

Schaller ponders new Gallup sports competition

Written by Joe Schaller Guest Columnist
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The 'athlon' competitions feature multiple events rewarding a compilation of diverse achievement. Most of these are strictly measures of athletic ability such as the triathlon, heptathlon and decathlon. Others such as the biathlon and pentathlon have included finesse events like fencing, shooting and equestrian.

The Grants Quadrathlon has achieved national status in over 30 years of existence with hundreds paying their \$60 fee to bike, run, cross country ski and snowshoe 43 miles every February with the winner receiving a modest \$1,000 prize.

Awards are given for teams, age groups and gender. In fact almost all athletic competitions nowadays are gender exclusive with women's awards separate from men's. Senior contestants and awards are also common with age groups often staggered at five year intervals. What if an athlon competition was created which gave women and the middle aged a near equal standing as young men?

Those of you who are fans of the TV series Survivor are aware of the diverse reward and immunity challenges which incorporate athleticism, finesse, coordination and brains. The women and middle-aged win the individual challenges almost as often as the young men. This kind of competition appeals to many would-be participants and spectators as well. In my research on American athlon-type events I have yet to find any which vary from traditional athleticism models into the types of creative and diverse events seen on Survivor.

The ten event decathlon is likely the greatest measure of athletic achievement in the world. The quadrathlon has different formats world-wide however I have yet to hear of any annual nine (enneathlon), eleven (hendecathlon) or twelve (dodecathlon) event competitions, so any community who used these for an annual event would essentially be a first.

How would a place like Gallup construct a multiple event competition which featured our natural resources and kept the playing field somewhat level for all types of competitors? This could all be decided by a committee however here are some proposals.

In a nine event enneathlon each contestant would have their choice of nine events from a

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selection of ten to twelve to participate in. The top nine finishers in each event would be awarded points on a sliding scale, points accumulating for a grand total.

It would likely be a three day event starting Friday evening thru Sunday morning. Red Rock Park could be the location. A Pyramid Trail run, mountain biking event and a climbing wall competition would fulfill the requirements for athleticism and from there the planners could get really creative. For purely brains I would include speed chess. A giant puzzle event like commonly seen on Survivor could be a wild card event changed every year so nobody can practice ahead of time.

The majority of events would focus on finesse and coordination. An obstacle course set up properly can emphasize balance beams with agility, quickness and coordination skills rather than strength and speed. Here are more possible events: Horseshoes, table shuffleboard, cornhole, bocce ball, darts, basketball free throws, sudoku, jigsaw puzzle, firearm archery or slingshot target shooting, pulling your weight race, stacking blocks, frisbee accuracy throw, soccer dribble, stork stand, walking on hands, billiards, ping pong, breath-holding, fire building, juggling - the possibilities are numerous.

Each of the nine (or possibly eleven or twelve) events would have a local sponsor. Prize money should be substantial to draw serious competitors. A \$9,000 cash purse rewarding the top nine finishers would be good for starters. Keeping the events fairly simple will reduce costs and volunteers. All these details would be worked out by the planning committee with format flexibility for future annual events.

Gallup has shown success with our world famous balloon rally and mountain biking events utilizing our scenic high desert and mountain resources. Those events enhance our tourist economy. Economy enhances quality of life.

We could very well become a pioneer of new age competitions. Here's the sales pitch: It's unique. It's diverse. It's inclusive. If you're athletic, coordinated, dexterous and bright, if you think you have the total package, you might undertake the Gallup Giddy Up. It's not just any athlon, it's the Enneathlon.