

“Can I go to the press with that?” McDonald asked. The IOC vice president paused. He’d been cornered. McDonald’s heart fluttered.

“Yes,” He Zhenliang told him, “you can.” (Graham, 1990, p.40, 45)

At the June 1991 meeting of the International Olympic Committee in Birmingham, England McDonald was present to continue lobbying IOC members. Wishing to speak to an IOC member from Britain, Princess Anne, he got in a receiving line to talk to the Princess. While in line he was asked “Who are you?” by a woman, and he complied by telling her he was there as the President of the International Triathlon Union to lobby for his federation’s recognition. McDonald was escorted to another room where he discovered the woman was a member of Scot-
land Yard and part of the Princess’ security detail. The security force then contacted the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Canada to run a background check on McDonald. Now McDonald was worried as he had been arrested in an anti-apartheid demonstration in Canada several years earlier. The fate of the sport of triathlon hinged on him being labeled a political rabble rouser. Security returned to the room and told McDonald he was cleared to meet the Princess. Upon meeting the Princess he asked her if she would support ITU’s bid for recognition and she replied “yes” and was asked if there was anyone else he would like to meet and lobby. About that time UIPMB’s President Novikov appeared in the room and McDonald told the Princess he needed to discuss his support for triathlon. The Princess called the Russian over (McDonald notes that the Russian had to come to her) and asked him to support ITU. According to McDonald, Novikov was hesitant but indicated he would support triathlon. When the vote came up for ITU to be recognized, he was told the Princess sat behind the Russian during the vote to approve triathlon and prodded him (L. McDonald, personal communication, January. 29, 2006).

All this effort took time and money - much of both. The seed money for ITU was provided by a small inheritance McDonald received. That money would allow McDonald to begin his lobbying efforts across the globe. Eventually the organization would need to secure funding from other sources such as race sanction fees and sponsorships.

Lack of money meant doing without items such as offices and staff. For the first several years of ITU’s existence, the main office of the organization was in a spare bedroom of Loreen Barnett’s condominium and McDonald’s office was in his home. Personal finances took a back seat to the needs of the new organization. Barnett told the story of how every resource she could provide went into the International Triathlon Union. So much so that she nearly lost her home trying to support the organization on her own (L. Barnett, personal communication, January 28, 2005). A Vancouver company granted McDonald the use of a fax machine and phone to maintain contact with the rest of his far-flung supporters. As Barnett explained it, “they would be leaving at 5 o’clock and we’d be coming in.” It was not until 2005 that ITU moved into what would be defined as a real office in a nondescript professional office strip mall in North Vancouver, British Columbia. One longtime volunteer who now is employed by ITU quipped, “I’m going to miss going to work in my fuzzy slippers and having Loreen baking cookies.”

No one has an individual office or a cubicle in the organization’s new location. The open
air format has several desks in a common area and another room that is used for meetings and conferences. During the author’s visit more than just the staff was present. A small-scale version of the United Nations was present with Canadians, an Irishman, an Australian, a Spaniard, a Hungarian and the American researcher. McDonald typically comes in later morning after having started the day off early from his home office dealing with issues from Europe. When he leaves in the evening and returns home, he spends a few hours dealing with Asian issues. His home office is wallpapered with pictures from around the world, event credentials, pictures from his past as a skier and climber, and pictures of his various family members (“if these walls could talk” is what the author thought). It is family that holds an important place in McDonald’s sense of being. Paintings of distant relatives from his wife’s side, as well as his own, adorn the walls of the home, a home he built. Near the home is a soccer pitch that was built decades ago by McDonald and his friends. This is part of the culture of the International Triathlon Union.

Trying to secure sponsorship dollars was challenging the first few years after ITU formed. McDonald tells the story of how Coca-Cola got involved with the international federation and it entails nothing with submitting a traditional sponsorship proposal to a business. According to McDonald, he was in Atlanta in the early 1990s lobbying the Athens Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games and anyone else available to help place triathlon on the competition program for the Games. Exhausted from the travel and efforts he, nonetheless, attended an opera in Atlanta and began dozing off during the performance. The man sitting beside him kept noticing McDonald’s head leaning on the shoulder as he dozed. He suggested that they both step out into the lobby to get some fresh air and asked McDonald why he was so tired. McDonald told the man he had been traveling quite a bit in an effort to get the sport of triathlon into the Olympic Games. After telling is story, McDonald discovered that the man was a senior executive a Coke. After a few more minutes of anecdotes, the executive asked “how much do you need?” A stunned McDonald did not know how to respond. Coke agreed, in a handshake deal as McDonald emphasized, to provide the International Triathlon Union with $200,000 in cash in two annual installments (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006). Other sponsors would follow, but it would be an area that would hinder and hurt the new international federation as it grew. The quandary ITU had with Pacific Sports Entertainment and having to borrow money from the International Olympic Committee to buy their marketing rights
back when PSE collapsed. Somehow though, McDonald was able to maintain his lobbying ef-
forts and occasional diplomatic interventions.

Nevertheless, these perceptions of being a diplomat and lobbyist were subject to interpre-
tation. Detractors existed.

The traits that had initially brought McDonald into the forefront as a great peacemaker
when the old governing body, TFI, fell apart in early 1988 – experience in sports politics
and labor unions, a defiant Scottish tenacity and an unswerving passion for triathlon –
were now working against his efforts in Avignon. While interpreters had been provided,
many Europeans were intimidated by the fast and often complex sentences that McDon-
ald used as chairman. Complicating the situation further was the fact that many of dele-
gates weren’t even remotely familiar Robert’s Rules of Order, the international standard
of procedures for parliamentary proceedings that were the rules for the Avignon con-
gress. McDonald was simply a more aggressive and savvy leader than some of the Euro-
peans felt comfortable with. (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p.57)

A public relations person for the World Triathlon Corporation, parent company of Iron-
man, disagreed with the accolades being given to McDonald. As the relationship between the
two organizations soured, he pronounced:

We do not claim to be the World Championship sanctioned by the world governing body.
The event in Kona predates the ITU by 10 years and culminates a highly developed sys-
tem of Ironman qualifying events around the world. Simply put, we desire nothing more
that to be the Ironman World Championship in Kona. And this is a trademark name that
we own which far predates anything the ITU has done. It has never been documented to
us that by maintaining the mane ‘world’ in our event, we are hurting the sport. Now tri-
athlon is in the Olympics and this is a non-issue. (Carlson, 1995, p. 41)

Those terms “World Championship” and “World Cup” had value to the International Triathlon
Union and the international federation meant to protect them. Sisson defended the organization’s
stance.

Control the sport? We have a world cup series with several events and one or two world
championship events a year. The pressure we exerted on the Surfers Paradise event was
an isolated case because they continued to call themselves a World Cup event. Discus-
sion was regarding the use of the “world” in their title, and we believe the International Triathlon Union should rightly control the use of the word. What are the ramifications of that? If another country wants to start a race with the word “world” in its title, we’ll give them a hard time. Short of that, we encourage our athletes to attend whatever races they can make the most prize money and never have said otherwise. (Questions put to the ITU, 1995, p. 14-15)

By 1996 the International Triathlon Union and the World Triathlon Corporation were headed for a showdown. ITU claimed ownership of the term “World Championship” while the owners of Ironman responded “we were here first.” In an interview in Inside Triathlon, McDonald was pressed about the situation with Ironman and the pending Olympic debut of the sport (note to reader: this is a long interview with responses from both McDonald and Yates).

Inside Triathlon: What is the situation between you and Ironman?
LM: It’s a long story.

One that you don’t care to tell right now?
LM: Not really. I don’t want to inflame the situation. While they may not think so, we hardly ever discuss them. They are not really relevant to what we’re doing.

Some of the athletes are concerned, such as Karen Smyers for example, that they won’t be able to race…
LM: She was at the congress. She was part of the debate and part of the vote.

But what about athletes who are afraid they won’t be able to participate in both…
LM: Well, they should speak with their federations.

Are you concerned that WTC might take legal action against the ITU?
LM: I don’t care. Not really. I really have to go.

OK…Were you happy with the way the world championships went in Cancún, Mexico and the way the draft legal races went?
LM: I’ve never been happy about anything in my life. There’s always need for improvement, for change.

Next year do you plan on reducing the size of the field?
LM: That’s exactly what we’re doing. It’ll be more difficult to qualify. The big story is qualification.
So fewer athletes will be able to qualify?
LM: If the Olympic Games were tomorrow, there wouldn’t be any U.S. male athletes in the Games.
Why not?
LM: They wouldn’t qualify anybody. They wouldn’t do any good. Every international federation is responsible for setting criteria to qualify for the Olympic Games. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has reversed its philosophy: to participate is more important than to win. The IOC said that was OK in the 19th century. But today, the sport is open practically to everyone. There has to be a limit on the number of athletes who can participate. The qualification standard is too kind. There is the tape measure and the stop watch. But for those sports that can’t utilize the stop watch or tape measure, there has to be other measures – head-to-head competition is the only way to qualify. The international federation will decide on what the maximum for each country will be. At the present, that is two athletes per country – if they qualify. The NOC [National Olympic Committee] or in the United States the USOC [United States Olympic Committee] ultimately decides who goes. So, the international federation has the qualifying criteria and the national federation attempts to include as many athletes as possible. They hand over those who have qualified to their national committee. We could have a situation in the United States or Canada where we qualify two athletes to go to the Olympic Games and the National Olympic Committee may decide not to send them. There’s 120 countries in the world involved in the sport of triathlon. So we have 50 men and 50 women allocated to us by the IOC to go to Sydney [Australia, site of the 2000 Olympic Games].
So that’s set?
LM: I’m negotiating after Atlanta to try and boost up to 75.
So you’re saying some countries will be shut out?
LM: Of course. If we were to give each country two spots – what is 120 times two? But we only have 50 spots. So is it possible for a national federation to qualify its athletes? Why not? Because you can’t tell if the qualifying process in each country is equal to an-
other country. And we’re in a sport where the stop watch can’t determine who is good and who is not.

There will have to be a world championship to determine who goes to the Olympics?
LM: Yes

What you’re really talking about is getting the best athletes to the Olympic Games; does it concern you that some of the best triathletes will not attend an ITU race because they will have to choose between and Ironman and world’s?
LM: That’s possible, yes. Every international federation at one time or another has had this problem. In the case of triathlon, the ITU is the world governing body for the sport of triathlon, recognized by the IOC and everyone else. All of the IOC are convinced that the Ironman is an inhuman event. You remember the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. The marathon was run in the middle of the day and a couple of athletes collapsed. Well it was a disaster for the IOC. So, to see a swim and an enormous bike ride before that and then do a marathon in the middle of the day is considered nearly criminal. The ultimate decision of whether triathlon was going to get into the Olympics was to be decided by the session of the IOC. And if you had terrified them with the thoughts of the Ironman, a duathlon, a winter triathlon, you’re killing yourself (p. 19).

Do you see yourself as creating a new sport or simply redefining the sport?
LM: There was a vote. It was a crunch time. September 4, 1994 in Paris at the congress of the International Olympic Committee. They go into a room and lock the door. The IOC only has 90 members. They’re self-appointed from within. An IOC member doesn’t represent a country. They’re individuals. IOC members represent the IOC. They decide the program, they decide everything. It’s a very closed society. At the end of it, they go behind the closed doors and decide. They had a big fight about it [whether to include triathlon on the program]. When it ended, they came across and said. “You’ve done it. You’re in.” I said, “Thanks.” “Now,” they said “go out there and mop up the rest of your property. Go out there and create the rest of your sport”.

You didn’t consider the Ironman then?
LM: With Ironman we asked, beginning with Valerie [Silk] and then we had made a deal with David Voth that we’ll call the Ironman the world championships for the next 10 years. What did we care? At that time they wanted us to give them money. But why should we give them a sanction fee? It should be the other way around if anything? Right? So we said, we won’t give each other any money. We’ll call it the Ironman Triathlon World Championships sanctioned by the ITU, and that’s it. Let’s have some peace. But that wasn’t enough. David Yates wanted perpetuity. Forever and ever more. Would you give organization perpetuity the right to call itself a world championship?

Wouldn’t it be better for the sport if the ITU and TPT came together to create one series?

LM: One thing at a time. I just want to convince you that we couldn’t support long distance events, duathlon, winter cross-country ski races, so that we could be firmly on the Olympic program. Once we had received the green light, we turned around and gave one more chance to the Ironman [to be the long-distance championship], “do you want to do this?” But they demanded perpetuity. But we couldn’t do that. There are other federations around the world that would like to organize the world championship and why shouldn’t they? We don’t have to ask your permission, but we did it anyway. We asked [the Ironman], is it OK if we do this? Yates said, well OK, go ahead. So we went to Nice and organized the world championship.

You’re talking about 1994?

LM: Yeah, we had lots of problems with that race [in 1994] but we were on the road to saying we’d do this every year. The race last year [1995] was a magnificent production.

But many of the top long-distance athletes were not at that race.

LM: No they weren’t. Because in France, they have elections, almost continuously. The French government is in a crisis almost constantly.

So you had to schedule it when you did [October 1, the same week as Ironman]?

LM: These people who say, why don’t you put the race on this date, who do they think we are? Jesus Christ? Next year, the race will be in June. Last year was impossible.

Well that’s true of Cancún too. They don’t say when they’re going to go do the ITU world championships, they say they’re going to Cancún.
LM: And we don’t care if they do either. But other people do care – the people on the 
International Olympic Committee. We’re in the Olympic Games provisionally. People 
think, surely they can’t kick us out. But of course they can. Let’s say the top 20 guys in 
Cancún tested positive for anabolic steroids. What do you think they would do? 

And one of the other things that might kick triathlon off the program is if the 
Ironman continues to a world championship?

LM: The IOC, the sponsors, television networks…they say, how many world championship 
do you have? If you’re the governing body of the sport, then go out and govern. 
This can’t go on. As far as I’m concerned, personally, I couldn’t care less.

So, in order for athletes not to be banned, David Yates needs to take world championship off the Ironman’s name?

LM: Yeah. From a marketing point of view, no one calls it the world championship. 
They call it the Ironman. It’s the best marketing tool they have.

So you wouldn’t want to see Ironman be the ITU long-distance world championship?

LM: We tried for 10 years.

And that still can’t be accomplished?

LM: We had a deal to do it in Canada. That was back in 1992. But we got a phone call 
while we were all in the room.

[David] Yates [president of WTC] didn’t want to do it?

LM: Well, of course not. He’s not going to let them do it.

Why not in Hawaii?

LM: Because he wouldn’t do it. He says come to Hawaii and we’ll discuss it. I had to 
buy tickets to go into the banquet. Is that the way to treat a president of the international federation? I said, “can we have a meeting?” He says, “We don’t have time for you.”

So good-bye…

 Didn’t something similar happen in Cancún, but with the tables now turned?

LM: Yes, because he threatened to sue us. He sent me a message that said this could be 
very expensive litigation. I had a lawyer and I said what should I do in a case like this.
And he said, “Forget it, you don’t meet with someone who’s threatening to sue you.” So, he offended us, grossly. Threatened us. We’ll go our own way, you go yours.

In terms of the public’s perception, Ironman is where you get all the best athletes.

LM: Then they should go there.

Right. And shouldn’t it be a world championship?

LM: Not if the private companies that own it aren’t willing to follow the rules and make some kind of agreement with the international federation.

What would they need to do, specifically?

LM: Let me tell you what they wanted us to do. They wanted perpetuity. Yates wanted to be on the executive board of ITU. ITU is registered in Canada as a non-profit society. That’s a conflict of interest. We’d go to jail. He wanted us to set up a program to develop long-distance athletes for the Ironman, out of ITU funds. In Canada we have 10 provincial associations, each one recognized by the provincial government with funding form them. Each one says the same thing: We’re giving you money to develop athletes for the Olympic Games. Do not spend any of this money on this stupid Ironman or your [sic] toast.

Most people in the sport think that the ITU and the TPT need to come together in order for the sport to grow.

LM: We can’t make a partnership with a private company. It’s not possible.

But can’t you make some of the TPT races World Cup races?

LM: Pride. I’ve been rejected on every occasion.

I don’t understand. A man who is able to get triathlon on the Olympic program has to be a pretty savvy politician…

LM: There are some things that you can’t compromise on and one is that you can’t hand the sport over to a private company.

But don’t you feel it’s unfortunate that the athletes have to make this choice? It’s entirely possible that the fields of both races or series will be diminished.

LM: We did the same thing with [the race director of Surfer’s Paradise Triathlon]. That’s what happens all the time. People in life have to take sides occasionally.
But it’s difficult enough to make money at this sport, particularly if you’re an athlete. So, to have you choices diminished like that…

LM: We will create enough money [that we will produce the better choice].

So, will athletes who chose the ITU series make more money?

LM: The already do. They make a lot more. I think the Ironman should drop the title triathlon. Just call it the Ironman World Championships.

That would be alright?

LM: Yes.

But you’ve still got the words “world championship” in there.

LM: That would do it.

And you wouldn’t ban the athletes?

LM: Yes.

Because it’s not called a triathlon?

LM: I think they could compromise in that way and call it what everybody calls it anyway. And just call it the Ironman World Championships.

Has David Yates been asked to do this?

LM: He will be. But don’t hold your breath. (Newbound, 1996, p. 19-20, 22)

Within the same article, the president of the World Triathlon Corporation offered his thoughts and opinions regarding the International Triathlon Union, the Olympics and the feud. The following text is from the David Yates interview.

Can you tell me what the situation is between the WTC and the ITU?

DY: I don’t have anything to announce right now, but certainly my position is as strong as it ever was. I think there needs to be more consideration of the athletes and the event directors by the ITU. We support the National Governing Body system and we want the Olympics but at the same time we want fairness and equity. We’re going to take a stand against this. This is not Ironman against ITU. There is a tangible amount of people in our sport concerned about the direction our sport is going. It comes down to this: Who makes the very substantial strategic decisions about what direction our sport is going to go? Is it going to be the ITU bureaucracy or are the athletes going to be heard? The drafting issue is a perfect example right now. I dare say that if you took a worldwide
survey of all the athletes, at least 90 percent are against any type of formal draft-legal races – other than occasionally experimenting with it. I plan on doing everything I can to push the Olympic movement ahead, to help grow our sport, but I don’t think we need to go out and sell our soul and change the essential integrity of our sport to get the Olympic games. I don’t have any specific update on any specific action.

