

least one of the most demanding sports known to man. In international competition, for instance, the athletes swim 1,500 meters (close to a mile), bike 40,000 meters, then run 10,000 meters (a little over six miles). Let's not forget that all of this is done in one day (usually between four and five hours for the international distances).

Additionally, triathlons attract large numbers of competitors. The triathlon held in Nice, France has a field of 1,000. Here in the states, the *Chicago Sun-Times* Triathlon usually has around 4,000 entries.

This sport is becoming more popular among blacks because it represents an ultimate challenge. To succeed, athletes are always competing against themselves, stretching to attain the highest level they are capable of reaching every time they compete.

"More blacks are getting into the triathlon because they want to try it," said Aurora Workman, Tri-Masters vice-president. "And it's helped us get more black youngsters interested in taking up the sport. To do well, you don't have to be tall and you don't have to be a jock type. Most triathletes are unassuming-looking people. It's not a matter of being a master of one phase, but being good at all phases. It's a personal best type of sport."

Aside from staging local triathlons, the Tri-Masters also have biathlons or duathlons. Because many inner-city areas aren't close to lakes or beaches, the swim portion of the competition is dropped and athletes bike and run instead.

The triathlon is due to continue its growth because it has gained more recognition around the globe. The sport has a world governing body — the International Triathlon Union, an agency that has affiliations in 70 countries on six continents. The triathlon got a huge boost in late April when the International Olympic Committee recommended that the triathlon become an Olympic sport, beginning with the '96 Games in Atlanta.

With that kind of recognition, Hartley feels his organization stands to be at the forefront in getting more blacks to compete and eventually reach the world-class level.

"Having the sport being a part of the Olympics means a lot," Hartley explained. "All you have to do is look at what happened when gymnastics was accepted for the Olympics. Corporations and the government start putting money into it and the sport takes off. Tri-Masters' goal is to make sure that the money won't stay on the other side of town."

To be sure, the triathlon is an elite sport. It's expensive to compete, just like golf and tennis. According to the Triathlon Federation, which has 30,000 members, the average income of their membership is \$50,000 a year. The federation estimates that it takes anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,000 to properly prepare someone to compete. That sum covers the basics -- a bike, wet suit, running and biking shoes, biking helmet, sportswear, and other training aids.

Since most minorities tend to earn less than \$50,000 annually, it's clear that lack of

