


Patrick EVOE

From Pud to Stud

His Remarkable Journey
from Coach Potato to
National Champion



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For Patrick Evoe, age 30, the road has been arduous and seemingly never ending. Yet he has done the unthinkable: He's become a professional triathlete. Giving up his chosen, high-tech career path, he has successfully remade himself into virtually another person.

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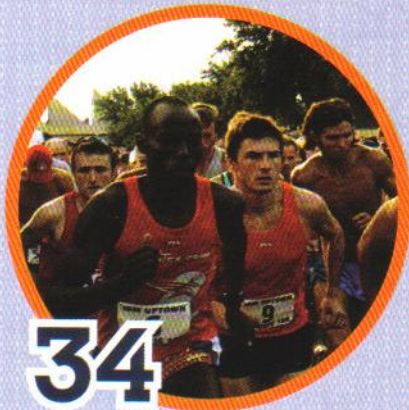
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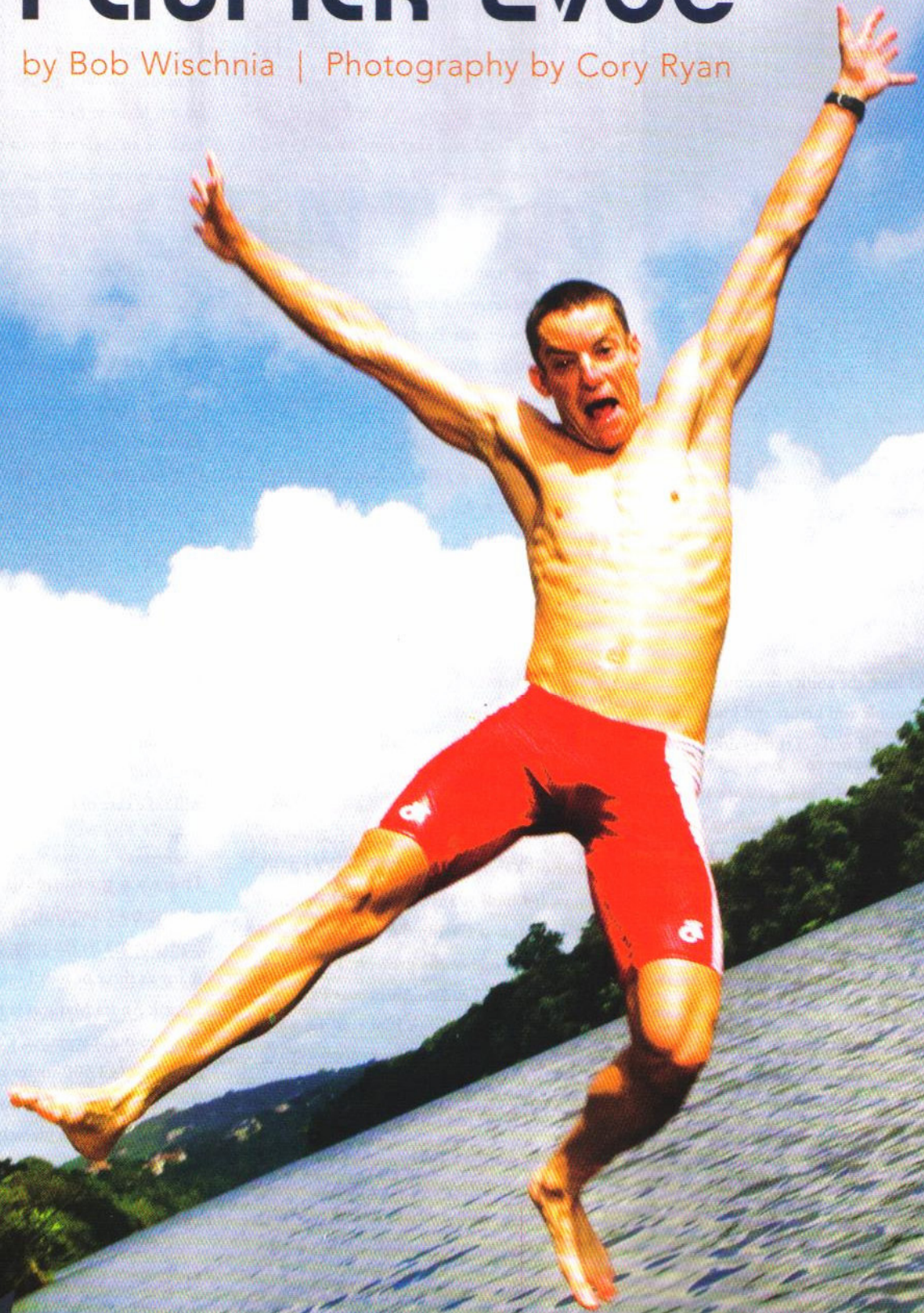
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TAKING THE PLUNGE