Do you have any timetable on that?
DY: As soon as I can. We’re doing a substantial amount of research and I want to find out what rules international federations have to abide by and which rules they don’t have to abide by. But let me say this: My door is always open and if the ITU Executive Board wants to sit down and talk in good faith; if they want to give the athletes and the race directors an ear in the process then I’m here. But until they’re willing to change the structure that they have right now, which is unfair, then we’ve got a problem.

Are you speaking to anyone at the ITU?
DY: Les [McDonald] and I have corresponded a number of times prior to Cancún. But no, I haven’t had any direct conversations. Les owes me a couple of responses to letters I sent him. I sent him a letter in [the fall of ‘95] where I proposed that I would drop the word “world” if he would go out and do a world-wide Democratic poll on drafting and I never heard back. I’ve corresponded with Les a number of times and we actually shook hands in agreement with Mike Gilmore [marketing director for ITU] a few years ago in Atlanta and they backed off. I’m here if they want to talk in good faith, and give the athletes and race directors a more direct voice in what they’re doing and listen to our concerns.

In a perfect world, how would you like to see all this play out?
DY: Well, what I would love to see is the TPT and the ITU World Cup come together and have one major triathlon tour with all the major events, have the ITU sit down and figure out a scenario where everybody won. The problems we have right now is that the ITU is saying: “Hey, either come with us or go with the TPT,” and they’re drawing a line in the sand. That’s nonsense. We should all sit down and work together and arrive at the scenario where all the major events are involved. Ironman can either be involved or not be involved, because Ironman can stand on its own. But take all the other events and
plug them into the World Cup system. Then the international federation has what it wants – it has a very solid race schedule with very good events and the events will be happy that they’re a part of this. So rather fight it out in the marketplace – instead of having the World Cup and the TPT – let’s come together. But to do that, there’s going to have to be an understanding from the ITU Executive Board members that they might not be able to have all the power that they’ve had in the past.

What if this happened and the ITU wanted to have some their races be draft-legal, how would you feel about that?

DY: If a race director on his own volition does a draft-legal race just to have some fun, maybe I can support that or maybe I can’t. But I’d at least want that race director to think it through. If the ITU wants to go out and have draft-legal races for anything that effects our sport, either major events or any kind of Games, Olympic, Pan Am, I want out find out why. And if they can’t look me in the eye and say, “TV has to have this.” Poppycock. I deal with the TV industry. Having a draft-legal race will not in any way increase the ratings, which they’ve been quoted as saying. If there is a legitimate reason then I think we’d listen to that, but I don’t see that (p. 19).

Had you seen a draft-legal race before observing the world’s in Cancún?

DY: No, and I was horrified when I saw it. When I saw 75 men coming in together and I saw 40 women coming in together, not even riding hard, because they were just waiting for the run, it just made me sick. That’s not the sport of triathlon that’s been brought up the last 15 years. It strengthened by resolve that it was wrong. But the issue isn’t whether David Yates thinks it’s wrong; it’s whether athletes think it’s wrong. If you don’t have the athletes in our sport, you don’t have the sport. What they’re purporting right now is a brand new sport (p. 20).

What is your understanding of the ban?

DY: My understanding is that any pro that races in my race in October will be banned from the designated ITU races they mention in 1997.

Has this affected your line up?

DY: As of right now, no. We’ll see as time goes on. But it’s unfortunate that ITU always takes the approach of penalizing the athletes when they have a problem. And I
guess I should go out and say that anyone who races in an ITU race is banned from Ironman for life. But that’s nonsense. The athletes should not have to pay the price of any problem ITU has. And I stand firmly against that and I think the athletes will support it.

If the athletes are so against it, wouldn’t it be a good strategy for them to just boycott the ITU races?

DY: I think the ITU knows that if the pro athletes get together that they’ll be in trouble. An ITU executive board member said to me a couple of years ago that if the athletes ever got together they’d be in trouble, but they [the pro athletes] have never gotten together and they [ITU] don’t think they can. But yes, if the pro athletes did get together and decided to take a stand then they could absolutely make a difference. The age-groupers can do exactly the same thing. I’ve probably got 50 letters and phone calls and read numerous things on the Internet, talking about boycotting the ITU races. I believe there is some sort of movement among the pro athletes to finally get together. That would be a very viable way to make a statement. And I believe that will happen in Cleveland [1996 ITU world championship] and Muncie [1996 long-distance championship]. I don’t wish that on Jack Caress or Andrea Allen [the race directors for those events] because they’re good people.

The younger athletes as well as the older athletes?

DY: I’m hearing more noise from all aspects of the sport, young, old, age-grouper, pro, race director, federation, you name it.

If you had to make a prediction about the Olympics in 2000, will it be draft-legal or draft-illegal?

DY: Well, that kind of gets us to what we’ve been talking about here as to whether the athletes and the race directors are willing to stand up and say no. As it stands right now, there’s no question: The ITU has said that it will be draft-legal. The only way that will change is if the ITU changes its mind or is forced to change its mind. Once again, it’s a matter of the sport getting together and saying we’re against that and we’re going to stop it.

So you think triathlon can survive and thrive as an Olympic sport if it’s draft-illegal?
DY: Absolutely. No question about it. I understand why they want to have that. They want more spectator-friendly races. In the marathon, if they have people together for the first 20 miles, they’ll have a better finish at that race, too. But we don’t do that. We don’t tell marathoners to run together for the first 20 miles. How much do you sacrifice? And how far do you go to get a better show? You can have very exciting non-drafting criterium format races. I’ve seen it done. As a matter of fact, if they want me to do it, give me some type of national championship. I’ll go out and do it. But to say that we have to have drafting in order to have an Olympic sport is very, very worn, to say the least.

Would you like to see an Ironman-distance race be in the Olympics?
DY: Back to my discussion with ITU, we talked at some length about going out and pushing for long-distance to be part of the Olympics. I think what ITU is doing now is like only having a world championship for the 400 meters and that’s it. ITU is pushing one distance and one distance only. What about the rest of the sport? For the ITU to go out and put all of their resources behind one distance, I think is a terrible breach of their responsibility. They have their token long-distance world championship every year, but no resources go toward that. And if you want to get into the Olympics, you have to do it one step at a time. But what’s your game plan? How are you going to involve long-distance and shorter distance into the rest of stuff you’re doing, i.e, the world championships and eventually the Olympic Games? I’m not saying that as just a long-distance person because we have all the resources to promote Ironman distance. But for an international federation to go out and promote, almost solely, one distance is absolutely wrong. You don’t see that in any other sport. What was Olympic distance is now called “triathlon.” That is the most arrogant, presumptuous thing, I’ve ever heard. What’s the rest of the sport called? I guess it makes sense because they are defining a brand new sport. Maybe we need to go out and come up with a brand new sport and let them do their own thing.

What about Les McDonald’s proposed solution to lift the ban if you call your race the Ironman World Championship instead of the Ironman Triathlon World Championship?
DY: The name is a small issue to a bigger problem. He [Les] has never offered that to me. If he wants to, I’m here. But taking triathlon out of the name, all we’re doing is playing games with words. It shows me that there’s no substance behind this issue. The concern up to now has been the use of world championship, and now I need to drop the word triathlon? It’s just a political tool that Les is using right now. (Newbound, 1996, p. 19-20, 22)

With his singular focus on getting the sport of triathlon into the Olympics, it was possible that those who disagreed with McDonald would suffer his anger. In 1990 at the Las Vegas meeting to discuss the International Triathlon Union’s adoption of a flawed 1989 Triathlon Federation/USA rulebook, the author incurred his annoyance when discussing the perceived errors in it and not knowing the proper time and place to address such concerns. Others have tried to take a diplomatic approach but then change their tone. Murphy Reinschreiber said that McDonald has a difficult time discussing the issues.

It has been incorrectly stated that I am an opponent of the ITU and Les McDonald…I am not an opponent of the ITU or Les. I think there are needs to be an ITU. I’m just at issue with some of the policies…[However,] with Les, it’s either you’re with him or against him, and it doesn’t take much for him to determine you’re against him. (Silverman, 1995, p. 56)

Sisson explained how he perceived McDonald’s leadership style and skills.

I think that it was quite clear that the ITU office, uh, tried to nurture its relationships with those federations that were friendly to ITU and were friendly to the election officers of ITU, um, again this is where, where Les’s experience as trade union negotiator representative of, and a representative of a certain party really played to his strengths. [H]e used to have a favorite saying that…”if you do me wrong the worst that’s gonna happen is that I am going to withhold my love from you.” But his idea of withholding love was significant. So I mean I was on the wrong side of Les many times. I was able to earn it back, um, but he, he wanted you to be a team player. He wanted you to be on his side. If you were in a federation that was not on his side, uh, there were certainly certain communications that you did not get. You’d be kept out of the loop. Uh, when it was convenient to be kept out of the loop. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)
An example of McDonald holding back information is his relationship with some journalists and others who he felt misrepresent what ITU was (and is) trying to accomplish. In an e-mail to the Triathlon Canada president, McDonald explained his position regarding two individuals.

Our policy on Alvin Chriss and Katherine Williams, officially agreed up at the ITU Executive Board meeting, is a policy of no co-operation, because obviously we do not trust them. Everything we say, to paraphrase the LA Police Department, “It will be taken down and used against you in evidence.” It will be taken down and used against us in her “reader’s digest”. Mike Gilmore has been given the task of explaining to her that she has some fences to mend before we co-operate with her and she knows what they are. If we stand firm and say, “We are not going to supply you with information. You really are on the outside looking in.” it [sic] will, I hope, eventually encourage her to “tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”, as you so eloquently put it. That would also put an end to the deep-freeze. Katherine Williams, Alvin Chriss and their types are only a blind alley into which other conspiracy theorists are so enthusiastically vanishing. The quicker, the better. (L. McDonald, personal communication, March 23, 1998)

Williams was in the “deep-freeze” because of her reporting on ITU matters. It appears McDonald’s concerns were justified as Williams had a silent partner who was later disclosed as being Alvin Chriss. Chriss had presented information for the digest using the e-mail address of a professional triathlete and presenting the information as if it had been written by the athlete.

Lew Kidder, an American who was a member of USA Triathlon’s Board of Directors in the late 1980s, and who attended the inaugural Avignon congress offered his view of Les McDonald the man.

I give the critics their due: the man ain’t perfect. He’s made mistakes, some bigger than others. The Olympic qualification system could be improved. The ITU marketing effort hasn’t always worked as well as it could. A few races have failed to fulfill pre-race purse promises. And McDonald doesn’t have a uniformly sunny disposition, especially towards those who contest his point of view. I have personal experience with that last character trait. I was a delegate to our sport’s con-con at Avignon in 1989, and one of the ITU’s original officers. But when I disagreed with Les on some point of policy (neither of us can today remember precisely what it was), he turned his ire my way. And a formi-
Kidder credits McDonald with helping create the International Triathlon Union and holding it together (“ever hear of the League of Nations?”). He credits McDonald for getting triathlon into the Olympic Games and getting more prize money into the sport through the World Championship and World Cup Series, thus causing a trickle-down affect to other events.

In an article titled “From hero to villain” in the British newspaper *The Times*, journalist David Powell wrote about how those involved in triathlon in England perceived McDonald on the eve of the Sydney Games.

McDonald is the Primo Nebiolo of his sport, the autocratic – many say bullying – president of the International Triathlon Union (ITU) who, through alleged vote rigging and other manipulative tactics, has managed to hold onto his position through the 11-year history of the world governing body which he formed. However, while his political skills may be compared to Nebiolo’s, the late president of the International Amateur Athletic Federation, his commercial shortcomings have made him many an enemy among those who seek to professionalise the sport. (2000)

Contained within the same article were some opinions from Simon Lessing, a British triathlete who was a medal contender going into Sydney and a former ITU Triathlon World champion. Lessing was concerned about how the sport of triathlon was operating on a global scale.

Les pushed for our sport to get into the Olympics and we need to give him credit for that. Unfortunately, I think the sport has lost its direction. I am speaking as an athlete who is trying to make a career out of this, and, to a certain extent, we have not managed to attract title or major corporate sponsors. We should now be asking questions like why, what have we done wrong. We need to look at a way to manage our sport in a professional manner. (Powell, 2000)

In his memo to the International Olympic Committee President Rogge and the IOC Executive Board pertaining to the health of the sport of triathlon and the International Triathlon Union in late 2001, then Secretary General Mark Sisson wrote:

ITU is an institution guided by Congress and an Executive Board. Its President Les McDonald is a charismatic and colorful individual – but he is not and has never been an
undemocratic leader. His leadership, his intensity and drive were instrumental in getting Triathlon into the Olympic Games. As loyal as his supporters to him, he is even more loyal to them and their collective will. All decisions taken by the Executive Board are taken after intense discussion and debate. Mr. McDonald simply enforces the will of the majority, as he should. Admittedly, his passion may be sent to create an occasional personality conflict, but that is the nature of all sports, politics everywhere. Notwithstanding the recent negative communications to the IOC by individuals, the triathlon national federations that fully support Mr. McDonald and his Board represent over 90% of the triathletes in the world. It is for all those athletes with an Olympic dream that we all work so hard. (M. Sisson, personal communication, December 4, 2001; underline in original text)

The loyalty Sisson spoke of can be demonstrated in several simple ways. McDonald’s quote, "nous ne sommes pas les autres," we are not like the others, is still held near and dear to him. McDonald believes without hesitation that the athletes are what make up the sport, and while this may come as a surprise to some of his detractors, the feeling came across as heartfelt to the author. Numerous stories were told about giving up a business class seat on an international flight if there was an athlete on the plane. McDonald housed several injured Australian triathletes who went mountain biking after a World Cup race in Vancouver and wound up crashing. The results were broken bones and a month of recovery at the McDonald household. Tales of McDonald sleeping on the balcony of a hotel while several athletes took over the room because they had no place to stay abound. In a fax to European Triathlon Union Secretary General Erika Koenig-Zenz he chided and reminded her that “we are servants of the athletes – not the country.” Finally, on the day Sisson’s second child was born, McDonald wrote the first born son that “kid sisters are a godsend.”

Once Sisson left the International Triathlon Union, he offered a more personal view of the organization and its president. Sisson summarized the role of an international federation and a limitation in McDonald’s leadership abilities.

But you know the, the, reason for an international federation to exist is to is to grow the sport and the perception of the sport worldwide. It’s not to make money. It’s a non-profit organization, so it’s what you do with the money and what you do with the resources you have at hand. And I think what’s incumbent upon ITU right now is to get
triathlon into more homes on TV sets and to get more people participating at all levels. But, you as an international federation, you do that primarily by showcasing the event the best in the world: in the Olympic Games and the world championships and world cup events using television. That’s the model. Otherwise you have no reason to exist. Once you’re in the Games you know you can become an administrative body of four people that just looks at points and invites kids to go compete in the Olympic Games every four years. That’s hardly worthy of anybody’s time. So if you want to keep growing the organization, you have to do it with a real business mind and that’s, that’s where Les, uh, you know, falls in his abilities. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Sisson also encapsulated a major weakness of ITU, in his opinion, with regards to the organization’s financial situation.

Yeah, I go back to my statement that that to this day I can’t figure out why, why there hasn’t been a marketing person who can come to triathlon and say hey I got an international company they want to be the named, naming rights sponsor to all your world cup events. Uh, they want, uh, they want 60 seconds of, of a clear and focused exposure of banner throughout every one of your television shows worldwide. And they want to buy two minutes of advertising on every show. They have $7 million a year. Is that all right? That’s nothing as far as I am concerned. Geez, I mean, you know, QVC spends $40 million on a NASCAR sponsorship. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

The International Triathlon Union and USA Triathlon

USA Triathlon (formally known as Triathlon Federation/USA) and the International Triathlon Union have been linked in a variety of ways since the creation of ITU. Mark Sisson, once the Executive of Triathlon Federation/USA, was involved with a variety of committees for the International Triathlon Union (i.e., doping, constitution) before eventually becoming the Secretary General for the international federation. Mike Gilmore was a board member for the American governing body before becoming an employee of ITU. Dave McGillivray worked on the International Triathlon Union’s Technical Committee as did others with ties to USA Triathlon. Carl Thomas, the founder of Federation International Triathlon which was a predecessor to ITU, was on Triathlon Federation/USA’s board before serving on the board for the international federation. There was almost a symbiotic relationship between the two organizations until the mid-
1990s. If one wants to study a single organization and its relationships with other organizations, information must be collected from not only the case but also the other organizations to better draw accurate conclusions about the relationships (Yin, 2003).

USA Triathlon was officially formed in 1985 as the Triathlon Federation/USA after an initial attempt as the United States Triathlon Association (Triathlon Board of Governors Meeting Minutes, 1985). As such, the federation had a head start as a formal organization when compared to the International Triathlon Union and just like the international federation, this self-proclaimed national governing body had more than its share of difficulties. In 1987 the editors of *Triathlete* magazine called Triathlon Federation/USA an incestuous situation which would eventually result in numerous conflict of interest problems, but without those initial people, motivated as much by self-interest as genuine concern for the triathlon, there wouldn’t have been much of a sport, let alone a governing body. (State of the Sport, 1987, p. 74)

They also wrote that “Tri-Fed has set as one of its goals the inclusion of triathlons into the Olympics and one barrier to that is the fact that the national governing body doesn’t claim sufficient proportion of competitors as members” (State of the Sport, 1987, p. 76).

By 1988, Tri-Fed had so much political infighting and intrigued that multi-sport journalist Mike Plant did an exposé on the organization. The organization went to mandatory licensing at its sanctioned events. This meant to participate in a Triathlon Federation/USA sanctioned event one must either be annual member of the organization or purchase a single-event permit. The result of this decision caused membership to increase dramatically and therefore revenue. As a result, Board member Lew Kidder owner of his own publication, *Triathlon Today!* was able to negotiate it as the periodical in which the federation’s newsletter would be inserted. Charges of conflict of interest, board resignations, and escalating costs threaten to split the organization. Plant wrote:

The long-stated basic goals of the organization – safety and fairness in the competitive arena – have been subverted by a bitter nine-month struggle for power that has left the Board of Directors depleted and exhausted, the thin line of dedicated, experienced personnel broken. Indeed, it’s reassuring that the prospects for the future of the sport are not based on the health of the national governing body. And if effectiveness and self-interest
that has infected the current Board of Directors is not cause enough for concern, there is
evidence that the Federation acted outside the legal parameters of its status as a non-profit
within the State of California. (Plant, 1988a, p. 54)

In the follow up article, he summarized

…our national governing body wallows in a complex mire of self-serving egos and con-
flicts of interest. The result over the last year and a half has been the decay of the Federa-
tion’s Board of Directors to a ineffective shadow of its former structure. (Plant, 1988b, p.
48)

Triathlon Federation/USA was at risk of imploding during 1988 and through early 1989. At
the same time the attempts to form an international federation were taking place. Eventually,
Mark Sisson was hired to right the organization and took over as Triathlon Federation/USA’s
Executive Director. These sorts of problems are not unique. In 1988, the United States Cycling
Federation’s first executive director wrote a book detailing similar tribulations. The book, In
Spite of Us, chronicles the good, bad, and the ugly associated with a national governing body’s
growth and development. Academically, it is a practical application of Kikulis’ (2000) research.
“I’m amazed at what the athletes have accomplished in spite of us” Prouty stated. USA Triath-
lon simply was repeating Cycling’s mistakes.

