

THE Accidental *Athlete*

Amateur triathlete Bill Bone of Palm Beach discovered his athleticism later in life — and then turned his newfound interest into a philanthropic powerhouse.

BY DARRELL HOFHEINZ

As a kid, Bill Bone never imagined he would be an athlete — or that he would one day help raise money for charity in that role.

Yet Bone has embraced a truism known to many Palm Beachers: Charitable giving is most rewarding when it has a deep, personal connection.

“The triathlon is my personal passion. I do triathlons for the fun of it — that is my sport,” says Bone, a personal injury lawyer and longtime Palm Beach resident with a home in Midtown.

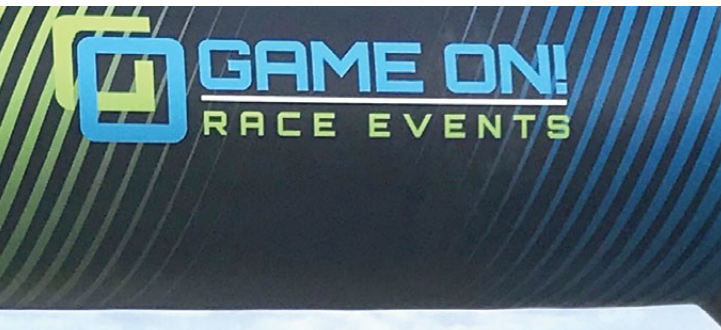
He discovered amateur triathlons — an intense sport that combines swimming, cycling and running — a couple of years after he began jogging, on a bit of a whim, to improve his health and his fitness level. That was 1990.





On the Lake Trail in Palm Beach, Bill Bone shoulders the Stradalli carbon-fiber bike he rides in amateur triathlons, which include a swim, a bike race and a run. Since he began competing in the early 1990s, he estimates he has completed 80 triathlons and has the participation medals to prove it.

PHOTO BY DAMON HIGGINS. STYLED BY DEBORAH KOEPPER OF DEBORAH KOEPPER BEAUTY, PALM BEACH



Bone crosses the finish line at the Bill Bone Tropical Triathlon in November. "I was nowhere near first," he says. "I never am."

RIGHT: Bone rides in the Great Clermont Triathlon in Central Florida. He competes, on average, in eight to 10 triathlons a year.



"I was working 12-hour days and I was getting a paunch — and I had always been a skinny guy. And I thought if I don't get out and do something, I'm going to be fat and out of shape someday. So I thought, I'm just going to start with a run. And I remember I tried to run from my house to the Intracoastal Waterway — OK, that's not far, about two blocks. And I couldn't even run to the end of the street."

He adds: "Two years later, in 1992, I ran the New York Marathon."

The emergence of his athleticism surprised him as much as anyone, he says. He recalls his lack of skill at throwing a baseball or catching a football during his years at Atlantic High School in his hometown of Delray Beach. And his ability with a basketball was no better.

"The worst grade I ever got in my life was in high school — and I was a good student — but I got a D one semester in P.E. That's how bad I was. I remember the grade was all about how many baskets you could make in 2 minutes. I couldn't get a single one," he recalls. "The coach was nice to give me a D."

That coach might be surprised to learn that today Bone has completed about 80 triathlons, including competitions in

Paris, London and Havana. He competes as an amateur in Olympic-distance and so-called "sprint" triathlons. The former involves a swim of a little less than a mile followed by a bike ride of nearly 25 miles and a run of a little more than 6 miles. The sprint version typically includes a half-mile swim, a 12.4-mile bike ride and a 3.1 mile run. Both events are substantially shorter than the Ironman and so-called "half-Ironman" triathlons.

Bone lately has averaged eight to 10 events a year. And besides triathlons, he has completed more 5K runs and long-distance cycling rides than he can count.

In addition to competing, he sponsors runs, cycling events and a triathlon to raise money for charitable causes through his Bill Bone Bike Law division at Larmoyeux & Bone, the personal-injury law firm he runs with partner Christopher Larmoyeux in West Palm Beach.