Patrick Eyo

by Bob Wischnia | Photography by Cory Ryan



From Coach Potato to National Champion

Patrick Evoe always carries two driver's licenses in his worn-out wallet. One is new and the photo shows a tanned, lean-looking athlete. The other license has a photo of a pudgy, techno-weenie who looks like the only time he emerges from the cocoon of his cube is to grab a few beers and a Twinkie. His puffy, transparently pale face stares back blankly as if he's impatient to get back to his computer.

He got this first Texas driver's license in 2000 and the reason Evoe still keeps it handy is as a reminder of the person he's left far behind. The person he has become is a ghost of his former self, but that only tells a sliver of Evoe's story.

For this man, at the age of 30, has done the unthinkable: He's become a professional triathlete. Along the way, he's given up his chosen, high-tech career path and remade himself into virtually another person.

But what's truly remarkable is that unlike every top-level triathlete, Evoe had practically no athletic background. Other than fooling around with a little ice hockey in high school, Evoe simply never competed in sports.

Instead, he studied and sang in the choir. Evoe grew up in Royal Oak, a wealthy suburb of Detroit and went to the University of Michigan where he earned an engineering degree in 2000. When one of Evoe's college roommates who was already in Austin working for Dell and told him what a cool place it was, Evoe took a job with Applied Materials in July of 2000 and got his first Texas driver's license.

From there, he plunged right into a 50+-hour week in supply chain management (Applied makes tools for the computer chip industry). When he wasn't working, he'd go out to eat with his three roommates or hang out on 6th Street.

After living in Austin for a year, Evoe broke up with his girlfriend who lived in Chicago. A few days later, one of his roommates announced he was getting engaged and moved out. In short order, another roommate took a different job with Dell which meant insane hours. The final roommate moved to Malaysia.

"All of a sudden," Evoe recalls, "my three best friends were gone. I was single and wanted a hobby because I needed something to do. Summer was coming up, but I was too embarrassed to take my shirt off in public. I couldn't even go to Barton Springs. I was disgusted with myself. Here I was, 24 years old and I'd already surrendered to being old and fat."

But rather than give up, Evoe decided to try and change his lifestyle. One night after work, he jumped into his apartment complex pool to go for a swim. There was just one problem: he didn't know how.

But he could dog paddle and after a week, Evoe was able to do a full lap without stopping. Every night after work, he went back to the pool and by the end of the summer, he could swim 45 minutes without stopping.

Even more noticeable, he had lost 25 pounds of baby fat. (Eventually, he would

lose 50.) But life in the cube wasn't so hot. The bottom had fallen out of the tech industry and Evoe was working unbearable hours to keep from getting laid off. Rather than moving up the corporate ladder, he was just treading water.

That fall, in addition to his nightly swim, Evoe added a short run. At first, he couldn't even cover a mile, but quickly built up to three miles.

"As soon as I started swimming and running," he recalls, "I started to see immediate rewards. It was so different from my work environment which had turned very negative."

At Applied, he hooked up with a group which ran at lunch and eventually progressed to where he could stay with them for five miles. One of his running friends told him about a mountain bike and trail running race — the Dirty Duathlon — and they decided to do it as a relay.