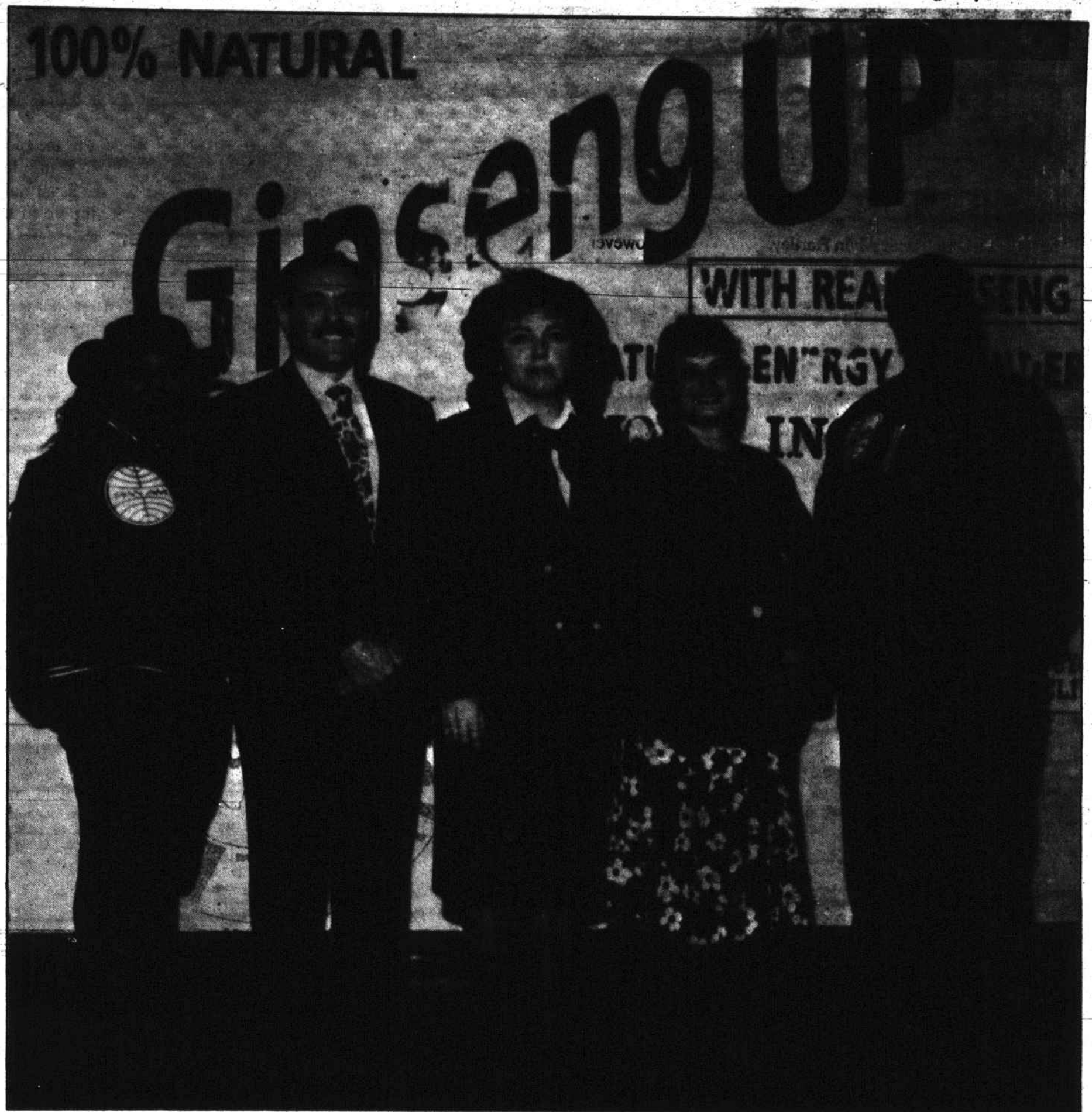


Photo by Lester Mike

The Tri-Masters established a college scholarship fund designed to help students pay for their schooling. The major principles in the Tri-Masters Future Mind Scholarship Series are (from left): Aurora Workman, Tri-Masters vice-president; Jim Fillpazi, sales manager—Ginseng Up National Soda; Helen O'Dell, division director of sales—USA Pan-American Airlines; Diane Krumholtz, division manager—USA Pan-American Airlines; and Alvin Hartley, Tri-Masters president. 12

financing is a major roadblock which keeps most minority athletes from pursuing the sport. But with the triathlon gaining Olympic status, more sponsorships will be available which will make it easier for minorities to get involved.

It will still be another five years until we see people receiving Olympic medals for the triathlon. And that's enough time for minority athletes to emerge as Olympic performers in the sport. Currently, there are no blacks who are highly ranked on the pro circuit. But there are few notable amateur practitioners. Luther Gales, 51, was ranked 17th nationally in his age group. Gales is a retired New York City policeman. Gary McCloud, a former tennis instructor, is known as one of the top competitors in the Iron Man Triathlon.

As part of the Tri-Masters game plan to encourage black participation in the sport, club members make personal appearances to speak at schools and community events to promote the importance of having a healthy body and strong mind.

"We're always pushing the message about having a sound mind and body," Workman said. "You can't work out for this sport and not have a clean body."

Another part of the Tri-Master focus on youth involves their Triathlon/Duathlon Future Mind Scholarship Series, which is being subsidized by the Ginseng Up Corp. and Pan-American Airlines. This year, the scholarship amount totals \$6,000.

Future Mind is designed to award funds to youngsters (ages 17-22) to help them pay for their college expenses.

The series consists of six events held during the course of the year. Three events remain for '91:

- July 4 -- Liberty-Liberty Triathlon in New York and Philadelphia.
- Aug. 4 -- Budlight Sprintman Triathlon in Key Biscayne, Fla.
- Oct. 5 -- Parkway Dualthon at Allentown, Pa.

"Our aim is to target urban areas and increase awareness of the sport," Hartley added. "In the coming years, this sport will be so popular that you'll be able to go almost anywhere in the country and enter a triathlon."

For more information, write: Tri-Masters, 303 Front Street, Hempstead, NY 11550, or call 516/486-0447.

— Blanton Birch