

# MIZZOU

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## Around the Columns

### Ironclad focus

He studies, and he trains. Period.

That's about all graduate student Joe Company has time for. He juggles course work and lab duties with a grueling training schedule in pursuit of a top-10 finish in an Ironman triathlon, a race consisting of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile run — yes, all in the same day.

A professional triathlete since 2002, Company, originally from Normal, Ill., hopes to finish his master's degree in exercise physiology in 2008. But he spent the summer training for the Aug. 26, 2007, Ironman Canada in Penticton, British Columbia. This year's winner finished in 8 hours, 32 minutes, 45 seconds; Company came in 57th in 9:58:38. Bitterly disappointed in his performance, he briefly considered retiring from triathlons before deciding to try again at Ironman Florida, scheduled for Nov. 3, 2007.

This meant a few more months of living on schoolwork-and-workout sandwiches. "I don't waste time," he says. He often gets up at 5 a.m. to run 20-odd miles before class, then hits the pool or bike after an afternoon nap. Company boasts a 4.0 GPA, though he regrets not having more time to spend in the lab.

Company's regimen helps him focus on work. "The training complements grad school rather than distracting from it," he says. He became interested in exercise physiology from participating in endurance sports and applies his classroom learning to his training.



Graduate student Joe Company finished the Nov. 3, 2007, Ironman Florida in 9 hours, 30 minutes, 35 seconds, placing 97th. Photo courtesy of Joe Company.

However, his experience has also sparked a healthy skepticism about scientific literature.

“I’m my own experiment,” says Company, who tracks statistics about his workouts, including heart rate and energy output. He is especially interested in the “black zone” that occurs about seven hours into an Ironman. Few researchers, he notes, have studied the impact of high-intensity endurance training. “It’s one thing to read about bonking,” he says, referring to the debilitating fatigue athletes sometimes feel during a long-distance event, “but it’s a different thing to experience it.”

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*Update:*




*Joe Company finished Ironman Florida in 97th place with a time of 9 hours, 30 minutes, 35 seconds. Although he failed to reach his goal of a top-10 finish, Company was pleased with his experience in the race, held Nov. 3, 2007, in Panama City Beach, Fla. He shaved an impressive 28 minutes from his finishing time at Ironman Canada, but says the competition was much steeper in Florida.*

*"I was very content at the finish of this race," Company writes in his post-race report. "I picked myself up after Canada and went after it again."*

*Company was proud of having executed the goals he set for himself, which included staying relaxed and enjoying the race. Ironman competition “has given me six years of passion, motivation, frustration, insight and humility,” he writes. “I leave [Ironman] racing (for now) with only a twinge of regret that I never had my breakout race. But then again, I knew it may never happen.”*

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