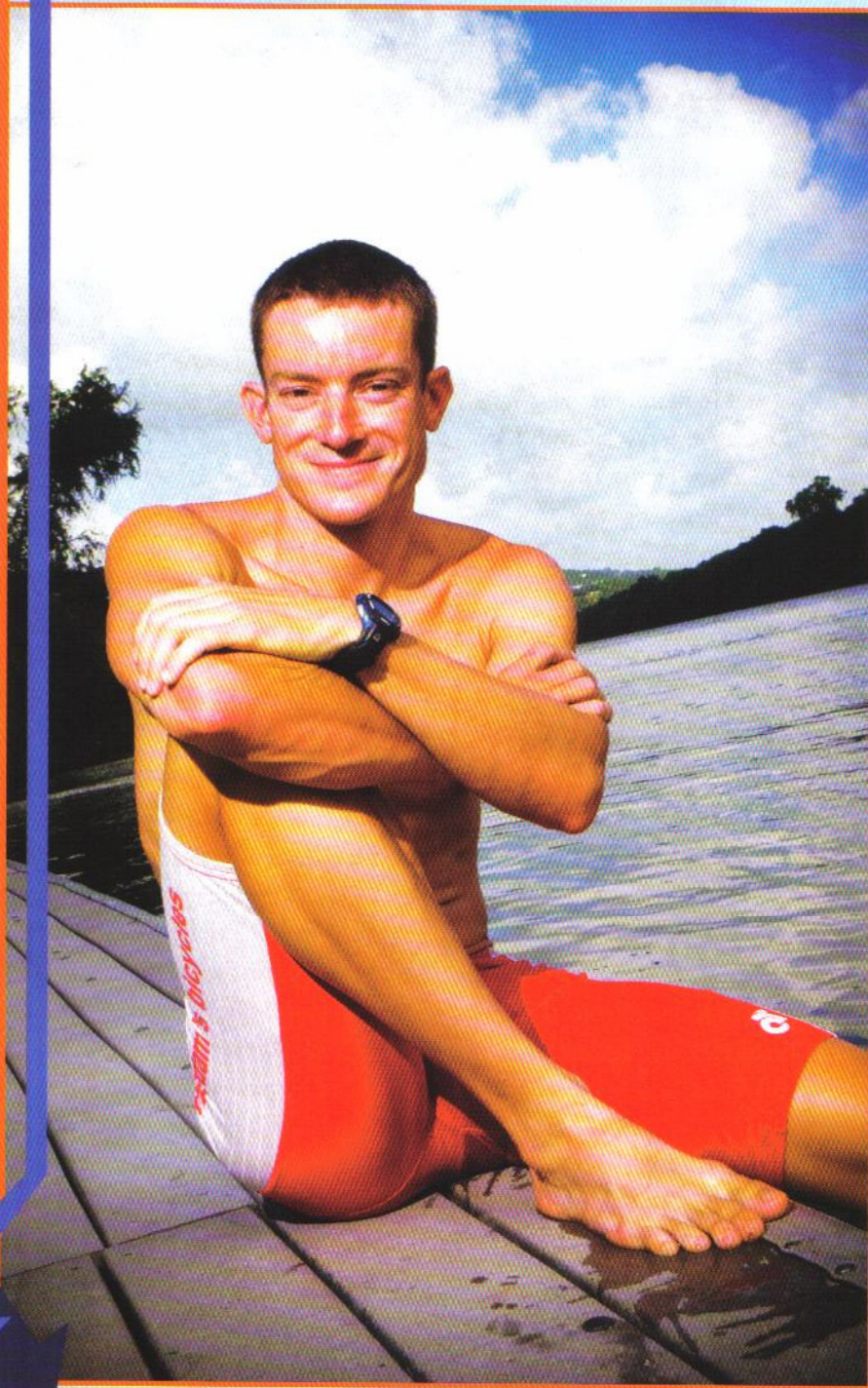
"I had never been to a race in my life," says Evoe. "I showed up and was amazed by these guys who all looked superhuman. I thought, 'I want to be one of them.' Right then, I decided this is what I wanted to do."

Evoe was on his way. That fall, he increased his running and plunged into the local road-running scene. After running several local races, he bought a used road bike and did his first triathlon — the '02 CapTexTri — followed a month later with the Buffalo Springs Half Ironman in Lubbock — a wickedly hot, difficult race in the middle of summer.

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Patrick Evoe > TAKING THE PLUNGE



especially a first-timer.

"That race made a huge change in my life," says Evoe who was on sub-three hour pace until the final couple of miles. "It gave me a tremendous sense of accomplishment. I could now check the marathon off my list of things I had to do. Half Ironman. Check. Marathon. Check."

To get ready for the Ironman, Evoe ripped through 10 triathlons that summer before Lake Placid. He still wasn't even a decent swimmer, but began to discover some hidden strengths.

