Comments from Competitive Swimming Event Coordinator from DRC Sports (Chris Moling)

This year saw the very first Triathlon to take place in downtown Jacksonville. The Jax Triathlon Series was born in 2005 at Little Talbot Island State Park, moved to Fernandina Beach on Amelia Island in 2009 and continued to grow to be the biggest Triathlon in the North Florida/South Georgia region. With over 700 registered athletes at each event in 2017, it was time to move to a bigger venue, which brought the series home to Jacksonville.

The Jax Triathlon Series consists of three disciplines (Swim, Bike, Run) at two distances (Sprint & Olympic)  The Sprint Distance is Swim ¼ Mile, Bike 15 Miles, Run 3.1 Miles. The Olympic Distance is Swim 1500 Meters (.93 miles), Bike 40K (24.8 Miles), Run 10K (6.2 Miles).

The relocation provided three significant swim challenges. The first was swimming in the St. John’s River. With no easy pubic access in/out of the water, We had to develop a safe and effective system of entry and exit. Second, fast moving water with changing currents. Race dates had to be scheduled according to the tides direction and speed.  Third, the water quality was a recurring question, however our preliminary water testing showed that the water was safe to swim by a better margin than many other bodies of water in the state. Overcoming the “reputation” of past issues became a primary concern. River swims are not uncommon in urban Triathlons such as the Augusta, Ga IRONMAN and the New York City Triathlon, which takes place in the Hudson River. I knew if they could do it safely, then we certainly could, as well.  I contacted several of these Race Directors, including the New York Triathlon to gain insight and advice for producing a safe swim in the St. John’s. We mobilized a force of Boats from the Coast Guard Auxiliary, Power Squadron, JSO and Fire Rescue. Swim support was provided with dozens of Kayaks and Lifeguards. In the end we held three successful swim events with no major issues.

Another challenge of the move downtown was finding a safe place to put hundreds bicycles on the road that didn’t cross a railroad track or force the closure of a major road. We worked with the JSO to coordinate a single lane closure around the stadium and onto MLK. This provided a safe , closed road where the bikes could be separated from the car traffic.  The athletes loved it!

Here are some basic numbers from this past season of racing in downtown Jax:

* 1,963 athletes registered for the series.
* 63% Male / 37% Female
* Largest Age Groups – 30-39   24%  / 40-49   26%  /  50-64   25%
* The Hyatt reported approx. 100 room nights
* The OMNI reported approx. 150 room nights
* 73% of Athletes from Florida, Remaining 27% for 19 other states

Chris

Christopher Moling, Race Director

**DRC Sports** Athletic Event Management