Sisson and others from the American national governing body then became involved with
the creation of the International Triathlon Union. Sisson would eventually leave Triathlon Fed-
eration/USA but would maintain his ties with the international federation. Following Sisson at
Tri-Fed/USA was Steve Locke.

When asked about who or what was key for USA Triathlon regarding its status in becom-
ing a full-fledged national governing body, former Executive Director Locke indicated that there
were other factors besides ITU and its efforts.

Well first of all, I think that the key to us wasn’t necessarily through the ITU. It was
through the USOC and they immediately embraced us as an affiliate sports organization,
and they also included us in meetings that was really, that were really designed to be in-
volving NGBs that were currently NGBs at that time. So I think that the USOC was get-
ting distinct signals from the IOC that we would be on the program. Not knowing ex-
actly when but hoping 1996 but, uh, it didn’t turn out to be but we were getting distinct
signals in the USOC was trying to be proactive and really prepare the sport for it’s, uh, entrée into the Games and they did a great deal of work for us, actually for ITU, getting triathlon into the Pan American Games as, uh, prelim and I know that Les takes a lot of credit for having done that but a lot of that work was done by international relations division within the USOC in, uh, getting us involved. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

He added that USA Triathlon was on solid footing in the eyes of the United States Olympic Committee.

[W]e were pretty well received because I think that they felt we were a legitimate sport. We weren’t a cute sport. Uh, I can remember even, uh, even, uh, at that point ballroom dancing was being, kinda, thought of as a potential Olympic sport but they knew that some of the other combat sports, combat sports for some reason have always been difficult sports because they seem to be just so awash in politics and corruption so they looked at, uh, particularly Karate and they looked at some of the other, boxing was already on the program was just a mess in politic of it being so corrupt. They knew that we were pretty pure and pretty uncorrupt compared to the others, not like the others. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

However, in an earlier magazine interview, Locke explained the importance of International Olympic Committee recognition of the International Triathlon Union in terms of what it meant to USA Triathlon.

Olympic recognition is very important – although it is controversial – to give this sport real credibility. Also it will help us gain more leverage to procure more sponsorship so we can provide more and better services to our members.

It will create credibility for triathlon. Indirectly, it will really benefit the age-groupers, because once we get into the Olympics, once we become what is considered by the USOC as an NGB, the money will start to flow and we won’t be as financially strapped as we are now. We’ll be able to provide more services, those we can’t afford right now. We can develop a coaching program. We can develop a whole range of programs for coaching athletes from junior on up to the international level. (A conversation with Steven M. Locke, 1992, p. 32)
Tension between the two organizations began to build after the International Triathlon Union announced its draft-legal policy for the Triathlon World Championships and World Cup Series. Locke and the USA Triathlon Board of Directors at the time were not happy with this unilateral decision by the international federation.

Well we ended up, we had a number of issues with the ITU one was at least on the men’s side, elite athlete wise, was total non-acceptance of drafting rules and as a result we fell way behind in getting high quality athletes involved and just a great deal of push back coming from our male side and to a certain extent there was a dynamic within the board of directors feeling that they weren’t going shove that down our throat because we were the inventor of the sport and, and we are not going to accept that even though the true inventor of the draft legal format was probably Mark and Mark’s from the USA but, uh, it was real, it was a real quagmire. Then I think that the real problem that we has was sort of our independence as an organization being challenged constantly by the ITU in the sense of them telling us what we had to do, uh, without even any consideration of the legal implications of doing things.

For instance we had, you know, a relationship with Ironman at that time it was very good. And, uh, we strongly endorsed Ironman. We worked closely with them. We did drug testing with them through the USOC, any number of things and we had a great relationship with them. And fortunately the ITU and Ironman had, uh, a troubled relationship. Principally because Les’s feeling that they shouldn’t be calling themselves world championship and he felt that they were, as a for profit organization they were taking advantage and doing things that were out of line and motivated to, a well, to the bottom line.

Les had a real issue with them and when Les gets on his high horse he, he demanded that we not sanction races there because, uh, their calling themselves world championships and we, we, uh, we resented that and we, our board resented that and we simply did not comply with Les’s rules, wishes. There was nothing that, if we would have discontinued sanctioning those races we would have found ourselves without any defense on the legal side if they would have chosen to sue us. It’s very similar to our
Locke referred to the Lifetime Fitness triathlon held in Minneapolis. This event offers a large prize purse, in the low six-figures for first place alone, but with a twist. The elite women are given a head start of several minutes and then the elite men start. The first person to cross the finish line receives the big first place check. Same-day television coverage is also part of the event’s appeal. As the National Governing Body for triathlon, USA Triathlon provides sanctioning for the event. McDonald has chastised the American federation for allowing this “Neanderthal” format to take place. Women are being marginalized and it’s demeaning to them to be chased by men according to the ITU position. Part of the problem is that the Lifetime Fitness triathlon typically falls on the same weekend as the ITU World Cup triathlon held in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Canada. Corner Brook has a much smaller prize purse so the top men and women race in Minneapolis, thus hurting the quality of the field in Canada.

Sisson offered his opinion as to why the International Triathlon Union and USA Triathlon began to drift apart.

Well, it changed for a couple of reasons. And again you know it is all based upon happenstance and certain personalities. Carl Thomas was an integral part of ITU. Carl Thomas was, was, uh, the last vestiges of Tri-Fed/USA and the connection with [the] USA federation and it was always ITU’s intention to have a U.S. federation. The [federation], not only an integral player but the lead player on the world scene but for some reason Tri-Fed/USA, uh, USA Triathlon drifted further and further away from that. And it was really after it was when Steve Locke and Steve’s Board of Directors and their, their own political leanings that caused it but how it fell that way, how it fell into place was Carl had taken it upon himself at the Avignon conference to go in with Dave McGillivray and to host the next world championships in Disney. Um, that placed him in a highly visible position, uh, they then Curl and Thomas went on to produce one or more world events. At one of those events there was a shortfall of funds some $30,000 that was owed to ITU that was not paid. And as a result Carl had to resign from his position as ITU treasurer. That, when Carl resigned from that position, that was the last link that USA Triathlon had to ITU in the context of, of moving ahead with the Olympic ideal as the
primary drive force. With Carl gone USA Triathlon became more of an age group organization tried to go back to its grass roots to, uh, spend much more time, money and administrative power and energy, uh, supporting the amateur part of triathlon as opposed to the elite part of triathlon. That was the beginning of a drifting away where it appeared that USAT just didn’t care that much about the Olympic Games, um, and it was borne out by the fact that they almost never, um, it took a long time for any U.S. athlete to appear on the charts: uh, world cup events and world championships. It just didn’t, you [know] that they resisted drafting to a fault. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

It was this resistance to adopting the draft-legal format of racing that ended up hurting the American athletes and USA Triathlon, in Sisson’s opinion.

Yeah and it manifested itself in its reluctance to teach the elite how to draft. It was quite clear in the races that they were going to that they were not drafting and they were holding out for, you know, clinging to this dream that the whole drafting thing was going to be repealed and they would be able to race traditional USA type non-drafting events, um, and they buried their heads in the sand and it was Rick the president of Texas...Rick Margiotta and Steve Locke. Who, you know, who kept, I am sure, Steve, you know heard so much from the age groupers that he couldn’t help but have to represent their wishes but USAT was torn, was so much between being a, uh, age group based club and a USOC based NGB that they didn’t know where they were and they lost four years on the world scene trying to catch up later on but they finally got it. And then I think Steve finally got it but it was too late. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

The American backlash against the draft-legal format was so strong that Sisson became somewhat of a man without a country in terms of support for his position in ITU and used unconventional means to maintain his standing. When asked if he served both USA Triathlon and the International Triathlon Union his response was

Well the problem was that I didn’t serve both sides. The problem was that I served ITU without, without a passport.

It was tough for me because I had taken on this position of Secretary General but I was Treasurer then Secretary General, uh, and I had clear vision of where ITU needed to go as an international federation and within the context of the Olympic movement, but
my, but the group that was supposed to nominate me and, and support me didn’t share
that vision and what happened was when I would represent my own vision within ITU for
the greater good of the international federation, and it was in cross purposes with the with
my national federation. I ran a risk constantly of losing the sport of my national federation. And even though I was considered a, a major factor in the growth and development of the ITU I could quite easily loose my job because the people who nominated me would withdraw their support. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

To remedy the possibility of USA Triathlon withdrawing its support for Sisson, thus removing him from the position of Secretary General, he took advantage of the existing requirements for eligibility. He became a member of the Mexican triathlon governing body.

I didn’t represent them. I just joined the federation. That’s what they didn’t get. I mean our rules, right or wrong, said that you have to be a member of a federation. Again it was fully of ironies. The U.S. federation for years it said if you want to race in the US and you’re from another country we’re going to make you join the U.S. federation.

So now we are making other people join our federation but I can’t join another country’s federation. Anyways, there were no clear, um, citizenship or residency requirements to run for election or to be nominated it was simply that you had to be a member of a federation in good standing with the ITU. We changed it later. In those days I was using the rules to my advantage. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

When asked what he thought McDonald’s opinion was of USA Triathlon and whether or not it helped or hindered ITU, Sisson said:

Help[ed]. Les felt strongly that that USAT should be the major player in, on the world scene. Um, he was very frustrated that not only were they not the major player on the world scene but that they seem to, to a resist any of the forward progress that ITU was exposing. They seemed to, again being just unaware of the importance of the Olympic movement and unaware of the possibilities for participating on the international scene and getting involved. I mean to the extent that Les could not believe that we couldn’t come up with two or three major players for a world cup event. Because the United States is the richest country in the world. Because it is the seed of the original sport of
triathlon. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Sisson also acknowledged some of the frustration the International Triathlon Union had with its American governing body.

And yet to have Tiszaujvaros, Hungary, you know, be a premier world cup event with 300,000 spectators and unlimited, virtually unlimited, funding from at the state and local level and 20 sponsors, um, and European Broadcast Union television coverage and yet in the U.S. we can’t get a deal on OLN [Outdoor Life Network] with any sponsorship to speak of. I mean when the U.S. team was coming back and going, ‘Geez that $85,000.00 prize money, or $75,000 in those days, that’s a bit rich can we get a pass on that.’ And I was with him. I said I can’t believe that that you’re working hard enough on this to make it happen because clearly this is where it ought to be happening. We ought to be leading in the world cup. Well then I get back to well, you know, the sponsors just don’t believe in drafting. Or the, you know, some bullshit excuse like it all came back to drafting the rules. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Drafting at the elite level was something that American professionals were adamantly opposed to at the time. At the 1995 ITU World Congress in Cancún, Mexico, American professional triathlete Karen Smyers, the 1990 and 1995 Triathlon World Champion, made a plea to the delegates not to adopt the draft-legal format that had been experimented with at some World Cup races and the Goodwill Games in 1995. Smyers stated:

I am a member of the pro board in the U.S.; we sent out a questionnaire asking the U.S. pros if they preferred drafting or no drafting and over 98 percent preferred no drafting….If we can get into the Olympics in such a short time, we can certainly manage to train a competent set of officials that can ensure a fair no-drafting race….Please, don’t drastically change the entire sport and lose what makes the sport unique to begin with. (Smyers, 1995, p. 8-9; bold in original text)

It was the Cancún Congress where USA Triathlon felt frustrated that its opinions were not being heard. In an effort to try to alleviate the brewing battle between the International Triathlon Union and the World Triathlon Corporation (Ironman), the Swiss and American delegations attempted to place the president of the World Triathlon Corporation on the agenda at Congress. In spite of this seemingly gesture of goodwill, there was an underlying effort to link the draft-legal
proposal to the “world championship” issue at the heart of the Ironman conundrum.

*Note: Before this resolution was voted on, the Swiss delegation asked that David Yates of the Ironman Corporation, be allowed into the congress to speak on his behalf. The ITU has sworn they had tried to negotiate with Ironman for 10 years and that he refused to cooperate. The U.S. delegation supported his right to come in and give his side of the story. We knew he had attempted to negotiate for we had a copy of a letter he sent to Les McDonald that offered to drop the word “world” from the Hawaii Ironman if the ITU would agree to have a democratic vote of the athletes on the drafting issue. The congress voted against letting him in, and the resolution passed with very little opposition.*

(Smyers, 1996, p. 8; italics in original text)

At the International Triathlon Union World Congress the previous year the delegates voted to “endorse draft-legal events in Triathlon World Cup, Duathlon Grand Prix and Triathlon and Duathlon World Championships for elite athletes only” (Smyers, 1996, p. 9). Additionally, Congress approved language that would ban elite athletes from competing in ITU sanctioned championships and World Cup events if they participated in any events with a self-proclaimed world title. This was clearly a shot across the bow of the World Triathlon Corporation and its Ironman events.

[I]t was only a matter of time before the ITU went after the Ironman World Championship for the same reason. Last fall, at the world congress in Cancún, Mexico, the following resolution was officially passed: “Be it resolved that athletes who compete in ‘self-declared’ world events in 1996 will not be permitted to compete in the following events in 1996 or 1997: all ITU Championships and World Cups, regional championships, Olympic qualifying events and multisport games. (Newbound, 1996, p. 16)

In other words, “those who chose to compete in the 1996 Ironman can pretty much forget about racing at any ITU World Cup races in 1997, including their world championships” (p. 16).

As a result of the drafting issue and the International Triathlon Union not allowing the Ironman president to attend and address the Congress, USA Triathlon threaten relief through the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). In Locke’s declaration for CAS he indicated that there was not the required number of ITU member national federations present, as required by the International Triathlon Union Constitution, to vote on a controversial issue such as the legalization
of drafting at certain events. He also stated that USA Triathlon’s resolution asking for a membership vote on the drafting issue was disallowed because the ITU Executive Committee had previously passed a resolution allowing it. Locke also claimed that

the ITU President at great length excoriated USA Triathlon because of its opposition to the ITU President’s polices. He accused USA Triathlon of having conducted a fraudulent election earlier in 1995 at which four USA Triathlon directors were elected. Les McDonald stated that he would cause an investigation of the election to be conducted by IOC and USOC. Since that time, no such request has been made of either the IOC or the USOC. I, on the other hand, did ask USOC to look into the election. Some time later, USOC informed me that it could find no evidence of any election proprieties (S. Locke, personal communication, n.d.).

The rapport between the two organizations dissipated in 1996, the same year the U.S. hosted the Triathlon World Championships in Cleveland. With the vitriol between ITU and the World Triathlon Corporation increasing, and USA Triathlon being caught in the middle of that battle as well as having its own disagreements with the international federation over drafting, conflict in some form almost seemed inevitable.

By May of 1996, the USA Triathlon Board of Directors decided to press ITU for what they viewed as needed reforms. A plethora of requests and resolutions came out of that Board meeting. From the meeting minutes this is some of what transpired and is listed in the manner it was presented in the meeting minutes:

Steven Locke introduced Alvin Chriss as the USAT Special Assistant for International Affairs and summarized the program undertaken by USAT with regard to current ITU issues.

Alvin Chriss described the aspects of the program as

- Efforts to make the ITU Congress a place in which USAT has a fair chance to represent its issues,
- Resolutions for specific action by the 1996 ITU Congress,
- Anticipation of resistance/feedback to the program.

David Yates made a statement to the Board which included the following points:
• Thanks to Alvin Chriss for his efforts on behalf of USAT and the sport of triathlon,
• Yates is fully supportive of both the National and International Federations as systems of governance,
• Yates does not approve of the current ITU Board method of doing business,
• Yates believes that the three entities, ITU, Race Directors, and Athletes need to be able to have input into the governance of the sport thru a more democratic system – structural changes are needed in the present ITU.

Upon motion by Gail Moore the board unanimously passed a resolution as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board support the USAT ITU Program conceptually in it entirety pending editorial revisions. (USA Triathlon Board of Directors’ Meeting, 1996, p. 3)

The USA Triathlon/International Triathlon Union Program also included an assortment of actions the national governing body would take to the international federation. USAT would provide:

• a letter to Les McDonald, ITU president, asking for an open meeting at the 1996 Cleveland Congress
• a letter to Les McDonald, ITU president, asking for assurance of secret ballot whenever any one member delegation requests the same
• a letter to Les McDonald, ITU president, requesting explanation of irregularities in member federations responsible parties data
• a letter to Les McDonald, ITU president, requesting nominating forms for the 1996 Congress elections
• a letter to Les McDonald, ITU president, requesting assurance that resolutions submitted for 1996 Congress will be presented to the ITU membership

Specific 1996 Congress Items:
• a resolution to vote for an open meeting, and to permit each delegation to have up three non-delegates sit with each delegation
• a resolution that each delegation be permitted three regular and three alternate delegates as representation at Congress
• a resolution that all submitted resolutions of a similar subject be considered together by Congress, and that all resolutions dealing with procedures of 1996 Congress be decided immediately following roll call
• a resolution requesting effort to insure 2/3 membership presence to ratify constitutional amendments, failing that, hold an extraordinary Congress to approve improperly adopted amendments, and appoint a parliamentarian by a member’s ad hoc committee
• a resolution that two active athletes be added to the ITU Executive Board
• a resolution that a Budget Committee be appointed and that an audit of ITU financial books and records from 1/1/1995 to present be performed
• a resolution admonishing the ITU Officer action of unilaterally declaring athletes who compete in the Ironman World Triathlon Championship ineligible for world championship competition base upon erroneous IOC dictate
• a resolution admonishing the ITU officer action of detailing criteria for Olympic team qualification without prior IOC approval for such a scheme
• a resolution calling for polling of ITU members on the issue of drafting
• a resolution calling for the elimination of the specific position of Marketing Director of ITU in favor of a Calendar Committee modeled after the IAAF for purposes of coordinating World Cup calendar and implementing contracts
• a resolution calling for the creation of a ceremonial ITU Chairman of the Executive Board position with the suggestion that Les McDonald be elevated to this position Other elements:
• candidates to be submitted on nominating forms for the various open positions for 1996 ITU elections will be finalized by USAT committee,
• Mark Sisson is to be informed that the USAT Board will not be nominating him to the position of Treasurer to the ITU for the 1996 election. (USA Triathlon Board of Directors’ Meeting, 1996, p. 3)
Additional actions by USA Triathlon’s Board of Directors at the same meeting included the following:

Upon motion by Jim Jimison, the Board unanimously approved a resolution as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED that Scott Zagarino be informed that the USAT Board will not be nominating him to the position of North American Representative to the ITU for the 1996 election (p. 5).

