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Handel one of the fittest people in Austin

Former University of Illinois swimmer rising through the ranks of runners, triathletes.

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AMERICAN-STATESMAN CORRESPONDENT

Tuesday, April 10, 2007

Kelly Handel turned a few heads a couple of few weeks ago when she knocked out a time of 36 minutes and 58 seconds at the Statesman Capitol 10,000, good for fourth place. Not many women in Austin can run that kind of time for a 10-kilometer race, but Handel is not your average runner.

Handel is a coach for Carmichael Training Systems, run by Chris Carmichael, the former coach to Lance Armstrong. She also is probably one of the fittest people in Austin.

[\(enlarge photo\)](#)

Kelly Handel Ex-collegiate swimmer is a threat at any running distance.

A former swimmer at the University of Illinois, where she was the team captain for two years, Handel discovered the triathlon after graduating in 2000. She quickly rose through the ranks, winning the Pan American championships in 2002 and finishing 43rd in the world championships that same year. She also was a member of the United States' national triathlon team from 2002-2004.

Then came a setback. In 2005, Handel was on a training ride near Denver, flying through a turn when she lost control of her bike and crashed. She suffered multiple fractures in her left arm that required three surgeries involving two plates, followed by nine months of rehab.

"It wasn't something where I could control what happened. I was in a group and someone swerved into me," said Handel, who's 29. "After that I couldn't swim or bike because of the injury, so now I've gained a huge appreciation for what I can do."

This past August, Handel moved to Austin from Colorado Springs, Colo., after her boyfriend, Derick Williamson — the 2007 AT&T Half Marathon champion — was accepted as a graduate student at the University of Texas.

Folks in Austin's running community may not have noticed her last summer, as she was busy with swimming and cycling. However, anyone involved in the local road-racing scene probably noted her victory at the Trail of Lights 5K in 17:22 (a personal best) in December. And her time of 1:18:35 at the 3M Half Marathon in January served notice that Handel was a real threat at any distance.

"My focus is the triathlon, but I'm really starting to pay attention to running, too. Right now I'm going to run the Indianapolis Half Marathon on May 5. I hope to better my 3M time, maybe win the race," she said.

Though Handel misses the mountains of Colorado, she's warming to Austin.

"I think I resisted Austin at first, but I really like the community here — there's a great triathlon scene. It's a very welcoming place. I like it more all of the time. And it's really nice to be able to get on your bike and ride three hours in January."

Upcoming races: Chapa 5K Challenge at the Chapa Middle School, Kyle, 9 a.m. Saturday. Call (512) 268-8500 for more information.

Schlotzsky's Bun Run 5K, 8 a.m. Sunday at Auditorium Shores. Call 294-4570 or visit bunrun.com.