

Edwardsville's Polinske signs letter with Drury University for triathlon

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EDWARDSVILLE – For Hannah Polinske, being a triathlete has opened doors for her that could mean quite a bit for her future.

Polinske, who ran for Edwardsville's girls cross-country team last fall, signed a letter of intent to attend Drury University in Springfield, Mo., this fall to join their triathlon team.

A triathlon is an event that combines swimming, cycling and running one after the other; the best-known event in the sport is the Ironman Triathlon in Hawaii, which combines a 2.4-mile ocean swim, a 112-mile cycling race and a full 26.2-mile marathon into one day. The sport is part of the Olympic program and was first contested in the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

“I'm really excited to see how next year turns out,” Polinske said. “It'll be a new experience, for sure.”

Polinske first got interested in the sport thanks to her mom Donna; she participated in triathlons herself and a Ironman Triathlon she competed in in Lake Placid, N.Y., got Hannah interested in the sport. “I went with my mom whenever she raced in Ironman-Lake Placid,” Polinske said, “and watching her finish made me want to get into the sport; seeing her and all the friendships she's formed in the sport through the Metro Track Club.”

Polinske was attracted to Drury by the short distance between Edwardsville and Springfield, a four-hour trip down Interstate 44. “It's not too far away,” Polinske said. “I didn't want to go across the country; I wanted to stay close to home.

“I'm grateful to all the coaches and my parents and excited to see what next year holds.”

While triathlons aren't thought of as a college sport, it is growing throughout the nation. “There are about 20 schools that are now official NCAA triathlon schools,” Polinske said; in January 2014, the NCAA added triathlon to the list of emerging sports for women in by Division I, II and III schools at the annual NCAA Convention; the addition came about thanks to an initiative by USA Triathlon, the national governing body for the sport. Among the schools other than Drury that have teams include Arizona State, West Alabama, Centenary, Queen's University in Charlotte and East Tennessee State.

Polinske ran for the Tiger cross-country team last season. “We were very fortunate to have Hannah join us this year for cross country,” said Tiger cross-country coach George Patrylak. “Ironically, I was actually at The Cyclery (a cycling shop in Edwardsville) trying to do some things for Mud Mountain (the annual summer fund-raising run at SIU-Edwardsville's cross-country course) and one of the managers there, David Parks, introduced me to Hannah, who was working a shift and David told me what a great athlete she was and that she runs a lot.

“I'm not going to back down if I see an athlete that has some potential that might be interested (in running cross-country) and found out that Hannah used to run in middle school and just took a few years off of competing in cross-country; luckily for our program, Hannah decided to come out over the summer and work with us. She provided some much-needed depth to our team and had a very solid year.

“I also learned on the journey what a gifted athlete she is with the triathlons; I know she had some very impressive performances during the summer and early on in the school year; I guess this is where she needs to be. I'm looking forward to hearing her results in her first year of college.”

Polinske believes her best event in the three sports is the cycling portion. “That's my favorite,” she said.

Polinske plans on majoring in psychology and criminology, with plans on becoming a lawyer – a profession both of her parents, Brian and Donna Polinske, are involved in.