USA Triathlon’s Board of Directors also decided to fund the candidacy of Steve Locke for the presidency of the International Triathlon Union. The meeting minutes reflected the subsequent action taken by the Board for the 1996 ITU elections:

Upon a motion by Ed Morris and amended by Ed Morris, the Board unanimously passed a resolution as follows:

BE IT Resolved that $25,000 be allocated as a general fund to improve the position of USAT in the international triathlon area thru ITU Board nominations, lobbying, and other general expenses including pursuing the nomination of Steve Locke and other USAT members for positions within the ITU.

USAT Board members are to go out to key membership in the search for viable candidates for ITU Board positions – fax recommendations to Rick Margiotta. Steve Locke is to come up with a plan for financial and logistical campaigns. (USA Triathlon Board of Directors’ Meeting, 1996, p. 7)

Locke explained this stance the USA Triathlon Board of Directors took in 1996.

[W]e simply were not going to be shoved around by some guy in Vancouver, Canada who was often not logical in his argument. And, uh, his argument was purely an argument of intimidation and, um, and we weren’t going to allow ourselves to be violating sports acts or any other law in order to accommodate what he happened to want that day and we were pretty constant on down the pike with that. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

From this Board meeting, the decision was made to have Locke oppose McDonald for the presidency of the international federation. Locke clarified how is candidacy was declared.

[T]he board decided. It wasn’t me. The board decided that it would be a good thing for me to do. And I thought, I, in retrospect, I would never do it again. Had I won, I had no
idea what we would have done. We had really no plan set aside as to what, do I run USA Triathlon and the international federation? How does one person do that? It was purely, I think we, as the board of directors and me, knew that probably I didn’t have a ghost of chance at winning but we wanted to at least make a statement that we were not going to be shoved around. That Les was not going to run unopposed. And that we were going to make some sort of issue with the fact that he was trying to, trying to run our organization for us according to what his whims were at that particular time. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

The Americans, who hosted the 1996 Triathlon World Championship and the World Congress, issued resolutions mandating change within the International Triathlon Union, and looked to “make a statement,” went head-to-head with ITU’s only president. Now the relationship between the two leaders changed. Locke explained the change:

Yeah, sure the relationship soured immediately because, uh, why, how could anyone have the absolute audacity to run against Les? And Les is a person who will forever hold a grudge. Although I found it interesting that after I ran he held his grudge for a year or two and then we became friends again. But you got to remember that no one’s ever a friend of Les. Everyone is, is, uh, can be dispensed with. And Mark thought he was a friend of Les. Les has no friends. If you are of no use to Les then he will dispose of you. And I think that, uh, that for some reason Les came back, at least with me, after a couple of years and we were friendly. I thought it was probably because he thought maybe at that point he could manipulate and use people for what his purpose is. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

In Locke’s opinion this situation put McDonald in a precarious situation because USA Triathlon was the largest national governing body in terms of annual members and richest in terms of revenue compared to other member governing bodies of ITU. Locke indicated:

Yeah, it was a difficult situation for Les because of that precise thing. We had more money than anyone else, we had potential for conducting events more so than anyone else with good quality events, and, uh, so he was kinda in a dilemma where he once side of his mouth would bad mouth the United States on an ongoing basis but yet on the other hand he would put us up on a pedestal and say how important we were and that he needed
to have....Yeah, in certain areas of being big and having developed members a number of
members that we had at that time. But we certainly weren’t the organization he would
want based upon a relationship where we were going to acquiesce to whatever he wanted
us to do. We simply were not going to be blindly following his every order. (S. Locke,
personal communication, July 30, 2005)

While Locke has been able to look back in hindsight and discuss his chances, going into the
Cleveland World Congress the perception was that the stakes were indeed high on this meeting
and election. In an editorial in Triathlete magazine, international editor Michaela Findeis wrote:

The setting is new: Les McDonald, leading figure of the International Triathlon Union
since its founding congress in 1989, the man whose name became synonymous for ITU
and for triathlon, will face a competitor for the ITU presidency at the elections to be held
at the Cleveland congress later this month. 120 national federations’ delegates will elect
their leaders for the next four years, the crucial period leading up to triathlon’s first ap-
pearance in the Olympic Games at the turn of the millennium. It’s a choice that bears a
lot of responsibility for each of the voting members coming from all over the world. All
we can hope and wish is that they take their task seriously, comparing programs and not
faces for the best possible future and not against somebody. Submitting both candidates
to serious questioning and not letting them impress and divide by lobbying or positioning
themselves advantageously inside the organization, or worse, by pure pressure.

For the first time in its history, the “parliament” of triathlon will be put upon to
demonstrate its maturity—i.e., our maturity as an Olympic sport.

By the simple fact that the congress is facing different options, triathlon as a sport
has already won the ’96 elections. It has already won because there now exists cam-
paigning and a debate: Some people have and will stand up and point out—right or
wrong does not matter—what could be considered worthy of serious thought or even a
change in the functioning of the international federation. Some of the choices made by
the actual executive board are now being questioned and discussed openly.

Whoever will be president for the next four years, whether it will be USAT Ex-
ecutive Director Steve Locke or, more probably, Les McDonald, he will be different
president for the last. Because no ITU management will event will ever be tempted to
“mistake leadership for dictatorship,” as Steve Locke has stated in his criticism of the current presidency, if the ITU congress delegates continue—after the Cleveland elections—to consider themselves not only as family members of the ITU, but also responsible parts of a democratic organization by controlling as well as being supportive of the power they give their leaders. (Findeis, 1996, p. 3; italics in original text)

In that same issue, Carlson interviewed Locke about his campaign for the ITU presidency. Charging that the current International Triathlon Union (ITU) President Les McDonald and his executive board members “mistake leadership for dictatorship,” USA Triathlon (USAT) Executive Director Steve Locke began campaigning for McDonald’s position in mid-May….If Locke succeeds in ousting McDonald, he would be in charge of the ITU in the crucial years leading up to triathlon’s debut in the 2000 Olympics

Locke vows to “wage a clean and fair campaign,” to avoid “name calling.” But his platform, published on the Internet news group rec.sport.triathlon and distributed worldwide to all voting members of the ITU, “reflects the bitterness felt by the U.S. delegation to the 1995 ITU Congress in Cancun for treatment of their position paper on drafting and for ITU resolutions threatening suspension of athletes for participating in the Hawaii Ironman World Championship and other events because ITU claims the proprietary ownership of the term “world championship.”

Locke states, “The current ITU management does not enjoy any significant credibility within the sport” and charges that despite ITU claims that McDonald got triathlon in the Olympics, the true responsibility for that achievement belongs with the Sydney organizing committee. Locke faults for settling for only 50 men and 50 women allowed in triathlon in the Olympics, and said that McDonald was trying to make the “ITU world rankings as the only way to gain admission to the Sydney Olympics,” contrary to IOC regulations, and thus is a “scheme that is patently part of a program to create a triathlon cartel where athletes will eventually not be able to compete in any triathlon except the Triathlon World Cup if they wish to compete on national teams.” (1996c, p. 6)

As Locke had been the Executive Director since 1992, he was familiar with how the ITU World Congress operated. He discussed how Congress operated:
Well the congress is an interesting sort of, um, situation in that it is very similar to that of the USOC’s board of directors used to be. Huge, 123 people with the USOC board. Probably over a 100 delegates at the ITU congresses. So all of the real business was done in the back halls or was done in the executive council meetings. It was planned out and it was pretty well choreographed as to what would take place throughout the congress and, uh, he pretty well had his votes in place and demanded how things would go. So he was, uh, he was an artist. He was an artist that really orchestrated how congress would go and the congress was simply a puppet congress and fulfilled his will. Uh, every bit of his will. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

Locke’s observations proved prophetic in this instance as he was easily defeated for the presidency. USAT President Rick Margiotta commented in a story about the election.

“It’s quite apparent that the ITU worked hard at getting unity with other national delegations,” says USA Triathlon’s (USAT) President of the Board of Directors, Rick Margiotta, who attended the Cleveland Congress. This comment is in response to the decisive win by Les McDonald over Steve Locke for the ITU presidency—of the 60 voting countries, 55 stood behind McDonald. “I guess it proves that Les is doing the job.”

… Perhaps the most promising development in the Cleveland congress is that the U.S. will now be involved in future ITU decision-making. “It’s important that the USAT become a working part of the ITU,” says Margiotta. Representation had been lacking in the past, according to him, but no longer. Margiotta was appointed the North American representative, one of seven regional reps, who previously had not been allowed to vote.

And finally, a vote was taken over the position of treasurer, held by Mark Sisson. While 15 voted for Margiotta, 40 threw their lot in with Sisson. Mexico nominated Sisson to the sport, which caused some confusion in the U.S. camp—“It was the USAT’s interpretation that Mark Sisson had to be nominated by his [native] country, the U.S.,” says Margiotta. “This [process] is left unclear in the ITU constitution, but the matter is by no means a ‘closed subject.’” (Park, 1996, p. 7-8)

All this posturing and saber rattling caught the attention of some International Olympic Committee members, albeit in an informal manner. In a letter to then United States Olympic Committee President LeRoy Walker, IOC member Chiharu Igaya, who was also a member of
ITU’s Executive Board and was the president of the Japanese Triathlon Union, wrote of his concerns about the antagonistic attitude the U.S. national governing body had towards its international federation and “that the USOC has donated $4,000 to [Locke’s] election campaign for president of ITU” (C. Igaya, personal communication, June 3, 1996). International Olympic Committee member Phil Coles, also an International Triathlon Union Executive Board member, wrote a similar letter stating that he was “simply appalled that the United States Olympic Committee has become involved by way of a $4,000 donation to campaign to unseat the existing president of the International Triathlon Union, Mr. Les McDonald” (P. Coles, personal communication, May 29, 1996). Walker, appearing not to be intimidated by the International Olympic Committee letterhead replied to both individuals that

USA Triathlon received a grant from the USOC to help advance their international position, a legitimate ambition within our democratic institutions…I can categorically state the USOC does not make donations of any type to any campaign anywhere, however, the USOC stands firmly behind our member association, USA Triathlon. (L. Walker, personal communication, June 10, 1996)

U.S. athletes, both the elite and even age group competitors, continued to disagree with the International Triathlon Union mandate that certain events would be draft-legal for the professional fields only. Age group competition, particularly in the U.S., continued to operate under the host country’s rules. In the case of USA Triathlon, drafting would still be illegal in the age group ranks. However, there was enough animosity being displayed by American age group competitors that there was a threatened boycott of the St. Anthony’s Triathlon in St. Petersburg, Florida in 1997 because the pro field would be using the draft-legal format (Carlson, 1997c). St. Anthony’s was serving as the pro qualifier for the 1997 Triathlon World Championship held in Australia. Locke realized that American athletes must prepare themselves for this new format, regardless of their personal preferences. However, in an interview he commented on the draft-legal format:

The woman’s triathlon will be the first event in the Sydney Olympic Games. Global television will be massive, and the impact will be huge. I think we must acknowledge that the U.S. does not share the same perspective on drafting as the rest of the international community. (Carlson, 1997c, p. 10)
With the Sydney Olympics three years away, and USA Triathlon’s aversion to the draft-legal format that would be used there, pundits began to question the organization’s ability to prepare its athletes. In an article in *Triathlete* magazine, former International Triathlon Union Managing Director Mike Gilmore predicted that unless the Americans made a concerted effort “the U.S. [will have] no realistic medal contenders for triathlon at Sydney in the women’s event as well, with Emma Carney, Jackie Gallagher, Natascha Badmann and Erika Molnar of Hungary displaying a consistent superiority” (Carlson, 1997d, p. 21). Carlson, himself, wrote:

> But since September 1994, when Les McDonald and the ITU convinced the International Olympic Committee to make triathlon an Olympic sport for the Sydney Games of 2000, pioneer leader United States has been playing catch-up in the high-stakes world of the international triathlon leading to the Olympics. (1997d, p. 21)

Taking a more pragmatic approach, regarding the implementation of the draft-legal format that would be used in Sydney, Fitzgerald wrote for *Triathlete* magazine that

> The overriding mission of the ITU in the early ‘90s was to bring triathlon to the Olympics, which meant integrating itself and the sport with the International Olympic Committee, which entailed making triathlon as spectator- and television-friendly as possible…But for all the dissension, once the ITU had the Olympics, it had the power and it was clear from that moment forward that drafting was here to stay. (1999b, p. 34)

Thus, the expectations for the Americans’ chances according to some were low. They were low in the eyes of USA Triathlon’s Executive Director too, but not for just reasons focusing on a lack of drafting experience.

> I think our ramp up to Sydney was really terrible because of coaching selections. It was just not working but we had athletes that were working out on their own…aspiring towards the Olympic Games, principally women. And the men were getting on late, although we had some people on our Olympic team, who were kinda, and I hate to be, and I don’t mean to be derogatory, but, kinda second tier athletes in our current pool of athletes at that time who ended up being on the Olympic team

> … I think it would be unfair to say that USA Triathlon should take any credit for what really developed. So our evolution into the Olympic sport in the 2000 Games I
think was very, very primitive at that point. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

One gets the feeling from both McDonald, as President of the International Triathlon Union, and Loreen Barnett, as its Executive Director, a sense of frustration with USA Triathlon. The sentiment shared by both of them appears to be that the Americans still don’t get it. It is being able to consistently win medals at world championships and the Olympics. It is being able to host World Cup Series events. McDonald suggested that the Americans are “ten years back” and have remained “static” while the rest of the world has progressed (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006). American women have had success at international level having won Triathlon World Championship titles in 1990 and 1995 in addition to finishing fourth and sixth at the Sydney Games during the 1989-2000 timeframe (an American woman won a bronze medal at the 2004 Athens Games). American men have not won a Triathlon World Championship since the inaugural event in 1989 and have no Olympic medals.

Nearly two decades worth of material have been summarized into this single chapter. The basic history of the International Triathlon Union’s creation and development has been illustrated using a variety of sources. Additionally, background information on Les McDonald and the relationship between ITU and the USA Triathlon national governing body has been included. The next two chapters provide the author’s insight, commentary, and conclusions.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This project began with the desire to discover what influences were experienced by the International Triathlon Union as it was created and developed while seeking International Olympic Committee recognition as the international federation for the sport and, ultimately, inclusion on the competition program of the Olympic Games; keeping in mind that the organization was created, then recognized by the IOC and finally, placed on the competition program in just five years. “No other sport has achieved Olympic programme status in such a short time” (ITU Triathlon Facts & Figures, 2006).

The theoretical framework that guided this dissertation was institutional theory, which identified that organizations tend to be homogenous in structure. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identified three isomorphisms that influence this move towards homogeneity: “(1) coercive isomorphism stems from political influence and problem of legitimacy; (2) mimetic isomorphism resulting from standard responses to uncertainty; and (3) normative isomorphism, associated with professionalization” (p. 150; italics in original text).

This chapter identifies, based upon definitions provided in the methodology section, those pieces of information that pertain to coercive isomorphism, mimetic isomorphism, normative isomorphism, leadership, and culture as well as samples of interest. These six areas provided the coding mechanisms for the variety of data obtained for the study. All data were then color coded when the appropriate theme emerged. Data was obtained from both primary and secondary sources as well as my own personal experiences having worked within the administration of the sport for four years. This heuristic approach allowed me to use my “personal experience with an intense interest in the phenomenon under study” (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

Since this research involves a constructionist view towards the data, the possibility for multiple viewpoints to exist simultaneously because each person has different experiences, perspectives, and opinions as what is real based on each of their experiences (Patton, 2002). Constructionism allows for individuals to perceive differences from the same data set because of background, context, education, history, and so forth. This type of interpretative approach
“hold[s] that social life is based on social interactions and socially constructed meaning systems. For interpretative researchers social reality is based on people’s definitions of it” (Skinner & Edwards, 2005, p. 406). My background in the sport of triathlon, in a variety of areas, as well as personal experiences, perspectives, and opinions make it possible that my interpretations, definitions, and conclusions could differ from another’s opinion.

Coercive Isomorphism [IT-COE]

Coercive isomorphism “results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 150). Coercion is the mechanism associated with Scott’s (2001) regulative pillar. “In this conception, regulatory processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect others’ conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions – rewards or punishments—in an attempt to influence future behavior” (Scott, 2001, p. 52). Coercive isomorphism need not be interpreted as a negative in my opinion. Coercive isomorphism can provide the guidelines by which an organization needs to abide by to seek recognition/acceptance from a regulatory agency. In the case of the International Triathlon Union the regulatory agency was the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Charter.

During its creation the founders of the International Triathlon Union were focused on what the Olympic Charter mandated an organization must do and accomplish before the International Olympic Committee would formally recognize it as the international federation for the sport of triathlon. Even before this took place the IOC recognized that new sports were being created and that they should be receptive to new organizations forming and governing these new sports. International Olympic Committee Sport Director Walter Tröger addressed this issue in 1985.

During the first attempts to form an international federation via FIT and TFI, European Triathlon Union president O’Callaghan said:

The phenomenal growth of the sport in its first 10 years was based on its ‘Ironman’ image and the business acumen of the early entrepreneurs. Both influences are being whittled back – the shorter-distance race has already replaced in popularity the dawn-to-dusk
event while the embryonic national governing bodies are guiding and policing current trends and developments within the sport.

Inter-continental communication and administration links have begun to be forged and will lead to the formation of a world governing body to whom all can readily pledge support. The institution of official world championships will foster this support and commitment and further pave the way to recognition by international sports federations, and in particular the admission of the triathlon into the Olympic movement. (State of the sport, 1987, p. 68) [IT]

This section was coded Institutional Theory, [IT], because it demonstrates the basis for homogeneity for a new international federation by referring to the move towards shorter distance events, the mention of national governing bodies, and the creation of an international federation that is a prerequisite for become part of the Olympic Games.

