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Scheidies breaks two-hour Olympic-distance barrier for blind triathletes

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DALLAS - Aaron Scheidies became the first blind triathlete to finish an Olympic-distance triathlon in under two hours Sunday, finishing the U.S. Open Triathlon in one hour 58 minutes eight seconds.

The 25-year-old Scheidies and guide Ben Collins crossed the finish line 48th overall, about 14 minutes behind winner and Australian Olympian Greg Bennett. The field of about 1,100 included 41 professional triathletes.

"I'm ecstatic," Scheidies said. "Not necessarily because of what I did, but I wanted to prove to general society that people with disabilities can do things better than able-bodied individuals."

Scheidies, who lives in Seattle, suffers from juvenile macular degeneration, a condition in which the central vision slowly deteriorates. Only 10 per cent of his sight remains.

Legally blind since fourth grade, Scheidies was tethered to Collins for the 1.5-kilometre swim and 10K run. In between, they rode a tandem bike in the 40K cycling leg.

Bennett finished in 1:44.41. His victory gave him a sweep in the five-race Life Time Fitness Triathlon Series and earned US\$420,000.

American Sarah Haskins won the women's race in 1:55:45.