

Now, for my Beijing ticket: Winner

Atkinson says win in testing Singapore triathlon has given him confidence to do well in Olympics next year

OSIM SINGAPORE
INTERNATIONAL TRIATHLON 2007

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IF HE goes on to win gold at next year's Beijing Olympics, Courtney Atkinson will be grateful he was in Singapore over the weekend.

Yesterday, he became the third successive Australian to clinch the elite men's open category of the US\$16,100 (\$21,500) OSIM Singapore International Triathlon 2007 at the East Coast Park.

His time of 1:50.16s allowed him to pocket the winner's cheque of US\$3,200.

Hong Kong's Daniel Lee (1:51.30s) was runner-up and Japan's Kuniaki Takahama (1:51.35s) finished third in the race, which comprised the Olympic distance of a 1.5km swim, 40km cycle and 10km run.

But more importantly for the four-time Australian Triathlete of the Year, the win may have boosted his chances of qualifying for next year's Olympics.

Minutes after winning the race, Atkinson said he was aiming for a spot in next year's Beijing Olympics and that the conditions in Singapore had provided him a taste of what it would be like competing in Beijing.

"Singapore is definitely a stepping stone towards getting to the Beijing Olympics, where my aim is to win gold obviously," said Atkinson, 26.

"Coming from an Australian winter, I was struggling as the heat and humidity here were more oppressive than I'd expected. But to be able to win here, where conditions are expected to be very similar to Beijing next August, shows that I can compete in hot and humid weather.

"It's definitely good practice and given

me an idea of what it's going to be like competing there."

Earlier this month, he was named in Australia's shadow team for Beijing by Triathlon Australia, along with the likes of three-time world champion Peter Robertson and Commonwealth Games gold medalist Brad Kahlefeldt. Only three athletes will be picked from the shadow squad.

Atkinson, who will return home to the Gold Coast today with his wife Kinga, 28, and seven-month old daughter, added: "My job now is to make sure the selectors know I can compete successfully in such difficult conditions."

It was the Australian's first time competing in Singapore and he was coming off a four-month break, but it hardly mattered.

The 1.67m, 67kg Atkinson was first out of the water in 18 mins 17 secs, followed by Japan's Hiroyuki Nishiuchi (18 mins 28 secs) and American Barrett Brandon (18 mins 34 secs).

But he fell to fourth (59 mins 27 secs) after the bike race, trailing joint-leaders Lee and Brandon (both 59 mins 08 secs) and third-placed Nishiuchi (59 mins 14 secs).

However, the world No 8 caught up with the leading pack in the run to eventually power home in 1:50.16s, more than 100 metres in front of Lee and Takahama.

Minister for Community Development, Youth and Sports Vivian Balakrishnan flagged off the event.

In the **elite women's open**, Japan's Shizuka Kutsuna won in 2:06.43s, with the Australian pair of Alee Sharp (2:07.07s) and last year's winner Samantha Beenie (2:08.04s) coming second and third respectively.

"I'd just competed in the World Cup in Austria last week so I didn't have time to train and it showed when I slowed down in the swim-leg," said Kutsuna, who also picked up a winner's cheque of US\$3,200.

"But I paced myself in the bike and running legs and just kept my mind focused

To be able to win here, where conditions are expected to be very similar to Beijing next August, shows that I can compete in hot and humid weather.

— Atkinson says he can handle similar conditions in Beijing



WEE TECK HIAN

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN: Atkinson leaves his rivals trailing in the swim-leg of the race.

on achieving my target, which was to finish first."

Singapore's best finishes in the elite races came in the under-23 category, where **Mok Ying Ren** finished eighth (2:02.34s), and **Elaine Chan** third (2:28.41s) in the men and women's event, respectively.

Safety was a priority at this year's event, following the untimely death of 17-year-old Singaporean Thaddeus Cheong on June 24 at a national triathlon selection trial.

Organisers made sure more medical personnel, equipment such as defibrillators and ambulances were on hand yesterday. Mist fans were also installed to keep competitors cool under the heat.

RESULTS: (Top five in elite men and women's open):

Men:

- 1 Courtney Atkinson (Aus) 1:50.16s;
- 2 Daniel Lee (Hkg) 1:51.30s;
- 3 Kuniaki Takahama (Jpn) 1:51.35s;
- 4 Hiroyuki Nishiuchi (Jpn) 1:51.52s;
- 5 Barrett Brandon (Usa) 1:52.01s

Women:

- 1 Shizuka Kutsuna (Jpn) 2:06.43s;
- 2 Alee Sharp (Aus) 2:07.07s;
- 3 Samantha Beenie (Aus) 2:08.04s;
- 4 Anel Stewart (Rsa) 2:08.43s;
- 5 Yekaterina Shatnaya (Kaz) 2:09.01s

ORGANISERS MULLING MARINA BAY VENUE FOR NEXT YEAR'S TRIATHLON

NEXT year's OSIM Singapore International Triathlon could be held at the Marina Bay area.

According to Mark Tay, president of event organisers the Triathlon Association of Singapore, talks are currently underway with various agencies, including the Singapore Sports Council, to make it a reality.

Tay, 43, told TODAY the main purpose was to accommodate more participants, particularly with next year's event expected to be held also in July, a month before the

start of the Beijing Olympics (Aug 8-24).

"Many of the top triathletes will want to use Singapore as a base to help acclimatise to the conditions in Beijing, which are similar," said Tay yesterday.

"So we're currently looking at moving next year's race to the Marina Bay area. Runners, especially the elite ones, will also prefer a city route, with its many turns, as it will provide more tactical challenges.

"We're currently discussing with the relevant agencies to see if it is feasible."

This year's OSIM Singapore International Triathlon, held on

Saturday and yesterday at the East Coast Park, attracted 3,800 participants. It is estimated that the Marina Bay venue would be able to accommodate about 4,500.

Details of the proposed race route and other features are still being worked out.

Tay added: "It is possible to accommodate about 4,500 participants at the East Coast Park, but it would be a tremendous strain on planning the logistics.

"Already, the cycling and running routes at East Coast Park are very tight. Holding it in the city, like the Marina Bay area, will ease that and also allow the event to grow."

— TAN YO-HINN

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