Initially, International Olympic Committee President J.A. Samaranch suggested that triathlon become a part of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon (UIPMB). He assigned another IOC member, Gunnar Ericsson, to help the triathlon group navigate the waters of international sport. Rather than create an international federation on their own, as had been previously attempted with Federation International Triathlon and Triathlon Federation International, the triathlon group followed the IOC President’s suggestion and looked to align itself with UIPMB. Having the International Olympic Committee President take an interest in the sport, and provide a liaison in the form of another IOC member, predisposed the triathlon group to this attempt of becoming part of another international federation rather than going it alone. Triathlon could make it to the Olympics independently of the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon; however, that might take more than 20 years. The fastest road to the Olympic program for the triathlon was through the UIPMB (Olivares, Jr., 1989a). Two decades to the Olympics if triathlon attempts to go it alone or a few years if it becomes part of UIPMB; this is quite an incentive to follow the suggestion of the IOC President.

With a leadership change taking place in Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon, the triathlon group was split in its desire to affiliate with the existing international federation. The Russian, Novikov, became president at the time the triathlon group was working to assimilate into UIPMB. Some Europeans wanted to become a part of UIPMB while the North
Americans and others felt triathlon would have no autonomy in the organization. After that rau-
cous meeting in Avignon in April of 1989, the triathlon group voted to go it alone (although the 
vote was far from unanimous). Here is an example of an item being coded [IT-COE] as some of 
the Europeans were being influenced by the new leadership of UIPMB. Pentathlon and biathlon 
have historically been European sports and the fall of the Berlin Wall had yet to take place so the 
Soviet influence over parts of Europe still existed.

This situation with UIPMB could also be considered a mimetic response as the founders 
initially considered becoming a part of an existing international sport federation (something that 
snowboarding did when it became a part of FIS and beach volleyball did when it became a part 
of the FIVB). However, referring back to Sisson’s comment about the new Russian leadership 
of UIPMB just not getting “it,” with it being how triathlon operates as a single-day event, the 
founders of ITU then looked at what the IOC Charter dictated. Samaranch’s suggestion for the 
triathlon group to become a part of UIPMB is coercive, while the decision to adopt UIPMB poli-
cies and procedures would be mimetic.

From that time the driving force for the founders of the International Triathlon Union was 
the Olympic Charter. The Charter spelled out the minimum standards needed before the IOC 
would even consider recognizing a new international sport federation. It mandates a specified 
number of countries must be practicing the sport for both men and women on a certain number 
of continents. That section of the Olympic Charter was coded as a coercive influence but not in 
a negative sense. The founders of the International Triathlon Union knew exactly what they had 
to accomplish before the International Olympic Committee would recognize them as the interna-
tional federation. The Charter provides the blueprint for aspiring international federations. 
Membership in the General Assembly of International Sports Federations was one item neces-
sary as the leadership of ITU moved towards recognition by the IOC as the international federa-
tion for the sport of triathlon.

The International Olympic Committee bestows legitimacy on an international sport or-
ganization by recognizing it as the international federation for a sport. Recognition as the IF of a 
sport grants an organization monopoly-like power over a sport because the action effectively 
hinders rival organizations from forming. Thus, a new self-proclaimed world governing body 
would want recognition as soon as possible and be granted this form of legitimacy. Aldrich and
Fiol (1994), Deephouse (1996), and Scott (2001) all refer to, in various terms, this notion of a regulatory agency bestowing legitimacy to another organization. Peter Coulson’s comments about ITU President Les McDonald asking “how many flags have we got?” is a reference to the IOC Charter. Mark Sisson’s remarks about the organization taking the requirements of the IOC Charter “very seriously” highlight the power this document had on the founders. The founders appear to have internalized this document, thus setting into motion the coercive isomorphic influence it would have on the International Triathlon Union.

Koenig said “the strive to become a recognized NF and later ‘Olympic’ is paramount for (almost) all sports” (E. Koenig, personal communication, February 26, 2006). Koenig also said “every sport (if it is not that strong as Ironman) seeks IOC recognition. It is the guarantee for survival (money!)” (E. Koenig, personal communication, February 26, 2006). With this recognition by the International Olympic Committee, the International Triathlon Union began to establish its sociopolitical legitimacy as described by Aldrich and Fiol (1994). ITU had achieved some “political power and institutional legitimacy,” in the words of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), by being named the international federation for triathlon.

We must remember, however, that the Charter instructs what must be done but does not say how it should be done. Some members of ITU interpreted the Charter’s mandates to mean they had the ability to create national governing bodies on their own versus national governing bodies developing independently of the international federation. The founders took a “top-down” approach to organizing its member national governing bodies.

Referring back to Scott’s (2001) regulative pillar, the “regulatory processes involve the capacity to establish rules, inspect others’ conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions –rewards or punishments—in an attempt to influence future behavior” (p. 52). The International Triathlon Union had met the regulatory standards put in place by the International Olympic Committee. With recognition secured the next step was lobbying the IOC membership to include triathlon in the Olympic Games.

Also exhibiting coercive isomorphism were the regional organizations such as the Pan American Sport Organization (PASO). Being placed on the competition program of regional games verified to the International Olympic Committee that the International Triathlon Union had control of its sport on a global scale. PASO required that 12 countries in the region must be
recognized by their respective National Olympic Committees before the sport could be included on the Pan Am competition program. With this scenario there existed a possible Catch-22 situation; before USA Triathlon could be recognized by the United States Olympic Committee its international federation had to be recognized, but before PASO would consider adding triathlon to its competition program USA Triathlon had to be recognized by the USOC. ITU and USA Triathlon worked together to meet the Pan American Sport Organization’s requirements and triathlon was placed on the 1995 Pan Am Games schedule.

Once the International Triathlon Union received recognition from the International Olympic Committee as the international federation for the sport of triathlon, the next step was to be placed on the Olympic Games competition program. When ITU found out that the sport would not be placed on the schedule for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic Games, McDonald acknowledged:

In our discussions with Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch [president of the IOC], he said, “Keep going. You have not made any mistakes up to now. Keep going.” Our plan then, is to shoot for the year 2000 and work backwards. We have never asked anyone about 1996—it’s a delicate situation. As far as the Atlanta Organizing Committee is concerned, they’d have us in the Games tomorrow. But they aren’t the ones who decide. It is the IOC which decides, and that is where we are concentrating our efforts. (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 26)

McDonald recognized that it is the International Olympic Committee that influenced the International Triathlon Union as it sought to be included in the Olympic Games. The IOC makes the decision on program inclusion. In addition to determining the competition program, the International Olympic Committee can determine the size of the competition field for sports. McDonald explained in 1992 that not everyone would be competing in the Olympics.

In the future we will put only athletes with proper qualifying times on the front and in the first wave. To be honest with you, we got a very serious fight from the NGBs regarding qualifying times. But we’re going to bite the bullet on this issue. We’re only going to use the 50 or so best men and women. Why? Because that the way it is in the Olympic Games, the way it is in other sports. (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 27)
Race distance too was influenced by the International Olympic Committee. The so-called Olympic distance triathlon (1.5K swim, 40K bike, and 10K run) was acceptable to the IOC membership. However, the International Olympic Committee had concerns about the Ironman-distance as a form of competition. In material distributed to its membership before the vote was taken to add triathlon to the competition program in 1994, there was concern about the Ironman distance.

As for triathlon, “recognised” by the IOC, it is knocking at the Olympic door but not all agree on its type of exercise. Originally, its notoriety and success were the result of television’s exploitation of the suffering men and women entered in an almost inhuman event: 6 kilometres of swimming, 180 of cycling followed by a running Marathon, alone considered extreme. (IOC, personal communication, 1994, p. 195)

A part of this race distance issue is also the length of the event as a competition. The IOC indicated that there was a two hour window for television. While this conversation came up regarding the change in the drafting rules for the elite fields, it certainly is applicable here also because the longer the race distances the longer the time it takes to complete it. The Olympic distance triathlon fits within the two hour time frame.

Another example of coercive isomorphism, in my opinion, was when the International Triathlon Union had to borrow money from the International Olympic Committee in 1998 to re-acquire their marketing and broadcasting from the defunct Australian company, Pacific Sports Entertainment. Owing the regulatory agency a substantial amount of money offers at least the appearance that the relationship is changed. The IOC was both the regulatory agency and creditor for ITU.

The 2000 World Congress in Perth, Australia, and the resulting fracas concerning the re-election of McDonald, caught the attention of the International Olympic Committee. In a Sydney Morning Herald story, an unnamed IOC source indicated that triathlon could be removed from the Olympic competition program immediately after the Sydney Games. “If McDonald is ousted in what is a simple political play, then there is no place for the sport on the Olympic program,” the source was quoted as saying (Magnay & Evans, 2000, p. 30). Since triathlon was a provisional sport, meaning that it would be re-evaluated after Sydney by the IOC, anything that indicated ITU was not in control of itself could have negative consequences on the sport.
When the election results were contested, and a lawsuit was filed in and accepted by the Supreme Court of British Columbia, reports were made that triathlon was in danger of being removed from the competition program after Sydney unless it got its internal affairs in order (USA Triathlon Weekly Report, 2001). Olympic Committee Sport Director Felli wrote to McDonald about the rift between the two factions.

So, as the President of the ITU, I leave you the responsibility to make sure that the sport of triathlon remains in order, as we do not want to have any problems during the period preceding the Olympic Games in Athens. (G. Felli, personal communication, June 15, 2001)

Newly elected International Olympic Committee President Dr. Jacques Rogge is said to have wanted a resolution to ITU’s internal strife resolved by a mid-December 2001 meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. Sisson sent out a fax to the IOC President and all the IOC members explaining that peace was in the making between the International Triathlon Union and those who had originally disputed the election. The threat of expulsion certainly caught the attention of McDonald, Sisson, and others within the international federation.

A final coercive isomorphism was time. Rule 52 of the Olympic Charter, section 1.1.4 stated “sports are admitted to the programme of the Olympic Games at least seven years before specific Olympic Games in respect of which no change shall thereafter be permitted” (p. 83). With ITU’s creation in 1989, the earliest the sport could have been placed on the Olympic program was 1996, the Atlanta Games. Sisson indicated that this had been an early goal of ITU.

[W]e initially tried to get on the program for Atlanta, because, uh, we were hoping that even though we formed in ‘89 and there is a seven year window in which, you know, to get put on the program. Uh, we were hoping that that we could get into the Atlanta games by virtue of the fact that it was a U.S. sport and Atlanta and we’d worked with …the guys who ran the Atlanta games and knew them to the point that had they wanted to put us on the game on the program as a as a exhibition sport they probably could have

(M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

In an interview in 1992, McDonald clarified ITU’s position on the Atlanta Summer Olympic Games.
In our discussions with Mr. Juan Antonio Samaranch [president of the IOC], he said, “Keep going. You have not made any mistakes up to now. Keep going.” Our plan then, is to shoot for the year 2000 and work backwards. We have never asked anyone about 1996—it’s a delicate situation. As far as the Atlanta Organizing Committee is concerned, they’d have us in the Games tomorrow. But they aren’t the ones who decide. It is the IOC which decides, and that is where we are concentrating our efforts. (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 26)

Time was also a factor with the legitimacy issue. Operating as a self-proclaimed international federation meant that a rival organization could have formed. Once the International Olympic Committee bestowed that recognition, the ITU had monopoly-like control and power over the sport on a global scale.

**Mimetic Isomorphism [IT-MIM]**

Uncertainty and ambiguity may encourage an organization to simply imitate what already exists. DiMaggio and Powell wrote that “uncertainty is also a powerful force that encourages imitation” (1983, p. 151). The organizational template could also be provided by other international federations. “Organizations tend to model themselves after similar organizations in their field that they perceive to be more legitimate or successful,” (p. 152). Mimetic isomorphism is a mechanism of Scott’s (2001) three pillars of institutions. It is “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made...routines are followed because they are taken for granted as ‘the way we do these things’” (Scott, 2001, p. 57).

When International Olympic Committee President Samaranch suggested that triathlon become part of Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon some of the Europeans felt this was the best path towards becoming part of the competition program for the Olympics. By becoming part of UIPMB, and adapting their policies and procedures, it would be quicker to achieve the Olympic goal. Meyer and Rowan (1977) proclaimed “organizations are driven to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society” (p. 340). Wholey and Brittain (1986) concurred by asserting “existing organizations provided models/training for those interested in forming comparable organizations” (p. 519).
However, the triathlon group decided to not become a part of UIPMB but create their own independent international federation (unlike snowboarding and beach volleyball which became part of existing federations). ITU did borrow from UIPMB though as Sisson explained “when we went from being a bunch of people to an institution in Avignon, uh, you know we, we copied UIPMB’s constitution. That was a mistake ‘cause there were a lot of glitches in that that came back to bite us” (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005). A former member of USAT’s Board of Directors and a one-time employee of ITU said “at first, the way to the Olympics was thought to be as a discipline of a pre-existing [international federation]. Ultimately we decided that even though it would be much harder, it would be better if triathlon controlled its own destiny and got in as separate sport” (Carlson, 1995, p. 40).

The International Triathlon Union also borrowed heavily from the Triathlon Federation/USA in 1989 as the international governing body chose to adopt the American rulebook. Furthermore, the

ITU was learning a lot from what we were doing and how we were trying to function. And it’s interesting because that was also a very tough time for Tri-Fed too. We were trying to grow and trying to really develop a national sports organization. Uh, we’d been around since ‘83-‘84 so we to were experimenting with new ways of doing things and new ideas, uh, but even in that early time frame the USA was still seen as being in the forefront of triathlon and we were respected as the country that had the most money, the most power the most ability to influence the rest of the world. (T. Yount, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

With the split from UIPMB, the International Triathlon Union was a self-proclaimed international sport federation was mimicking other IFs as it imposed conditions for national governing body membership.

After the inaugural Triathlon World Championship in 1989, membership in General Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF) was the next step for the International Triathlon Union to obtain. “Membership in the GAISF is recognition by all international sports federations of the ITU’s independence and jurisdiction over triathlon and its related multi-sports” (Graham, 1990a, p. 36). Membership in the General Association of International Sports Federations was one item necessary as the leadership of ITU moved towards recognition by the Interna-
A move towards homogeneity as the International Triathlon Union did what all other international federations did. Seeking membership in GAISF was one of the milestones on the route to International Olympic Committee recognition.

The GAISF example was also coded as a coercive isomorphism because is required of an international federation to be a member of this organization. This demonstrates that there may be interaction occurring among these variables and influences that do not allow for exclusivity. Simultaneous influence is a possibility. Interaction and simultaneous influence will be discussed in the final chapter.

The International Triathlon Union’s World Cup Series was patterned after the World Cup Skiing Series.

McDonald, active in alpine skiing, saw the value in having a global series of triathlons as a way to expand the sport and demonstrate that the new international sport federation had control of the sport as the International Olympic Committee desired. (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006)

Referring to his skiing background once again, and to eligibility issues for athletes, McDonald stated:

As a long time member of the International Ski Federation (FIS), and the organiser of several World Cup Ski events myself, it would be impossible to imagine for one moment that a competitor from Switzerland, Germany, Austria, France, Italy or Canada would ever start in an international event unless they were in “good standing”, and in possession of a card or license, which was current with their national federation. We are simply going to apply the rules which have been used by every other sports federation since the beginning of time. (L. McDonald, personal communication, December 31, 1996)

When Sisson summarized the International Triathlon Union he said:

Oh, I think we became, we became exactly like the others. And again not to pass judgment, it’s not good nor bad but, um, the nature of the organization was such that in the early days we had to do that required more liberal interpretation of the rules, uh, certainly the number of federations that we created….We had international representation. We started a world cup series that gave us cachet and gave our athletes an opportunity to compete on world scale, uh, so we had again but other federations did the same thing.
We are not like the others but we created a world cup. I mean that’s what a lot of other federations do. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Koenig provided a succinct statement regarding what organizations influenced the development of the International Triathlon Union: “The IOC – and the Ironman Corp as the enemy” (E. Koenig, personal communication, February 26, 2006). Ironman has been the foil for ITU.

**Normative Isomorphism [IT-NORM]**

Normative isomorphism concentrates on professionalism and is the “collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 153). DiMaggio and Powell specifically refer to “the resting of formal education and of legitimation in a cognitive base produced by university specialists [and] the growth and elaboration of professional networks that span organizations and across which new models diffuse rapidly” (p. 153). Personnel are hired from a narrow field of candidates that are similar in nature, education, training, and experience. DiMaggio and Powell call this “filtering.” Professional career tracks “are so closely guarded, both at the entry level and throughout the career progression that the individuals who make it to the top are virtually indistinguishable” (p. 154). Chappelet and Bayle (2004) indicated that “professionalization (the technical management of dossiers and the actions delegation to permanent staff: salaried staff, staff made available by the State, or volunteers with time and specific competencies) under the control of volunteer administrators is a vector for progressing with and implementing projects” (p. 85). Scott (2001) adds that “professional and trade associations present clear modern instances of such groups and processes” (p. 118). Scott and Backman (1990) stated “the professions rule by controlling the believe system. Their primary weapons are ideas” (p. 290). The normative pillar of Scott’s stance (2001) holds its position here. “Normative systems are typically viewed as imposing constraints on social behavior…they empower and enable social action…they confer rights as well as responsibilities, privileges as well as duties, licenses as well as mandates” (p. 55).

Less obvious, at least when compared to the other two isomorphic influences, normative isomorphism was evident in a few areas. The founders of the International Triathlon Union came from various sports backgrounds before becoming involved in triathlon (i.e. McDonald in skiing and mountain climbing, Sisson in running). Once involved in the sport, the founders brought with them skills sometimes honed with their national governing bodies. USA Triathlon,
in those early few years, was the first step for several individuals as they transitioned from national governing body positions to international federation status. They then brought with them the shared experiences from the U.S.A. onto the world stage. Additionally, these people helped formed the “guiding coalition” as described by Scott (1996, p. 21). As ITU developed, leadership was able to target individuals who could offer expertise and guidance within the realm of the International Olympic Committee. McDonald was able to involve several IOC members over the years in various capacities ranging from Gunnar Ericsson as the Honourary President to others serving as advisors and Executive Board members.

ITU recruited and hired individuals with specialized skills. Some of these people came from national governing bodies and had talents that were needed by the international federation (the narrow field of candidates similar in nature). Using Sisson as an example, he had worked on the anti-doping code for USAT before being hired as that organization’s executive director. When he left USAT, he began working for ITU on committees dealing with anti-doping issues as well as the constitution. Eventually, he became treasurer and then the Secretary General for the IF. His involvement was coded as [IT-NOM] because of his skill sets, but we cannot discount the possibility of mimetic isomorphism operating through him as an individual.