"I don't have unbelievable athletic talent," says Evoe, "but it became apparent that I had persistence, determination and liked to work hard."

Well, he liked to train hard. Work? That was a different story. He trained for the triathlon before work, at lunch and after work. In between workouts, he dutifully logged his time at Applied but it was evident his energy was being plowed into something entirely different.

He bought his first triathlon bike and after training non-stop for a year, toed the line at Lake Placid '03 on one of the legendary rotten days in Ironman history. There were thunderstorms all day, but somehow Evoe splashed his way to a time of 10:24 and finished an impressive eighth in his age group.

The day after Ironman races is when the age group results are announced as well as the number of Ironman slots open for each age group. It's called the roll down and in order to get one of the coveted Hawaii Ironman World Championships slots, you must be present to win.

In Evoe's age group at Lake Placid, there were six Hawaii slots and when two guys ahead of him didn't show up (they may have already qualified), Evoe was in.

Even though he hadn't planned on doing another Ironman, this was *Hawaii* and he had to go for it. Evoe had a few of months to ramp up his training for Hawaii, but then on a ride near Pflugerville, he got

"It was brutal," recalls Evoe of Buffalo Springs, "but I enjoyed it."

He enjoyed it so much that right after Buffalo Springs, he took a vow to do an Ironman. To the uninitiated, there are plenty of Ironman races around the world (other than the Hawaii Ironman World Championships) that all have the standard, mind-boggling distances: a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and a full 26.2-mile marathon.

That summer, Evoe signed up for the

'03 Lake Placid (New York) Ironman which gave him a full year to train. He also found time to train for the AT&T Austin Marathon in '03 and began running with top locals like Scott McIntyre who told Evoe if he could hang with his long-run group, he could break three hours in the marathon.

Even though Evoe fell apart in the final, cold windy miles of the marathon, he still ran 3:00:37 — a terrific time for anyone,

broad sided by a car, flipped over the hood and landed on his head.

Evoe's bike was totaled, but miraculously he didn't break anything. Just plenty of swelling and deep contusions on his legs. He missed a couple of weeks of training, but still went to the Hawaii Ironman where he crumbled in the oppressive heat of the lava fields and just four miles into the run was forced to walk. He finished the marathon in 3:40 and the race in 10:39 — not bad for a novice but certainly not what he envisioned. He vowed to do Hawaii again and nail it.

To do that, Evoe had to learn to swim better. He joined an organized program and started to get the basic technique and body position in the water down. Equally important, he began to do long weekend rides with some of the Ironman heavyweights in town such as Stephan Schwarze, Adam Reiser, Todd Gerlach, James Bonney and Dan Carroll.

"When he first started training with us, Patrick was really gung-ho and excited," recalls Bonney who has been a professional triathlete for 11 years. "He had so much enthusiasm and we all liked him, but it was tough for him because he didn't have the background."

"I killed myself to hang onto the back of those packs," says Evoe of those epic weekend rides. "Riding with them, I always had to push just to keep from getting dropped."

After nine months of hard training, Evoe was ready for the Coeur d'Alene Ironman in Idaho in June of '04. There, he took 30 minutes off his best bike split, ran a 3:12 marathon and placed 10th overall in 9:34 to earn another trip to Hawaii.

Emboldened by his running and cycling, Evoe went to Hawaii thinking he could get a top 10 in his age group but cratered on the run and walked a good chunk of it to finish in a dispiriting 10:55.

Afterward, Evoe made an even greater commitment to his training back home. "All of a sudden, the Ironman was my life."

Clearly, work was no longer part of the equation and in August of 2005, Evoe left the financial security of Applied Materials to train full-time. He joined Gilbert Tuhabonye and his Gazelles which gave him some of the best runners in town to train with as well as greater structure for his workouts.

Tuhabonye said, "I promised Patrick that if he trained with me, I would get him on the podium in Hawaii [top five in the world in his age group]."

To do that, Evoe would have to run as close as possible to a three-hour marathon which, in the searing mid-day heat of Kona, after 112 miles on a bike, is a major accomplishment.

The '05 Hawaii Ironman became *the* turning point for Evoe. His running and cycling had improved so much that he could hang with most of the studs in town in any workout that didn't involve water.