The events he sponsors contrast with races organized by for-profit companies. "If I'm going organize something," he says, "then it's going to have a charitable purpose."

In 2016, Bone and his staff at the law firm took over managing the longtime Tropical Triathlon, one of the first triathlons Bone ever entered. Today renamed the Bill Bone Tropical Triathlon, the event in Lake Worth was founded more than 20 years ago but had hit tough times after losing its longtime sponsor, the Central Palm Beach County Chamber of Commerce.

Although the Tropical Triathlon was canceled in 2017 by the threat of a hurricane, it was back on the calendar in November, with athletes completing an ocean swim plus a run and bike ride that took them back and forth across the Ocean Avenue bridge. Proceeds benefited the Lake Worth Community High School Air Force ROTC program, which provides students to help with logistics and assist with the many road closures necessary for the event.

His annual Bill Bone Saving Limbs Ride, a cycling event from West Palm Beach to Boca Raton, meanwhile, benefits the Paley Foundation. And his Bill Bone 5K run in November is part of the West Palm Beach-based FITTEAM Palm Beaches Marathon, which has a charity component as well.

TACKLING THE TRIATHLON

Bone began cycling about the same time he discovered running. He added swimming to his exercise regimen after he got to know members of the Palm Beach Ocean Rescue team, including retired chief lifeguard Mark Hassell, who today works as a bicycle-accident investigator for Bone's law firm.

As Bone improved at the three sports, tackling his first triathlon seemed a logical step, he says. From the start, however, he decided his focus wouldn't be to win races but simply to finish them — an odd choice, it might seem, considering what he describes as his hard-driven, goal-oriented and competitive personality.

Yet by taking that approach, he explains, he found he could enjoy the sport without excessive stress — and without enduring the intensive training it would otherwise require. Removing the competitive edge, it turned out, gave him exactly the respite he needed while still providing the exercise that thrilled him.

"Triathlon helped me psychologically as a type-A person, because I accepted that I was not competing with anyone else — I was competing to finish. And that has been my mantra since the day I started this sport," he says. "It's about athleticism — not just skill. For me, participating in triathlon gave me the energy, gave me the high, gave me the sense of accomplishment without having to come in first."

And that attitude sets him apart, he says, from others on the triathlon circuit.

"Most people who do triathlon do it because they are champion swimmers or champion cyclists or champion runners. I'm not really great in any one of those sports. I flop around in the water. I'm a mediocre cyclist. And I'm a terrible runner. But when you put all three together, I'm actually pretty good.

"I've crashed, I've cramped, I've been as scared as I can be in the water, because of the waves. I've thought I was going to have heatstroke — but I have finished every race I've ever begun."



An avid traveler, Bone says he tries to keep up his swimming regimen whenever possible, as on a trip to Croatia, where he swam in the Adriatic outside Dubrovnik. Around his neck is a serape he uses for sun protection and to dry off from his swims.



In early 2018, Bone joined his son Rex — one of his four children — on a cycling vacation in Bagan, Myanmar.

And because his goal isn't to compete with others, he says, he can better focus on his own efforts.

"If the panic starts to get to me in the water — and it does sometimes — I just start dog-paddling. I just sort of float and say, 'You know what? You just have to finish.' If my tire goes flat or some other cyclist pulls out in front of me and I have to skid to a stop, I say, 'Pick yourself up and keep going.' If I'm running and get too hot, I actually start walking."

'BILL IS AN ADVOCATE'

Bone also has been a longtime sponsor of cycling as a sport. Although he doesn't race himself — "too dangerous for me," he says — his Bill Bone Racing Team competes on the cycling circuit. Cycling events that carry his name include the Bill Bone Pro-Am Series, which

includes races throughout the state, and the Bill Bone Twilight Series of closed-course races in Broward County.

And his bike team provides logistical support and serves as safety marshals for runners in local charitable events such as the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure and the Women for Women 5K/10K race.

The latter is one of several runs organized by Iva Grady, former race director of the Marathon of the Palm Beaches. She has known Bone for years and most recently worked with him on the Palm Beach Literacy Coalition's Walk Run Bike event, scheduled for Feb. 16 at Lake Worth's Bryant Park.