Leadership [LDR]

Kotter (2001) simply states that leadership is “about coping with change” (p. 86). Leaders look toward the future, searching for “patterns, relationships, and linkages that help explain things” (p. 87). The leader of an organization provides the vision and the strategy. S/he is able to articulate that vision to others and “good leaders motivate people in a variety of ways” (p. 93). Leaders must attempt to see the “big picture” and see where the organization will be in the future, the future being long term in nature. Kotter also indicates that leaders had opportunities while they were in their 20s and 30s to “try to lead, to take a risk, and to learn from both triumphs and failures” (p. 96).

Les McDonald came into the sport of triathlon having had opportunities to lead while in his 20s and 30s. McDonald explained his background:

My background has been as a trade union leader, a leader of an electrical workers union. My specialty was organizing unemployed people and organizing people in low-areas – particularly women. I organized some pretty big strikes, but never as a paid official. As
the president of my union, those questions – the questions of women’s rights and racial
equality – you must deal with at the very core. If you’re going to be a trade unionist, you
find out right away that everybody’s the same. (A Conversation with Les McDonald,
1992, p. 26)
McDonald has been credited with almost willing the sport of triathlon into the Olympic
Games. In 1995, Sisson declared:
We lucked out when we picked Les as president of the ITU. No other person could have
done it as brilliantly as Les in the big picture. And no one would have spent so much of
his own money and worked 52 weeks a year, 80 hours a week over the last seven years.

Is Les a dictator? Nothing further from the truth. Much of the direction the ITU
took, Les fought. But like any good leader, the buck stops with Les. He takes the heat
for all of us. (Carlson, 1995, p. 40)
A member of the British triathlon delegation to the Sydney Games provided additional accolades
regarding McDonald’s perseverance.

McDonald was the driving force who knew how to jump through the Olympic hoops to
get into the Games. Many purists in triathlon did not think the Olympics were important
but he did. It is phenomenal to think that, in 22 years, we have gone from nothing to the
Olympics. (Powell, 2000)
A former North American representative for ITU said:

It was tough getting the Euros and North Americans and Australians together. Then Les
told them: First you will pay women equally of there won’t be a world championship.
That spoke of his integrity. He risked everything to take that stance. In the end, the dif-
ference that defines Les from everyone else in the sport is that Les did what he did solely
because he thought he was doing the right thing. (Carlson, 1995, p. 41)
McDonald was also credited with being a diplomat when USA Triathlon was on the verge of col-
lapsing in the late 1980s do to disagreements among Board of Directors’ members as well as in
1988 at the Triathlon Federation International meeting in Vancouver when the Americans chose
not to send a representative. He was also named to the Working Committee that attempted to
bring triathlon into the UIPMB.

He has also been less diplomatic in the eyes of a few. Some European groups were leery
of McDonald “and his forceful nature” during the negotiations with UIPMB (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 58). Coulson, the British delegate at the Avignon meeting, touched on McDonald’s leadership abilities based on him floating the trial balloon of an independent international federation and providing a glimpse of his background during those negotiations:

Obviously, McD, had other ideas and he floated his own view that a separate [sic] and self governing body would be the best solution. Because Modern Pentathlon was under threat from the IOC at that time - as it was perceived as an old sport - the view was that if this liaison [sic] took place then triathlon would be simply rubbed out by UIPMB. McD’s own knowledge of left wing politics was useful to facilitate the manoeuvring which was required when dealing with the various people at the Congress and particularly those from Eastern Europe. (P. Coulson, personal communication, August, 25, 2005)

Locke provided this initial opinion of McDonald and how he took control of a meeting regarding the creation of the Pan American Triathlon Confederation:

[W]e met at St. Andreas Island and [I] met Les for the first time and, and he was an interesting, blustery kinda character that really dominated and browbeat everyone there at the meeting. And because he wanted some things done in a certain way and included was the establishment of PATCO as a regional federation and it be done properly. And when you’re dealing with a lot of Latinos it became a macho exercise and prolonged and very frustrating to him I remember. We finally got it done and we became good friends actually during that first meeting because I was willing to sit there and listen and for hours to him pontificate and so it was pretty interesting listening to him what he had to say. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

During the raucous organization meeting with UIPMB when the Russian president of the international federation refused to accept triathlon and its by-laws, McDonald asked the delegates to vote on affiliation with UIPMB even though he was simply a member of the Working Committee (Olivares, Jr., 1989a, p. 58). These types of actions led him to become the logical choice for president for the new self-proclaimed international governing body for triathlon.

Yeah, all by acclaim. I mean he was. It was going into the first world congress I don’t think there was anyone else that was running for President. Uh, you know it had been
predetermined that he would be the President of this organization for the first term. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

McDonald is the focus here because of his longevity and not because of some notion of the great man theory. Longevity as the president of an international sport federation is not unusual as stated earlier in Chapter 2 (p. 31). Many others had leadership roles over the years but it is McDonald who has ultimately persevered. Mark Sisson went from being the Executive Director of Triathlon Federation/USA to working on committees for the International Triathlon Union. He moved his way up the organizational ladder from being a committee member to eventually becoming the Secretary General of the organization before retiring. Sisson also accepts the praise and condemnation associated with pushing for the draft-legal format for the elite fields at World Championships, World Cup races, and the Olympics (“You can pin the drafting rap on me”). Loreen Barnett has worn so many hats over the years as a volunteer (i.e., Technical Delegate, secretary, official) before becoming the organization’s full-time Executive Director. McDonald did achieve, using Chelladurai’s (2001) summary of leadership definitions, organizational goals (Olympics), shaped organizational objectives by setting new objectives and altering old ones (draft-legal format), and maintained the group and organizational culture (athletes come first).

Charismatic leadership, as defined by Chelladurai (2001), refers to the perception of others, such as subordinates, suggest the leader has some sort of special, rare, and exceptional talents. Northouse (2004) identifies charisma, or idealized influence, as a trait which allows for followers to identify with the leader and “want very much to emulate them” (p. 174). Charismatic leadership “refers to follower perception that a leader possesses a divinely inspired gift, and is somehow unique and larger than life” (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992, p. 174).

McDonald was described as “a charismatic and colorful individual” by Sisson in a letter to the International Olympic Committee in 2001. As stated earlier, it was the stories and the ability to “press the flesh” that made McDonald a persuasive lobbyist. Sisson provided examples of his persistence:

This was for Les, it was a never ending challenge, uh, a pursuit that he was not going to take lightly or ever give up on. Uh, he quickly learned the names of every IOC member, learned about their wives, their families, learned about their backgrounds, learned about
their countries’ history. It was quite interesting to watch Les go into a bar and talk to some IOC member from Eastern Europe and start to educate that IOC member on the history of his own country. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

His lobbying efforts then created a network of IOC members, national governing body leaders, athletes, and so forth. McDonald’s ability to meet with IOC members and educate them about the sport of triathlon grew this network. After his trip to Barcelona in 1992, McDonald commented on the lobbying efforts:

One of the most significant aspects of the trip was that I managed to speak to every single member of the IOC—and there are 92 of them—for the first time. For me, Barcelona was a watershed. I now know every member of the IOC, and in turn, they each know the story of the triathlon. And more importantly, I have not heard anyone who has a negative feeling about our sport. Everyone I spoke to said, “Yes, you’re going to be on the program. I support you.” (A Conversation with Les McDonald, 1992, p. 26)

As president of the International Triathlon Union, Les McDonald met with International Olympic Committee members, heads of states, National Olympic Committee officials, and national governing body representatives. The settings ranged from social and formal where diplomacy and charm are *muy importante* or the setting was an International Triathlon Union World Congress committee meeting where his strong will and forcefulness were apparent. McDonald has been characterized as both charming and “ornery” (Kidder, 2000). It was his cantankerous and forceful character that often annoyed his detractors.

With leadership come power and the ability to influence. “The power possessed by a leader is important not only for influencing subordinates, but also for influencing peers, superiors, and people outside the organization, such as clients and suppliers” (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992, p. 160). McDonald has played the role of peacemaker between warring factions within Triathlon Federation/USA. He has used coercive power to ram through legislation, in the opinions of others, regarding the draft-legal format. McDonald has controlled information allowing him the opportunity to bring into disrepute the views and positions of opponents (Slack, 1997). The election in Perth and the decision by the Executive Board to remove certain proxy voters is one such example. His legitimate power comes from holding the presidency since the organization’s creation. He was also able to build a relationship with former International Olympic Committee
President J.A. Samaranch that allowed him borrow money from the IOC to recover ITU’s marketing rights from the defunct PSE. This relationship also gave him support after the tumultuous Perth election in 2000. Furthermore, McDonald was able to convince the World Congress (with help from people like Sisson) that it was in the best interest of the sport to adopt the draft legal format for the elite athletes, in spite of loud protests from USA Triathlon, thus employing agent persuasiveness (Yukl, 1999). Protests which further strained the rapport between the two organizations.

Transformational leadership is a subset of cultural leadership because it may allow for implementation of cultural change. Transformational leaders “are concerned with creating a new vision and order for the organization” (Chelladurai, 2001, p. 308) and having the ability of “influencing major changes in the attitudes and assumptions of organization members (organization culture) and building commitment for major changes in the organization’s objectives and strategies” (Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992, p. 174). Transformational leaders “frequently provide ideas that result in rethinking of old patterns of behavior, and enable followers to look at problems from different angles and resolve those problems in new and novel ways” (Koh et al., 1995, p. 320).

McDonald, as the focus of this discussion, was able to encourage and persuade others to accept his vision of what the International Triathlon Union was to become. Personal finances took a back seat to the needs of the new organization and people accepted this. Barnett told the story of how every resource she could provide went into the International Triathlon Union. So much so that she nearly lost her home trying to support the organization (L. Barnett, personal communication, January 28, 2005). Volunteers ran the ITU headquarters for several years; there was no paid staff.

Culture [CUL]

With only one leader for nearly two decades, one must consider just how much the organization reflects the beliefs of its president (and also the probability of dissenting views existing). Chapplet and Bayle (2004) indicate that “strong presidency” occurs when the “president takes the major decisions; he or she controls the functioning of the [Olympic Sport Organization] and usually surround him- or herself with two colleagues to implement these decisions (usually the technical director and director of administration)” (p. 72-73). Schein (2004) defined culture
as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 17; italics in original text)

Harris (1994) states that organizational culture “encompasses both individual and group-level phenomena” (p. 309) and that organizational culture is “ultimately manifested in and maintained by the sensemaking efforts and actions of individuals” (p. 310). Denison (1996) described culture as “the deep structure of organizations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by organizational members” and “meaning is established through socialization to a variety of identity groups that converge in the workplace” (p. 624). Mahler (1997) explains that organizational culture “informs the sense making and interpretation of the kinds of ambiguities seen in puzzling data, problematic situations, uncertain program technologies, and obscure links between problems and solutions” (p. 519).

Culture is a unique area of this study because it was swirling around in so many areas and organizations that came in contact with the founders of the International Triathlon Union. The divisions formed after the failed attempts with Triathlon Federation International and Federation International Triathlon, establishing an alliance of North Americans and Oceania countered by members of the European Triathlon Union, which continued into the 21st century. Those European countries that wanted to align themselves with the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon, but were thwarted by the North Americans and a few European federations, developed into a festering wound that would not heal. The German federation seemed consistently at odds with the direction the leadership of ITU was taking. Not helping their cause was the officiating and logistical problems with the 1992 Frankfurt Duathlon World Championships and the abdicating the 1999 Munich Triathlon World Championships.

Engelhart led the discussion in favor of the UIPMB vote before elections. Arguments against the West German’s proposal were heard from representatives from most of the Alliance countries. As the verbal battle raged on, it became obvious that the Engelhart faction was trying to block the elections, principally to prevent McDonald from assuming
power as the sure-to-be-elected president, and that they also were trying to lock out any 

disruption of their hidden agenda with the UIPMB. (Olivares, Jr., 1989, p. 62)

This snippet was coded culture, [CUL], as it exhibits the opinions that some of the European 
governing bodies had towards their North American counterparts. It also provides a cornerstone 
for the bitter relationship that vexed the two groups for years. Culture is also demonstrated when 
some of the European governing bodies walked out in protest of the elections within the triathlon 
group.

An example of a perceptional difference between McDonald and a European are the 
thoughts of Koenig and what she believes to be driving the sport of triathlon. When asked how 
the sport is prospering right now, Koenig replied:

The sport is prospering because of the Ironman. All new athletes wish to compete in 
such a race. TV coverage and money is on the side of Ironman. The Olympic triathlon is 
alive because of the Olympic Games, duathlon not existing anymore and winter triathlon 
struggling. (E. Koenig, personal communication, February 26, 2006)

Her views seem to counter those of McDonald’s.

One item pertaining to culture, and something that McDonald asked me not to overlook, 
was the need for equality of women and the involvement of women in leadership positions. This 
idea of equality is placed in the organization’s constitution and the idea of mandating equal prize 
money during those early years was challenging. The inaugural Triathlon World Championship 
in 1989 is such an example where the French organizers were not going to offer equal prize 
money, but were forced to capitulate once the athletes and ITU leadership demanded change. A 
Women’s Commission was created early in the organization’s history and from that committee 
came the first female vice-president of the International Triathlon Union. Loreen Barnett is the 
Executive Director for the international federation. This involvement of women was noted by 
those outside the sport:

Triathlon is a new sport with new attitudes and most importantly new structures. The tri- 
athlon federation set up a women’s commission in 1990 with a brief to establish gender 
equality by 2000. By 1992 two out of the six members on their executive board were fe-

male. Free air tickets offered by race organizers are shared between male and female ath-
letes: that equality of opportunity at the start line. They lobby the media for balanced re-
porting of male and female event’s and fight for the same prize money. (Jennings, 1996, p. 220)

What I found worthy of note in the area of culture within the International Triathlon Union was how it focused on the issues of the importance of the terms “world championship” and “world cup.” The international federation did not hesitate in going after events that were using the terms without ITU approval, even if it meant expelling one of their own. The race director for the World Cup Gold Coast, who was also a member of the Technical Committee, was cast out of the organization and then elite athletes who competed in this pariah event were then banned from ITU sanctioned competitions. McDonald and others took this issue of linguistics seriously as it had implications to the organization’s credibility with the International Olympic Committee. “How many World Championships are there?” McDonald said, impersonating an IOC member, when trying to explain the use of the terms by others who were not associated with ITU (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

No where more was this apparent than the personal and legal battles fought between the International Triathlon Union and Ironman, also known as the also known as the Ironman Triathlon World Championship. Each side had their own reasons for wanting the term “world championship” to be proprietary. Ironman had a “we were here first” attitude and had brand recognition; triathlon was synonymous with its event. ITU countered that the international federation awarded world championships, and that Ironman’s use of the term negatively impacted the international federation’s goal to become an Olympic sport. With the International Triathlon Union now in the position of governing the sport on a global scale those individuals and races which had been in existence well before the creation of an international federation were now having to adapt or battle the organization regarding event names and dates. Self-proclaimed world championships and world cup races were subject to ITU’s review.

In 1991, after the International Olympic Committee had recognized ITU as the international federation, the “ITU endeavour[ed] to reach [an] agreement with Ironman based [specified criteria], and produce harmony we all desire for the good of Triathlon” (International Triathlon Union Council Meeting, 1991, p. 9). Of the 10 items listed as criteria, two dealt with the term “World” in Ironman’s title and marketing. ITU would “suggest to the Ironman Corporation, as a gesture of our desire to reach a mutual agreement” that they drop the self-declared title (p. 9). A year later the International Triathlon Union indicated they would “severely criticize” Ironman
and others who used the term “world” in their event names. The leadership of ITU was becoming more comfortable with exerting its power, power gained from being recognized by the IOC as the international federation for the sport of triathlon, by indicating that it determined what events were called world championships.

Of further interest to me was when ITU leadership began to look at pressuring USA Triathlon to withhold sanctioning from Ironman unless the World Triathlon Corporation abided by the international federation’s wishes. The International Triathlon Union was willing to withdraw the American national governing body’s “good standing” as a tactic to get them to refuse to sanction the Ironman triathlon. At the Stockholm Executive Board meeting, the International Triathlon Union was ready to put USA Triathlon on notice regarding the Ironman triathlon. In the meeting minutes, Sisson reported:

Options were given to USAT to solve the problem of the Ironman self-declared World Championships. They, the Ironman Company, will determine which name change they have chosen. If they do not change their name from Triathlon World Championships, the USAT will not sanction the Ironman event in Hawaii and will align itself with ITU.

This agreement changes the nature of ITU’s relationship with the Ironman Corp. and will create harmony. Les McDonald stated that we have strong allies in the International Sports Federations who confirm they will never tolerate a self-declared ‘World Championship’ in their sport. We are following a well trodden path.

**The Executive Board agreed that USAT will not be issued a letter of ‘Good Standing’ if this situation is not resolved.** (International Triathlon Union Executive Board Meeting, 1997, p. 3; bold and underline in original text)

Ironman eventually took their grievances to court seeking to keep ITU from forcing USA Triathlon to decide between membership in good standing with the international federation and sanctioning an American event. McDonald viewed this as fighting the good fight because the international sport federation is supposed to have control over world championships. Trice and Beyer (1991) indicated that the founder/leader creating the organization’s culture must also recognize peoples’ uncertainties, remove ambiguity, and be able to communicate and convince them about the culture so that it becomes shared (p. 151).

This *ménage a trois* relationship between the International Triathlon Union, USA Triathlon and Ironman offers a glimpse of competing cultures operating within the same field. ITU
viewed the sport from a global perspective, operating the auspices of the Olympic Charter. USA Triathlon, as the American NGB, had to serve ITU, the United States Olympic Committee, and its age group based membership, an age group membership that did not always agree with the decisions of the international federation (e.g. draft legal format for elite athletes). Ironman, having been created before ITU, had longevity and brand recognition on its side. It is because of these factors it is the most visible triathlon in terms of overall media exposure. These cultural aspects of each organization seem to exhibit their own coercive isomorphism on one another.