But in Hawaii, Evoe had a decent swim (1:07) and a few miles into the cycling leg, he caught close friend Stephan Schwarze who, at the age of 40, has more than 30 Ironman races under his belt.

"Three miles into the bike, I caught Stephan and we agreed to work together," says Evoe. "Near the end of the bike, I told him that I was going to go out at sub-seven minute pace on the run. Stephan said, 'That's too fast. But I'm going with you.'"

"The first mile," continues Evoe, "is 6:15. That's fast. The pros had a 15-minute head start on the day and all of a sudden, two miles into the run, we're reeling in the pro women. They would try to stay with us, but we're shelling them and blasting 'em out the back."

"At mile three, Stephan says, 'This pace is crazy.' But this was my third time in Hawaii and this was it for me. I didn't want to leave anything on the course."

The two friends (who were competing as amateurs) ran stride for stride and were well under a sub-three hour pace through 20 miles. Even though Evoe

slowed, he held on for a 2:59 marathon while Schwarze had the fastest amateur run of the day in 2:55. To put those runs in perspective, the pro who won that year's race was less than a minute faster than Schwarze and just four minutes faster than Evoe in the run.

Even better, both Schwarze and Evoe placed in the top five in the world in their age groups. Schwarze was fourth in the 35-39 in 9:02 and Evoe was fifth in the highly competitive 25-29 in 9:06.

Not quite world-class times but close. (Sub-nine hours is considered world-class in Hawaii.)

The following season, Evoe entered five half Ironman-length races to see if he was truly good enough to compete nationally. If he could and hit certain times, the plan was to turn professional.

Of the five major races in '06, Evoe won three and placed in the top three in the other two. The biggie though was the nationals in St. Louis where he beat the two-time defending champion to win the amateur title by four minutes.

After the season, there seemed to be little doubt that Evoe would go pro. His father, a corporate architect for Little Caesar's pizza chain, encouraged him to turn pro as did Jack Murray (the Jack of Jack & Adam's Bike Shop).

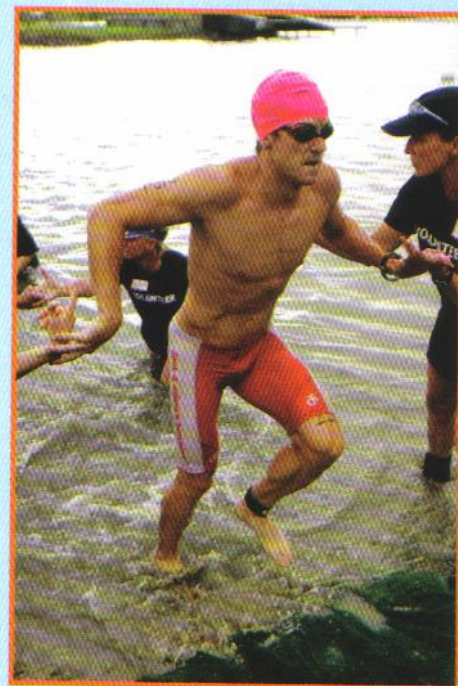
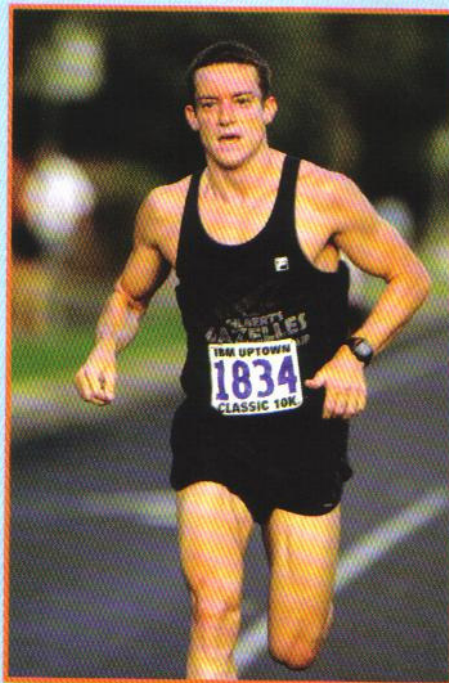
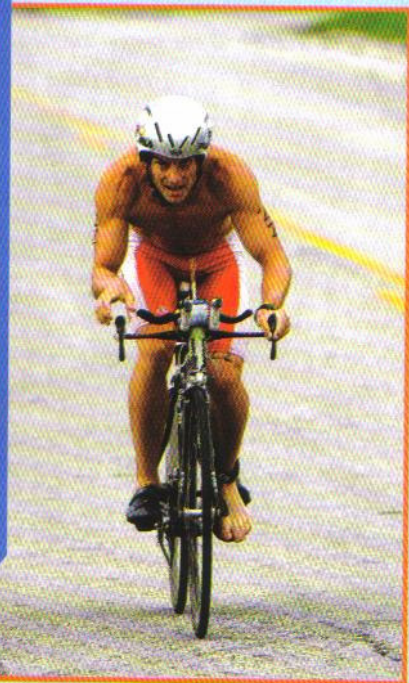
"I told Patrick that he could always go back to his regular job if it didn't work out," says Murray. "Physically, he's right there with the best guys. The difference is he missed out on winning at a young age. Everyone else played Little League or swam or ran and learned how to compete and win. He didn't. The biggest thing he needs to do is learn how to execute that killer instinct."

