

# Take 5

**Marathon? Nah. Triathlon? Boring. For George Sanderlin, only pentathlons will do.**

## How do you train for a pentathlon?

After running competitively for more than 11 years, it has been quite a challenge to master four new sports simultaneously. My training regimen basically consists of working out twice a day, five days a week, and once a day on the remaining two days a week. I spend equal amounts of time on technique (like riding, fencing and shooting) and building core endurance, strength and speed. I cannot think of a better place to train for pentathlons than Atlanta. The coaching and facilities are excellent, and there are many competitions in each of the five modern pentathlon sports. These individual sport competitions help me peak for the modern pentathlon.

## What is the most challenging part about training for a pentathlon?

My biggest challenges are obtaining the proper breathing rhythm while swimming and maintaining flexible calves for both the ride and the run. The calves are a unique challenge. To ride horses, you must keep your heels flexed down in the stirrups, which strains your arches and stretches your calves. Conversely, when running, you should stride down on the ball of your foot, which keeps your heels up. Between riding and running, the countering forces on my heels puts a significant strain on my calves. All of the strain, plus aging, has caused my calf muscles to lose some of their flexibility. To remedy this, I try to spend more time stretching.

## How do you maintain a healthy diet?

I like to cook, so that makes it easier to create healthy meals. I bring my lunch to work and eat a sandwich made from low-fat ingredients. For dinner, I eat a lot of soups and salads and try to stay away from simple carbohydrates. I also stay away from baked goods, highly processed foods and unhealthy snacks.

## What keeps you motivated?

After recently reading Rick Warren's "The Purpose Driven Life," I have a better understanding of the importance of doing things for others. For my next big international competition, I am planning to raise funds for a local nonprofit organization, like the Dream House for Kids. I will seek sponsors who will contribute to the nonprofit organization based on the total amount of points I score. In addition to this, I am a very driven person. You have to be, if you want to compete in the modern pentathlon while working full-time. And listening to Southern rock also helps keep me pumped.

## What advice do you have for other middle-aged athletes who are interested in competing in athletics?

Don't dream about your actions; take action on your dreams. It is easy to jump into competitive athletics in Atlanta because of the facilities, coaches and prevalent competitions. When people reach middle age, they may feel unfulfilled. Competitive sports can help this situation on several counts—they are stimulating and can therefore be rejuvenating; they help relieve stress from work; they are good for your health; and they provide more balance in your life. Being a competitive athlete gives you an activity to focus on. You alone are in control of the activity. This can be a welcome change, especially when you consider how much is outside of our control in life.

George Sanderlin doesn't compete in one sport—he competes in five. The 48-year-old Atlantan shoots, fences, swims, rides and runs in modern pentathlons, and he is one of the few Masters-level athletes in the country to do so. Sanderlin, who works in the customer technology marketing department at UPS, says he first learned about modern pentathlons as a child, when he watched pentathletes compete in the Summer Olympics. His interest in the competition was rekindled when he again watched pentathletes take part in the 2004 Summer Olympics. "I was hooked on the amount of skill, courage, stamina, speed, endurance and strategy it took to master all five sports," Sanderlin says. "That was when I made a commitment to pursue the sport competitively." Read on to find out how Sanderlin trains, stays motivated and proves to the world that five is truly a magic number. -Allison Weiss *Entrekin*