*Nous ne sommes pas les autres*: the belief that the International Triathlon Union was different from other international federations. This is part of “the deep structure of organizations, which is rooted in the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by organizational members” and (Denison, 1996, p. 624). McDonald believes that triathlon and the International Triathlon Union are unique and special. Referring back to what Sisson had said of this philosophy, the former ITU Secretary General explained:

> It tried to convey an image that we’re not going to be the heavy-handed bureaucratic, uh, old guard where the federation is run by people who have never done the sport or people who don’t care about the athletes but in fact care more about whatever kind of side deals they can make. That was kind of the perception at least Les had of other federations. Uh, we were clearly the hip younger energetic good looking charismatic federation or athletes. We come from an age group background all of us within the administration inside the sport…we were all athletes so we all knew what we were talking about in terms of what the athletes wanted. That was one aspect that was we are not like the others (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

Schein (2004) calls this “the formal statement – the attempt by the founders or leaders to explicitly state what their values or assumptions are” (p. 269). The statement is reflective of McDonald’s ideology and philosophy.

What the athletes wanted was also part of McDonald’s philosophy that became part of the International Triathlon Union’s culture. The World Cup Series with its travel and housing vouchers to those athletes who committed to the circuit and who performed well was an element of this ideal. Triathlon was to be about the athletes and not the administrators or countries. “We are servants of the athletes – not the country” he wrote to a European Triathlon Union official. Athletes are the focus of the sport. Not the administrators. While explaining an early meeting
with TFI officials in Canada, McDonald said “[They wanted] to stay at the Bay Shore Inn at $200 a night and [in separate rooms]….We still don’t do that today. We’ll have six kids in our rooms half the time” (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

Schein (2004) provides an example of allocating rewards and punishment:

Being told company secrets is a major reward; being frozen out by *not* being told can be a major punishment that signals excommunication. Being no longer in the loop is a clear signal that one has done something wrong. (p. 129)

Sisson’s provided an example of McDonald withholding his “love” for someone when that individual had done something to wrong or keeping the individual “out of the loop...when it was convenient to be kept out of the loop”(M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005).

Locke’s explanation of how his relationship with McDonald changed after he ran against him for the presidency of ITU in 1996 affords us another illustration of the culture of punishment and reward.

Yeah, sure the relationship soured immediately because, uh, why, how could anyone have the absolute audacity to run against Les? And Les is a person who will forever hold a grudge. Although I found it interesting that after I ran he held his grudge for a year or two and then we became friends again. But you got to remember that no one’s ever a friend of Les. Everyone is, is, uh, can be dispensed with. And Mark thought he was a friend of Les. Les has no friends. If you are of no use to Les then he will dispose of you. And I think that, uh, that for some reason Les came back, at least with me, after a couple of years and we were friendly. I thought it was probably because he thought maybe at that point he could manipulate and use people for what his purpose is. (S. Locke, personal communication, July 30, 2005)

McDonald is one to respond to criticism he views to be unfair with point-by-point retorts. Schein (2004) calls this “leader reactions to critical incidents and organizational crises” (p. 254). His response to the 220 article in 1994 accusing him of selling out the sport is an instance of his reaction. His reaction to the *Australian Triathlete* magazine article involving Alvin Chriss was a 10-point, two page memo outlining errors and observations.

Yes, Les McDonald has always been opposed to people drafting on his back wheel, and they always did. But occasionally, the president of ITU is wrong. (No, often). The change of mind came with the realization that we were deluding ourselves with a veneer
of hypocrisy if we thought the drafting problem would disappear of its own free will. It hasn’t and it won’t. so [sic] we are experimenting, with ITU Congress approval, with some of the ITU events again in 1995. many [sic] of the athletes who were originally opposed have now changed their mind. The World Cup is sponsor-TV driven. There are thousands of triathlon events world-wide for athletes to chose from, let them decide. But, take time out and watch the bike section of a triathlon. Chose one where the organiser has paid an appearance fee, plus travel and hotel accommodation for a couple of star attractions from a foreign exotic land, like Colorado or California, and is hell bent on getting his promotional financial return with guaranteed victories. Try it. I have. It is degrading. And listen to the bitter complaints of one athlete against the other, for drafting. I have, and its [sic] very sad. (L. McDonald, personal communication, December 29, 1994) [CUL]

Acknowledging the need to change the rules for the elite athletes only at the Olympic-distance, this paragraph was coded as culture. Considering a draft-legal format represented a tectonic shift in the sport as drafting was a core value of the sport, from an American point of view. The ramifications of such a move meant disaffecting a portion of the athletes and governing bodies.

Triathlon is also unique in that it holds an age group world championship in conjunction with the elite Triathlon World Championship. When the IAAF holds its cross-country and track and field world championships there are no age group competitions. The same applies for the vast majority of other sports recognized by the International Triathlon Union. Triathlon came from the age group competitors and McDonald and others have kept that connection. “It’s non-negotiable” McDonald said referring to the presence of age group competitors at all World Championships (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006).

Schein (2004) points out stories are important to an organization. “Thus, the story – whether in the form of a parable, legend, or even myth – reinforces assumptions and teaches to newcomers” (p. 268). It has been documented that McDonald is a prolific story teller. While in North Vancouver, the office personnel acknowledged the “bathroom story,” when McDonald snuck in through a bathroom window to attend an IOC meeting, was indeed part of the organization’s lore.

As a final point, the culture of the organization is also demonstrated in the lay out of its office in North Vancouver. “Leaders who have a clear philosophy and style often chose to em-
body that style in the visible manifestations of their organization” (Schein, 2004, p. 267). No individual has a private office. No individual has a private parking space. This egalitarian design may be a product of McDonald’s past as a union organizer and anti-apartheid protestor. It is also conducive with his notion that ITU is not like the others.

**Of Interest**

This became somewhat of a catch-all category because the data did not fit the definitions of the other codes but was included because the material was intriguing to me. Intriguing to me because the data was prophetic, completely wrong, and/or demonstrated the passion and opinions of the individuals involved.

As early as 1985 the International Olympic Committee recognized the creation of new sports and that the organization should be receptive to them.

The IOC wishes and has open its door to new sports and the programme of the Olympic Games to new sports, disciplines and events. In no way does that mean that an extensive and unreasonable development should be possible…We have biathlon, pentathlon, heptathlon and decathlon. There are a lot of possibilities in between and every day new events are invented and new sports founded or developed…The revision of the Olympic programme, which I already mentioned, particularly the study on the limitations of entry numbers for most of the events, also serves the purpose of giving new events or sports a better chance…Popularity and all the other criteria from the “Olympic Charter,” should be a basis for admission, as well as the fact that newly admitted sports and events are only and completely controlled by sports organizations themselves. (Tröger, 1985, p. 103)

This paragraph from the International Olympic Committee’s 1985 minutes was coded as [OI] as the IOC is being made aware of new sports and new international federations forming. New sports could infuse the Olympic Games with new vitality and vibrancy.

The Olympics meant change, however, to the free-spirited sport from Southern California. The race director of Ironman in 1987 said:

Even greater international awareness is certain, an Olympic status is on the horizon, but the through this inevitable growth process, I hope the original purpose of triathlons will be preserved. Primarily, the sport should provide an arena of fun and fitness for those who participate – whether triathletes, race organizers, sponsors, media or sanctioning
bodies – so those involved can feel they’ve accomplished their personal goals and contributed something special to others. (State of the Sport, 1987, p. 66)

This statement was coded [OI] because it proved prophetic because of the shifting relationship between Ironman and the international federation. The focus was on the Olympics for the founders of the international federation almost from the start. Sisson explained that the Olympics were the goal.

With always the understanding that triathlon should become an Olympic sport. I mean that was the emphasis for ultimately creating an international federation…Early on that was the primary goal. You know in many respects that was [sic] no other reason to have an international federation. (M. Sisson, personal communication, May 27, 2005)

When IOC President Samaranch took an interest in the sport, the spark was provided for the sport to move forward towards the Olympics. Then again, there were concerns expressed what the Olympics might do to the sport:

We [the editors of Triathlete magazine] would like to see the triathlon become an Olympic event; our major reservation has to do with the fact that Olympic involvement tends to create a nasty combination of sports and politics, power-plays and personalities. Triathletes and their organizations in 40 different countries are also trying to get the sport into the Olympics. Perhaps we don’t have to try so hard – especially if the effect is to seriously damage the sport here in the United States.

The triathlon is a strong, healthy sport, with some of the best international competition consistently available anywhere in the world. The Olympics should be courting the triathlon as much as the reverse. The Olympics may not need the triathlon, but perhaps the triathlon doesn’t need the Olympics either. (State of the Sport, p. 76-77)

The Olympic dream was not shared by all those involved in the sport. Additional data provided examples of individuals who were not as enamored with the Olympic Dream as were the founders of the International Triathlon Union. Examples of athletes and editors illustrated some of the concerns present to question why the Olympics were the goal.

Another item that fell into this category was the issue of proxy voting at a meeting between the Union Internationale de Pentathlon Moderne et Biathlon and the triathlon group as they tried to come together. Looking back through the lens of history, there is a certain amount of irony present as the triathlon founders at that early meeting, including McDonald, were disap-
pointed in how the proxy issues was being handled. To paraphrase Santayana, those who fail to understand history are doomed to repeat it. In the year 2000 this issue of credentials and proxy votes would result in legal action against the International Triathlon Union.

Proving that humor can result in even serious moments, the two anecdotes involving bathrooms illustrate the need to adapt quickly in the face of obstacles. ITU President McDonald climbing through the window of a bathroom to avoid security at an IOC gathering so he can lobby for the sport is an atypical, albeit creative, response to a problem. ITU representative Loreen Barnett and USAT representative Tim Yount meeting in the women’s bathroom in Manchester trying to correct the age group results at the 1993 Triathlon World Championships is not a textbook example of sport management, but does show initiative by the actors involved.

When Samaranch sent word that the International Olympic Committee had placed the sport of triathlon on the competition program for the Sydney Games, the driving goal of ITU had been achieved. However, within that minimal statement contained the word *provisional* and that meant the excitement and thrill of the announcement of inclusion should be tempered because the sport would still be evaluated leading to Sydney and after the 2000 Olympics.

ITU also seemed to stumble about with regards to its Triathlon World Championships and Duathlon World Championships. Drafting issues with the Triathlon World Championships in the early 1990s tarnished the organization’s marquee event. Financial problems with the 1996 TWC in Cleveland, Ohio cost the IF $60,000 and legal action against the race promoter in the Court of Arbitration for Sport. The Frankfurt Duathlon World Championship in 1992, with its massive drafting issues, as well as Germany’s reneging on the 1999 TWC, further soured the relationship between the ITU and its German governing body. The Americans, putting on the 1993 DWC with only a couple of months lead time after Switzerland back tracked on its bid, is another example of the problems associated World Championships for ITU.

To finish this section, the relationship between USA Triathlon and ITU, as well as USA Triathlon’s own internal problems beginning in 1989, fell into this category. At times symbiotic in nature and at other instances hostile, the two organizations share history and personnel in the quest for Olympic recognition and program inclusion.

**Interaction and Simultaneous Influence**

At times the coding lent itself to conflicting categories. An incident or setting could be coded coercive but also have mimetic properties. Membership in GAISF is required; a milestone
on the road to Olympic recognition, but it is also something that every international federation has done as they developed. Normative coding an individual is difficult because the professional attributes of the person may fit the definition of normative isomorphism, there is, at this juncture, no way to consider any mimetic isomorphism applied by that person on the organization. These issues are further addressed in the following chapter. Institutional theory does have some weaknesses that come to light as a result this case study.
Unlike previous studies in sport management that attributed change in organizations due to mimetic isomorphism (Kikulis, 2000; O’Brien & Slack, 2004), the largest influence being exerted upon the International Triathlon Union was that of coercive isomorphism, in a variety of forms. The International Olympic Committee and the Olympic Charter provided the direction the founders of the new international federation had to take. Kikulis found that volunteer boards became institutionalized in national sports organizations in Canada, a mimetic process (although she did touch on the influence of the Canadian government on NSOs). O’Brien’s and Slack’s looked at an English rugby league transforming from an amateur model to a professional model. Some clubs started the transformation before the scheduled date so other teams often copied what the early adopters had created. In both these studies there was no powerful regulatory agency issuing directives, but rather uncertainty and ambiguity were present.

Various milestones had to be reached before the IOC would consider recognizing the organization as the international sport federation for the sport of triathlon. After recognition, the founders of the International Triathlon Union then had to lobby each and every member of the International Olympic Committee to put the sport on the competition program. This lobbying was in addition to showing the IOC that ITU had control of its sport on a global scale and was able to govern it effectively. Perhaps the most blatant example of coercive isomorphism is when rumors began permeating the Olympic world that triathlon was in danger of being removed from the 2004 Athens Games unless it got its house in order. There’s nothing like being called on the carpet by the regulatory agency and told to play well with others or be cast out. Additionally, time was a coercive isomorphism for the leaders of the new international federation because of the threat of a rival organization forming, being granted regulatory legitimacy, and meeting the dictums of the Olympic Charter as soon as possible.

While coercive isomorphism was the primary influence in how the founders of the International Triathlon Union determined the direction of the organization, there were examples of mimetic and normative influences. Initially, the founders thought that becoming part of an existing international sport federation would be the quickest path to the Olympic Games after
Samaranch’s suggestion. After attempting to become a part of UIPMB, the founders of ITU resisted and decided to form their own international sport federation. In the beginning ITU borrowed heavily from Triathlon Federation/USA’s rule book. Les McDonald, with his background in skiing, and others saw the need to create a Triathlon World Cup Series patterned after the Skiing World Cup Series. These are example of mimetic isomorphism at work. The normative examples, while much less subtle in their display, did exist. Many of the founders came to the International Triathlon Union from their own national governing bodies. Mark Sisson wrote TriFed’s original anti-doping statues and then did the same for ITU. As ITU developed, individuals were recruited to join the organization because they had experience with the IOC; indeed, some members of the International Triathlon Union’s Executive Board were also IOC members. The realization that outside assistance in the securing of sponsorship dollars and the selling of marketing rights needed expertise that members of ITU did not have provided the impetus to hire Pacific Sports Entertainment, and although that decision wound up costing the international federation time and money it did demonstrate a need for professional input. Finally, the leadership of ITU understood that a professional office staff was necessary and that the organization could no longer be completely run by volunteers.

Leadership of the International Triathlon Union has been in the hands of Les McDonald since 1989. He survived re-election bids in 1996 and 2000. Depending upon who you talk to, and when you talked to that person, he has been called charismatic, dictatorial, diplomatic, visionary, and ornery. In this case study, in my opinion, it is highly improbable to separate the organization from its president. The two are intertwined, and so much of that has to do with his longevity as the leader of the international federation. While he eschews the notion of “I did this” or “he did that,” and that the focus should always be on the athletes, he is the face and heart of the International Triathlon Union.

Institutional theory promotes the concept that organizations are moving towards homogeneity, within a specified field, because of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), as well as being influenced by other organizations (DiMaggio, 1991). Leaders surely have influence over their organizations as well as others. McDonald’s belief in the Olympic Charter as the road map for recognition and inclusion is an example of coercive isomorphism, but his decision, along with others, to go out and create national governing bodies to meet the Charter requirements rather than wait provides additional pressure on the organization to operate in a certain manner.
Culture, within this case study, could have been its own topic due to the complexity surrounding the number of different groups associated with ITU. By focusing on an international sport federation, I brought into play a mixture of backgrounds, political systems, beliefs, language, and gender roles, to name but a few, that occur not only within ITU but also in the member national governing bodies and the International Olympic Committee. Each entity associated with this study has its own culture. At times these cultures clash as was demonstrated with the long running battles ITU had with some of the European national federations and Ironman as well as confrontations with USA Triathlon. The goals and aspirations of the international federation did not always match those of its member governing bodies. This led to ITU incorporating its own coercive isomorphism with these national governing bodies at various times.

*Nous ne sommes pas les autres* is McDonald’s defining statement and belief. A belief in a democratic, representative IF that considers the athletes the main ingredient to its successes. A variety of cultures clashed within ITU and from the outside. ITU’s relationship with its largest and richest member national governing body, USA Triathlon, is one such example. By 1996 USAT became so frustrated and annoyed with ITU that the organization placed its Executive Director on the ballot for president of the international federation. USAT also provided sanctioning of the Hawai‘i Ironman, which the leadership of the International Triathlon Union, did not come to appreciate. This led Ironman to seek an injunction against USAT from withdrawing sanctioning for the event. For a short time, ITU considered withdrawing USAT’s “membership in good standing” status as a means to influence the NGB.

There are examples and detractors providing support to the contrary; ITU is indeed like the others. All these conclusions are based on the data available to me. There exists an abundance of other information that was unavailable and unobtainable for a variety of reasons. Not being able to interview all the founders either because their locations were unknown or they chose not to participate, accessing all the International Olympic Committee meeting minutes as some are embargoed, and not being able to interview members of the IOC to gain their perceptions are limitations to this study. However, my intention with this study was look for what influences were present as an organization went from creation to Olympic recognition and then to program inclusion in five year’s time did come to fruition. By combining heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and a historical review, as a methodological approach, of what transpired in those five years has begun to be identified. With the introduction of leadership and cultural aspects
which are not typically identified when discussing institutional theory, it is my hope that others will be able to build upon this study by incorporating other variables and using other methodologies to examine organizations.

**Institutional Theory Challenges**

While institutional theory provided the framework for this topic, it did so with some challenges. From a macro perspective it was indeed demonstrated that coercive isomorphism was the largest force acting on the founders of the International Triathlon Union. However, coercive isomorphism does not operate exclusively at the expense of mimetic and normative (in addition to leadership and cultural influences). Rather than a broad based view of institutional theory reliant upon the three traditional isomorphisms, this case study shows interaction taking place between all the isomorphisms. Multiple influences occurred and impacted the founders of the International Triathlon Union. Other elements exist and we cannot ignore what else is occurring, thus negating these other components, simply to take a general observation. We must consider that no single source is totally responsible for the move towards homogeneity, but rather take into account the interaction that is involved between all the influencers.

Further compounding the challenges of institutional theory is the individual. The Olympic Charter was the coercive isomorphism for ITU, but the role of the individual is not adequately addressed. An individual may be hired by ITU to serve a specific role (i.e. marketing manager). This individual may then bring in his or her own coercive and mimetic isomorphic influence into play while a part of the organization. The macro view shows homogeneity being driven by coercive isomorphism, but the micro view provides a demonstration of interaction and simultaneous influencers.

The presence of a strong regulatory agency, that bestows legitimacy to an organization (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Deephouse, 1996; Scott, 2001), lends itself to making coercive isomorphism the most powerful isomorphism present. A regulatory agency provides the minimum standards to be met before its approval is granted. The National Collegiate Athletic Association has specific guidelines for each college or university operating in a division that exist within its jurisdiction. There are minimums and maximums associated with DI-A, DI-AA, DI-AAA, DII, and DIII. There are also punitive actions available to the organization to take against member institutions that fail to abide by the rules, regulations, and policies of the NCAA.