"Bill has always stepped up to sponsor many of the events that I put on," Grady says.

"I think it's more rare than it is common for someone who participates in races to also sponsor them. A lot of sponsors just give money,"

Grady says. "But Bill is an advocate for the events, for the sports and for healthy living. He really supports the events in every way — by promoting them on his website and trying to get people to participate or to volunteer or to just come out and watch."

She adds: "I admire him. I think a lot of people look up to him, because he always steps up to the plate. He has so much energy. Just when you've think his plate is full, you call him up and he steps up to the plate again."

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Bone's sponsorships, he says, are tied to the lessons he learned from an early mentor, the late Palm Beach attorney Robert M. Montgomery Jr. Bone joined Montgomery's law firm directly after graduating with a law degree from the University of Florida.

In the personal-injury field especially, lawyers often choose to market their firms through television advertising, Bone explains. But once he had his own firm, Bone chose not to go that route, following Montgomery's more traditional method of getting his name out into the community by lending support to charitable, cultural and community events.

Bone's community support has included his role as chairman of the Palm Beach Centennial Committee, which organized a series of events for the town's 100th birthday in 2011. The committee led the restoration of historic Memorial Fountain and its accompanying park near Town Hall.

And last year, Bone and his committee spearheaded a successful drive to earn the Town Council's tentative approval, pending the state's authorization, to add a set of stairs to the back of the fountain, which was designed in the late 1920s by noted society architect Addison Mizner.

His efforts for the centennial grew out of his deep love of Palm Beach, he says. Divorced and single now, he and his second wife, Dr. Melanie Bone, raised four children — Becky, 23, Carlton, 22, Bailey Mae, 21, and Rex, 20, all of whom attended Palm Beach Day School, now Palm Beach Day Academy.

Bone also is the longtime chairman of the Palm Beach County edition of the annual Do the Write Thing Challenge, a middle-school program sponsored, in part, by Larmoyeux & Bone and associated with the National Campaign to Stop Violence. Each year, some 30,000 local students enter a judged contest by writing about youth violence and bullying.



'MY IDEA OF FUN'

On Palm Beach's charity circuit, Bone is known for volunteering as a guest auctioneer at charity fundraisers. But attending Palm Beach galas, he says, isn't really his thing.

"I've never been one of those people who really enjoys those balls. I go to them very seldom," he explains. "I attend the Palm Beach Police Foundation's ball, for example, because the cause is important to me. But if I am going to work an event as an auctioneer, then I usually don't stay for the whole event, because this is a job for me, the job of raising money.

"I like and admire these people who plan these parties and raise enormous amounts of money. But to me, my idea of fun is to do what I did this past weekend — ride 165 miles on my bike to finish the days sweating, with my legs burning, barely able to walk into the tent and have dinner and then collapse in bed. That to me, that's fun."

He was referring to November's SMARTRide, a two-day cycling event from Miami to Key West to benefit organizations that increase awareness of AIDS prevention and help those with the disease.

Since he began competing, Bone has acquired several hundred medals for completing triathlons and other events. But none of those medals came for placing first.

"I've never won — never. I never won my age group in anything," he says, without any trace of bitterness.

But, he adds with a grin, he has stood on his share of award podiums. They just happen to be at events he and his law firm have sponsored or organized, he quips.

"I jokingly say, 'I knew I was never going to get up here on the podium, so I put on my own race — and now I'm here on the podium. That's the only way I knew I was ever going to make it up here.'"



In 2016, Bone took over the organization of the longtime Tropical Triathlon, now named the Bill Bone Tropical Triathlon. **ABOVE LEFT:** He spoke in November at Lake Worth Beach Park at its awards ceremony. The USA Triathlon-sanctioned event benefits the Air Force ROTC program at Lake Worth High School Air Force ROTC, with students, **LEFT,** providing logistical support. Bone, a lawyer, not only sponsors the event through his West Palm Beach-based Bill Bone Bike Law group but also competes in its "sprint" triathlon.