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Blind faith carries the day for athlete in 'perfect race'

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Through most of the U.S. Open Triathlon, Ben Collins felt someone breathing down his neck. From the swim at Joe Pool Lake, to the bike ride into downtown Dallas and through the final 10-kilometer run around Reunion Arena, Collins couldn't shake Aaron Scheidies.

When they crossed the finish line, Collins turned to Scheidies and hugged him. With Collins as his guide, Scheidies became the first triathlete with a disability to break the 2-hour barrier in an Olympic distance triathlon, finishing in 1:58:08.

"It feels amazing, man," said Scheidies, whose sight deteriorated from childhood to only 10 percent because of juvenile macular degeneration. "This has been my goal for a long time. I had to have a perfect race to do it."

Collins and Scheidies were tethered together from the start, riding a tandem bike during the 40-kilometer ride. Scheidies' previous best at an Olympic-distance triathlon was 2:03, and the Open was his first pairing with Collins.

"This just puts a cap on my year," said Collins, a newly pro triathlete who won the U.S. and World amateurs this year. "It's just something I wanted to do, something to give back."

In a field of more than 2,000 triathletes, Scheidies and Collins were among the happiest in the pack.

"Let's go find the beer garden," Scheidies said.

Greg Bennett of Australia won the men's pro division in 1:44:41, and claimed the points prize and the super bonus for winning all five races in the Lifetime Series. All told, Bennett had a \$420,000 payday.

"This is big time," Bennett said. "I was in debt at the start of the year, so it's a big relief. I don't think I slept for a week before the race."

Bennett trailed Matt Reed by 27 seconds after the bike portion but pulled past with a time of 30:46 in the 10K.

Sarah Haskins won the women's pro division, coming out of the water first and never giving up the lead as she finished in 1:55:45. Haskins, who won the 2006 U.S. Amateur, claimed a \$60,000 prize for winning.

"This is my biggest win ever," Haskins said. "I didn't think I'd win it until the run. The course was very challenging on the bike. I just kept staring ahead of me."