This is a form of coercive isomorphism in action. However, how a member institution
responds is another matter. An institution, even knowing exactly what is required, may still look at other institutions and mimic what they have done to comply. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) indicated that mimetic isomorphism was a “standard responses to uncertainty” (p. 150). The regulatory agency has established the rules of operation, but may be the uncertainty exists in knowing what to do but not how to do it. Ambiguity is then the reason for mimetic isomorphism to take hold, but in combination with the coercive nature of the regulatory agency.

Leadership and organizational culture have not typically, or specifically, been addressed with reviewing institutional theory. When compared to the macro view often taken by institutional theory, these micro variables emerge as having some type of impact on the organization. McDonald’s longevity as the president of ITU allows for at least the consideration the impact of leadership stability has on an organization, positive or negative. With nearly 20 years at the helm, the culture of the organization would also appear to be influenced in some manner by his tenure.

Alternative Explanations

Constructionism allows for variations in interpretation and conclusion. Not only is it possible for someone else to interpret my findings differently, my expectations are that this will happen. I encourage others to find different meanings and explanations from the data based upon their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.

With this in mind, the codes assigned to the data could be interpreted differently by another. While I take the stance that coercive isomorphism was the major factor in determining the path of ITU, others might look at mimetic isomorphism as the key influence. This could be possible by interpreting the data and concluding that the founders of ITU simply copied the IOC Charter. From there, the founders duplicated the skiing World Cup Series, imitated USA Triathlon in structure and in rules, and exerting its influence as other international federations do. The International Triathlon Union did what other international federations did before it. My interpretation of coercive isomorphism, with coercive not having to be viewed in an entirely negative manner, means that the IOC and the Charter provided the direction the founders needed to take and the steps required before recognition would take place. The markers already are in place, all that is needed is to reach each one. In this case study the interviewed founders of the International Triathlon Union internalized the Olympic Charter, viewing it as the guide for their actions.

Taking a “bottom-up” view of organizational creation compared to the “top-down” for-
mat I chose might also provide different results and interpretations. Collecting data from a variety of national governing bodies, national federations, and national sport organizations offers a different perspective. Former USAT Executive Director Steve Locke indicated the United States Olympic Committee had a tremendous amount of influence on the American national governing body compared to the influence ITU had on it.

Finally, the nature versus nurture debate might affect one’s perception regarding both culture and leadership. I have attempted to hold a neutral stance by providing background information on McDonald, his interests, upbringing, views, and so forth to let the reader come to an individual conclusion regarding who and what McDonald is. With his background in union organizing and his activity as a high caliber athlete himself, it may be interesting to speculate on what else guided him besides the Olympic Charter.

Practical Applications

Loreen Barnett told me right before I left the International Triathlon Union offices in North Vancouver that “this couldn’t happen again.” She was referring to the path that McDonald and others took, under the guidance of the president of the IOC and an assigned IOC member to the sport of triathlon, because the process the IOC uses now to admit a new sport is stricter today than when the founders of ITU were making their case for recognition and program inclusion. However, the course of action another sport would take remains similar.

Attractiveness: Attractive not only applies to meeting the minimums as specified in the IOC Charter regarding number of countries participating in the sport, but also the sport itself and its participants. Triathlon portrays an active lifestyle by combining three sports that a child might do on a summer day; the simplicity of swimming, biking, and running is appealing. Attractive also applies to the physical beauty of the competitors, how telegenic they are, and their youthfulness (and the stewards of the Olympic Games are interested in keeping a youthful demographic; see the addition of snowboarding). The uniforms are tight fitting and colorful (see women’s beach volleyball). Attractive pertains to the cost of the sport, including the cost of a venue. Triathlon requires the building of no stadiums, no field house, or gymnasiums. A body of water and roads are all that an OCOG needs. Along this line, triathlon is attractive because a limited amount of athletes comprise the field and there are no heats thus speeding up the competition. The sport fits well into a two hour time block, attractive to both television and the local organizers.
Creativity: As has been stated several times, the Olympic Charter indicates what must be done, but how it is to be done. Rather than take a “bottom-up” formational view, ITU began exporting its leadership and culture by assisting in the creation of national governing bodies/national federations/national sport organizations. This allowed for the organization to reach the IOC minimums concerning “countries and continents” rather than waiting for each individual country to develop the sport alone.

Determination: There must be a willingness of founders of a new international federation to meet and lobby every single International Olympic Committee member. These are the people who evaluate the competition program after each Olympic Games. Les McDonald was able to develop relationships with individual members of the IOC. You “have to make friends with IOC members” as they might not be voting for the sport, but are voting for you (L. McDonald, personal communication, January 29, 2006). By meeting every IOC member and lobbying each one for their support, McDonald was able to create a large and powerful network of individuals who would ultimately control the destiny, and to a certain extent, the fate of triathlon.

This is an expensive and time consuming proposition but it is necessary, otherwise the people who make up this regulatory agency are uninformed at best and indifferent at worst. Within the entire IOC membership the key players include the president and the executive board of the organization. The president and members of the executive board influence the general membership. The same concept applies for national governing bodies seeking recognition by their National Olympic Committee.

Events: Somehow ITU was able to progress towards the Olympic Games in spite of itself. Its World Championships always seemed to have problems. Whether it was logistics, financial, or officiating, the marquee event for the IF placed them in a poor light. An organization’s showcase event needs to operate seamlessly and smoothly. The legitimacy of the organization is at stake.

Luck: A highly unstable intangible that cannot be directly created, but may be cultivated through persistence and focus. It is also contextual in nature and not necessarily random. In the case of triathlon, the accepted story is that IOC President Samaranch saw the sport of triathlon on television and indicated that it had the potential to be an Olympic sport. His interest in the sport helped trigger the guiding force that the founders of ITU would use. The IOC, in 1985, addressed the need to look at other sports being created and played across the globe to help keep
McDonald attended every gathering of the International Olympic Committee. He began to get recognized and got IOC members interested in triathlon. Through these contacts other doors began to open. He lobbied bid committees that were going after the Olympics. He was the voice in the wilderness asking others to take a look at this sport. As a result, he falls asleep on the shoulder of a Coke executive and secures a $200,000 sponsorship deal.

Here again McDonald’s lobbying and networking, at the micro level, would appear to have created luck. He crawls through a bathroom window to circumvent security to meet more IOC members. His meeting with Princess Anne, after surviving the immediate background check and gaining her support, is part of this process.

There’s a confluence of factors associated with this concept of luck that may be the result of one activity. Creativity, determination, and resiliency all were cultivated and were outcomes of the networking Les McDonald and others did within the International Olympic Committee. This power of the network, meeting every IOC member and befriending each one, allowed McDonald to create a rapport with the very people who would vote for triathlon’s recognition and program inclusion. This put the sport of triathlon within the Olympic family rather than on the outside.

“Gunnar Ericsson [the designated guide to IOC recognition] came over and said, ‘Welcome to the family,’” recalls ITU President Les McDonald. “It is a family, and it’s good to be on the inside rather than the outside” (Moore, 1991, p. 6).

**Resiliency:** In the case of the International Triathlon Union numerous mistakes occurred during its creation and development. However, no one incident caused the organization to collapse. ITU was able to bounce back after each setback and keep moving towards the Olympic goal. While many of the mistakes had the potential to deliver fatal blows, none did.

**Future Research**

Future research within this area is vast and involves pristine territory. International sport federations and their companion national governing bodies have not received the attention by North American researchers when compared to studies incorporating larger professional leagues and major university athletics. Nonetheless, the parameters of this project could be applied to professional leagues and North American college and university governing bodies. Looking at the isomorphic influences present, and differences, among the NCAA, NAIA, and CAA is an
application of institutional theory. These regulatory agencies also differ in their rules, policies, and procedures, in addition to punitive powers, and these differences provide for comparisons and contrasts.

This project could easily be duplicated using USA Triathlon as the focus to see what influences it experienced, and accepted, as it sought recognition from the United States Olympic Committee. The National Governing Body for the sport had to travel a similar path as did ITU as it sought recognition and program inclusion, both in the Olympics and the Pan Am Games. Both the International Triathlon Union and the United States Olympic Committee serve as regulatory agencies, but the USOC has financial influence over all NGBs. The application of institutional theory in a setting with more than one agency pushing for homogeneity, and possibly in different directions, is an outgrowth of this study.

Furthermore, the way the International Triathlon Union’s ability to export its culture and create from scratch national governing bodies where none existed is an interesting topic. Institutional theory may be applied in determining whether or not these ITU created governing bodies became homogeneous. Additionally, there are cultural diffusion issues that should be addressed and this circumstance lends itself in replicating the cross-national cultural diffusion that Kaufman and Patterson (2005) looked at regarding how cricket was spread across the globe.

Finally, a project which could test the strength of institutional theory, and just how strong homogeneity exists within a specified sport field, are State Games organizations here in the U.S. While each organization may have a similar mission statement in their focus on grass roots competition, the way they go about offering these sport festivals comprised of multiple sports differs. From my own personal experience there are different economic models exist with State Games organizations and this impacts how they operate and function within their field.

**Unique Case**

At the beginning of this study it was stated that this case is unique. It is unique because of the speed by which the International Triathlon Union achieved recognition as the international federation and then being placed on the competition program of the Olympic Games. It is unique because a group of people basically created an Olympic sport out of thin air according to Mark Sisson. It is unique because of the mix of cultures, languages, political systems, and more. Somehow it all coalesced and reached fruition at the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games.
In the final analysis this case shows the power the International Olympic Committee had on the creation and development of the International Triathlon Union, the ability of the founders of ITU to fit within the mold cast by the IOC Charter (sometimes creatively), the fortune of good timing, the power of networking, and the leadership of Les McDonald and others. Traditional isomorphisms, as defined within institutional theory apply, but this perfect storm of events determines the uniqueness of this case.

*Finis Coronat Opus*

Something a child might do on a summer’s day became an Olympic sport. Something that was created, according to accepted legend, by tired runners in San Diego as an alternative training method, became an Olympic sport. Perhaps the concepts of child’s play and the unconventional helped the activity gain a foothold in the world of sport, which then germinated into the idea that something so simple could indeed become a part of the Olympic Games. *Citius, Altius, Fortius:* swim, bike, run.
APPENDIX A

Basic Interview Questions (not in any particular order)

1. Tell me what you did before you got involved with the sport of triathlon.
2. What’s your educational background?
3. What’s your work background?
4. How’d you get involved with the sport of triathlon (participant, administrator)?
5. What’s been your biggest challenge in the sport as an administrator?
6. What’s been your biggest disappointment as an administrator?
7. What’s been your biggest accomplishment as an administrator?
8. Tell me more about ITU having had only one president?
9. Tell me more about Les McDonald?
10. In your opinion who were the founders of the organization?
11. What about some of the challenges/growing pains/successes the organization has experienced?
12. What other organizations were also involved in ITU’s development?
13. Tell me about working with committees.
14. Tell me about relationships with other organizations (IOC, NGBs, IFs).
15. How long have you been involved in the sport of triathlon?
16. How has your involvement in triathlon compare to other facets of your life?
17. What would you recommend to someone interested in pursuing a career in the sport?
18. Who are the stakeholders in the sport that vie for attention/power/money?
19. What’s got your attention right now?
20. How is the sport prospering right now?
21. Where do you see the organization in 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?
22. In your opinion how has the organization matured?
23. Is there anything else you’d like to add?
APPENDIX B

HSC APPROVAL #1

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(850) 644-8673 - FAX (850) 644-4362

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 4/28/2005

To: Sean Phelps
2060 Continental Avenue #112
Tallahassee, FL 32304

Dept.: SPORT MANAGEMENT/PHYSICAL ED

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
The Creation and Development of an International Sport Federation: A case study of the
International Triathlon Union from 1989-2000

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal
referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human
Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Exempt per 45 CFR § 46.101(b) 2 and has been
approved by an accelerated review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to
weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential
risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which
may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 4/27/2006 you must request renewed approval for
continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the
project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing,
any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is
reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human
subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to
insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The
Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: Aubrey Kent
APPENDIX C

HSC APPROVAL #2

Florida State University

Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2763
(904) 544-9673 FAX (904) 544-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM (for change in research protocol)

Date: 5/26/2005

To: Sean Phelps
2080 Continental Avenue #112
Tallahassee, FL 32304

Dept: SPORT MANAGEMENT/PHYSICAL ED.

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human subjects in Research

The memorandum that you submitted to this office in regard to the requested change in your research protocol for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved. Thank you for informing the Committee of this change.

A reminder that if the project has not been completed by 4/27/2006, you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

cc: Aubrey Kent
APPLICATION NO. 2005.339
APPENDIX D

RELEASE LETTER

Dear <Name>:

I am a PhD candidate under the direction of Dr. Aubrey Kent in the Sport Management Department, within the College of Education, at Florida State University. I am conducting a research study looking at the creation and development of the international sport federation known as the International Triathlon Union. You are being asked to participate in this study because of your participation and involvement in the development and creation of this organization.

Your participation may involve audio taped interviews and review of relevant documents pertaining to the research topic which you might possess and will allow me to review. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate in it and withdraw from the study at any time. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used unless you agree to it.

If you have any questions concerning this research study, please call me at 850.445.6133 or Dr. Aubrey Kent at 850.644.4813.

Sincerely,

Sean Phelps

Sean Phelps
Florida State University Sport Management Doctoral Candidate
Tallahassee, FL USA
850.445.6133
spp02c@fsu.edu
APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I give my consent to participate in the research project entitled *The Creation and Development of an International Sport Federation: A Case Study of the International Triathlon Union from 1989-2000*. Sean Phelps, a doctoral student in the Sport Management program at Florida State University, is conducting the research. I understand that the purpose of the research is to gain a better understanding of what influences were experienced by the organization and its members as it was formed and developed into the international federation for the sport of triathlon. The information obtained through my participation will be used for this dissertation project and may also be used for subsequent publications within academic journals and popular press publications.

I understand that the interview may be tape recorded. I have the option of allowing or disallowing any interview to be tape recorded. For any interview not tape recorded I know, understand, and appreciate that the researcher will keep notes. All tapes will be kept by the researcher at the researcher’s home in a locked fire-proof box. I understand that only the researcher and his four dissertation committee members will have access to these tapes and that they will be destroyed by 1 January 2011. For interviews not taking place either face-to-face or via telephone, such as but not limited to email, instant messaging, or traditional mail, I understand the answers and responses to questions will be treated as if they were and remain secure and confidential.

Information obtained during the course of the study will remain confidential, to the extent allowed by law. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts if I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any time. I acknowledge that by refusing to sign this form I am unwilling to participate in this study in its present format.

In checking the following categories, I indicate my willingness to participate in Mr. Phelps’ research project. Please check all that apply.

___ I agree to be interviewed, one-on-one.

___ I agree for my interview(s) to be audio taped.

___ I agree for my name(s) to be used in the research project.

_________________________ (signature) ____________________ (date: dd/mm/year)

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.
APPENDIX F
COPYRIGHT PERMISSION LETTER

8 February 2006

John Duke, CEO/Publisher
Triathlete Magazine
328 Encinitas Blvd. Suite 100
Encinitas, CA 92024

Dear Mr. Duke:

I am a PhD candidate under the direction of Dr. Aubrey Kent in the Sport Management Department, within the College of Education, at Florida State University. I am conducting a research study looking at the creation and development of the International Triathlon Union and am completing my dissertation entitled The Creation and Development of an International Sport Federation: A Case Study of the International Triathlon Union from 1989-2000. I would like permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following Triathlete magazine articles:


A conversation with Steven M. Locke. (1992, April), Triathlete, 28-32.


The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. This authorization is extended to University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the purpose of reproducing and distributing copies of this dissertation. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own, or that the company owns, the copyright to the above-describes material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Thank you very much for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Sean Phelps

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

Date
7 February 2006

Amy White
Inside Triathlon
1830 North 55th Street
Boulder, CO 80301

Dear Ms. White:

I am a PhD candidate under the direction of Dr. Aubrey Kent in the Sport Management Department, within the College of Education, at Florida State University. I am conducting a research study looking at the creation and development of the International Triathlon Union and am completing my dissertation entitled The Creation and Development of an International Sport Federation: A Case Study of the International Triathlon Union from 1989-2000. I would like permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following Inside Triathlon magazine articles:


The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. This authorization is extended to University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the purpose of reproducing and distributing copies of this dissertation. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own, or that the company owns, the copyright to the above-describes material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. Thank you very much for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Sean Phelps

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

Amy White, Editor

Date: 2-13-06
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sean Patrick Phelps is the oldest of three boys born to Dean and Gladys Phelps. Education was stressed, B average required to play sports, and the kids could participate in almost any sport, within reason, as long as they never quit mid-season. Life lessons learned. To paraphrase Woody Allen, so much in life is just finishing – however long it may take.

Over the years he’s been able to go from Point A to Point B, although not always in a straight line. As an undergraduate student he started out at a university, transferred to Northwest Community College, graduated from junior college and then transferred to Eastern Montana College. His stint as a master’s student was just as meandering. He enrolled at, then, Mankato State University, immediately after graduating with his bachelor’s degree, spent two years there, and then left ABT to head to San Diego because his brothers were there. Life got in the way while he was busy making other plans (John Lennon) and years passed without him finishing the degree. After some time in San Diego and Colorado Springs, he returned to Montana to become a part of a small retail business with his brothers (yes, you can go home again). However, ABT meant all he had was a B.A. He approached his undergraduate alma mater about what it would take to get a master’s degree and accepted their proposal. The long delayed degree finally was completed. It was the return to the classroom that sparked his interest in obtaining a doctorate degree. Florida State University accepted him and he was ready to make the move. Then the Olympics came and he landed a job with the Salt Lake Organizing Committee. School could wait.

It was in junior college that he discovered the sport of triathlon through an intramural event. Little did anyone know the seed planted in 1982, as he stumbled across the finish line and promptly collapsed, would take hold so strongly. The sport has taken him all over the country as a competitor, official, and administrator. Phelps spent four years working for USA Triathlon. He volunteered to become the Triathlon Commissioner for the Big Sky State Games to bring the sport to his hometown. Triathlon took him to international destinations. He competed in Ironman Switzerland, the Byron Bay triathlon in Australia, races in Alberta, Canada, worked events in Puerto Rico and St. Thomas and was a Team USA manager for the Frankfurt Duathlon World Championships. He celebrated 20 years in the sport by participating in Ironman Hawai’i in 2002. Now the sport provided him the basis for his dissertation.