Bonney agrees. "Patrick needs to be more aggressive on the bike. He tends to baby the bike a little bit, making sure he has plenty left for the run."

But being a professional triathlete doesn't mean instant riches, bike techs, daily massage and shoe contracts. On the contrary.

Patrick Evoe > TAKING THE PLUNGE

photography by Liz Kreutz



Most pro triathletes barely scrape enough together to eat, pay the rent and travel to races.

Which is pretty much the situation Evoe is in. Most of the guys he went to college with or worked with at Applied have started families, are well into their careers and are starting to command substantial salaries.

In contrast, Evoe is living off his savings in a small downtown apartment. So far, in his first year as a pro, Evoe has only made \$2700 in prize money.

He's giving himself five years to answer whether postponing his career is all worth it, but so far only has more questions.

"What does being a pro triathlete mean? What's the point?" he asks one late summer day, just before traveling to Louisville where he finished fifth in his best Ironman ever. (He'll do one other Ironman in Panama City, Florida in November.)

"The point of doing this isn't just the results and the prize money," he says. "It's loving the process. Through this, I'm learning more about myself than in any other capacity. I don't want to get 30 years down the road and think I was so close to making it. I don't want to look back on my life and have regrets for not at least trying.

"Doing this, is something few people have

the opportunity to do. When I was sitting in a cube all those years, I thought: Wouldn't it be great if all I had to do was train?"

And that's about all he does now, three times a day, six days a week for up to 10 hours. He has a reputation as one of the most relentless trainers in town. In a sport which defines itself by its excess, Evoe takes it one step further into the never-never land with a punishing weekly regimen that would make just about anyone gag.

Although his training load will vary, Evoe's typical weekly volume is staggering: 12-15 miles in the pool, 65-75 miles of running and 400-550 miles on the bike with at least one huge ride of 120-130 miles. Some weeks it's even more than that.

Just paying for the travel and training is a struggle, but Evoe gets by with some sponsorship money from Little Caesar's pizza, occasional part-time work at Jack & Adam's and whatever prize money he wins.

"I hardly make anything in the sport," says Evoe, "but I accept it for what it is. I have a two or three-year development plan in my head where I will continue to grow and develop. Hopefully, after that, I'll be a top three guy who is in contention to win every race."

To do that, he has to become more com-

petitive in the swim. The fastest he has ever swam in an Ironman is 57 minutes (for 2.4 miles) but he needs to be at least four or five minutes faster in the water as well as run a 2:48-2:50 marathon (or faster) to contend.

"Evoe has everything it takes to be good in this sport," says Bonney. "The long-term strength he needs for the Ironman will eventually come with more years of training. He's gaining that strength and eventually it will pay off for him."

"Ultimately, I think Patrick's strength will be on the run," says Murray, "but he thinks it will be on the bike. Right now, he's so far behind because of the swim that he's always playing catch up and can't relax on the bike. If he can become a better swimmer, there's no telling what he can do."

Aside from the triathlon wars, Evoe is at least a year away from a masters degree in international studies at Texas State with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa. He figure it'll take him another year to write his thesis.

But that's way down the road. "I don't know where I'm going," says Evoe, "but there will be a life path for me and hopefully the triathlon will lead me to the place where I am meant to be. Until I'm there, I'm going to do everything I can to make it to the top level in my sport."