

Boulton shows golden focus at Ontario Games

By Herb Garbutt
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Sasha Boulton stared straight ahead as Lorri Zagar dispensed some in-race advice. The 16-year-old triathlete never acknowledged her coach but Zagar had no doubt that Boulton was listening to everything she said.

What Zagar saw was a different athlete than the one she had been coaching for the past three years with the Caledon-based Fun2Tri triathlon club.

"Usually when I tell her something, she'll look over, maybe even smile or laugh," Zagar said, "but she never took her eyes off the road."

With each lap, Zagar saw the same determined look on Boulton's face. It remained that way until the final lap, when there was just an open stretch of road between Boulton and the finish line.

"Everyone at the finish was going crazy," Boulton said. "I couldn't stop smiling and thinking, 'it's over.'"

Boulton had been on the triathlon course in Sudbury for just under an hour but her run to an Ontario Games gold medal had been two years in making. In her first Games in 2008, when she was the youngest competitor in the event, Boulton miscounted the laps on the bike course and pulled into the transition zone a lap early. The mistake dropped her from fifth to 12th.

The Grade 11 student at T.A. Blakelock came back determined to make the most of her second chance.

Training 15-20 hours a week, Boulton set her sights on the Ontario Games gold medal. She began the year by winning her first race at the junior level, which includes athletes as old as 19. Everything was on track for a strong showing until June.

During a training ride to practise drafting, she was riding in close quarters when her handlebars locked with another rider. She flipped and landed on top of one of the bikes and then had another rider fall on top of her. The crash opened a deep five-inch gash just below her left knee.

"You could literally see everything in my leg," Boulton said.

It took 17 stitches to close the cut and Boulton feared that should would not be able to compete in



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the Ontario Games. Instead, she got encouraging news from the doctor, who told her it was alright to continue training. Boulton was back in the pool training five days later, though the fear of re-opening the wound and the mental hurdle of getting back on the bike prevented her from fully resuming her training.

Just two days after having the stitches removed, she competed in a national junior race. A week before the Ontario Games, she finished fourth at the provincial championships, missing a spot on the podium when she was passed in the final 300 metres.

But her goal for the season was the Ontario Games. Boulton used her strong suit — swimming — to take the early lead. She began training with the Oakville Aquatic Club when she was eight and continues to swim with the club today.

Boulton emerged from the 600-meter swim with a 30-second lead. Looking to maintain her advantage, she charged through the 16-kilometre bike course.

"I knew I had to get out of the saddle and put the hammer down," said Boulton, who was concerned about the strong runners behind her. "I was worried about wasting my legs but I knew I had to keep the lead."

Boulton entered the run with a 28-second edge. Over the final 4-km run she relied on the stamina she built, first as a rep soccer player, then as a cross-country runner. Her main rival, Samantha Klus of Kanata, was unable to make any significant gains.

"Sasha made the girls work so much harder (on the bike) to keep up with her that it put them at a disadvantage (during the run)," Zagar said. "Everyone was wondering, 'How long will it take them to catch her?' but they couldn't run like they normally do. Everyone saw a new level of toughness in Sasha."

With no more advice to give, Zagar called to Boulton as she headed for the finish line.

"Sasha, I'm so proud of you," she said.

Boulton turned and smiled at her coach briefly, then turned back to the road to finish what she had started. She crossed the line in 55 minutes and 47 seconds, 24 seconds ahead of Klus.

"I gave it everything I had left," Boulton said.

The same could be said of her preparation over the last two years.

"I trained so hard for so long," she said. "To set a goal and then achieve it, it feels so great."



SPECIAL TO THE OAKVILLE BEAVER

TRIPLE THREAT: Sasha Boulton emerged from the water in first, set a blistering pace on the bike and then held off the competition during the run at the Ontario Games in Sudbury. The result was a long-awaited triathlon gold medal.

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