



Special to The Bee/Rick Cruse  
**Jamie Whitmore was a volleyball and softball player at Valley High School until her math teacher got her running.**

# Glad she gave this racing a tri(athlon)

Jamie Whitmore got off to a late start, but her hard work is leading to success.

By Gary Voet  
 BEE STAFF WRITER

Math teachers usually know the score, and when it came to distance running, one instructor decided that sport added up in Jamie Whitmore's favor.

Whitmore was a Valley High School freshman with lots of energy and an affinity for volleyball and softball. But that wasn't good enough for her math teacher, Rod Hunt, who also was the track coach. Hunt hounded Whitmore daily to run track. "You're a natural," he would constantly say.

Whitmore finally agreed to give track and cross country a chance, and in her junior and senior years

(1993 and '94) became league and Division II Subsection champion in cross country. She went on to Cal State Northridge and was a successful long-distance runner.

Now, the 26-year-old Whitmore has combined her running skills with some old swimming skills and some recently acquired mountain biking skills to become the top U.S. woman on the Xterra race circuit. She is poised to take home \$14,500 and the U.S. Championship on Sunday at Incline Village, Nev.

"I'm thankful for what Mr. Hunt did for me and saw in me," Whitmore said. "I still see him, and each time I do, he says, 'Hey, I told you you needed to be a runner.'"

The races in which Whitmore competes aren't exactly all about running. They're an offshoot of the traditional triathlon. All three elements - swimming, bicycling, running - are the same, but instead of

► WHITMORE, page C10

## Whitmore: She's tied for series lead

► CONTINUED FROM C1

running and cycling on a flat road course, these courses go through the foothills and on mountain trails. Elevation gains of 2,000 feet are common.

Whitmore didn't start focusing on Xterra racing until 1999. Her rapid acceleration to the top of the women's pro circuit is somewhat amazing, even to Whitmore.

"I still have a lot to learn, but the top mountain bikers and triathletes are usually 30 to 34 years old. I still have time," she said.

It's such determination that grabbed the attention of the man Whitmore would marry, Courtney Cardenas. He was an expert downhill cyclist when he first met Whitmore. Cardenas' sport involved getting on a mountain bike, then coming down a hill as fast as he could - in reckless style.

Whitmore was training for triathlons when Cardenas saw her.

"Here was this natural athlete who was very, very dedicated," he said. "She had very strict training rules, and she knew what she wanted. When we first went on a bike ride together, she could barely keep up to a 16 mile-per-hour average. Every time we went out, she felt like she was going to throw up."

"Now, just a couple years later, she easily goes 23 miles an hour average, and when I go with her, I feel like I'm going to throw up."

In 1999, Whitmore, now married to Cardenas, decided to try the newly created Xterra circuit.

"I went to college to be a police officer," Whitmore said. "If that didn't work, I wanted to go into

private investigation, things like insurance fraud or cheating husbands and wives. I thought it would be cool dressing up and taking photos of people doing something they shouldn't be doing."

But after Whitmore graduated from college, she took some time off and went to Europe for a three-month vacation. She still ran and saw a television interview from one of the top triathletes at the time who happen to say her weak spot was running.

"I thought, Hey, that's my strongest. I swam from ages 5 to 12, and the only thing left to learn was how to ride a road bike. Why not try triathlons?"

When Whitmore returned home and told her parents her plans, they were supportive.

"They could have said, 'You know, we helped you out in school; now it is time to get a job.' But they didn't. They bought me my first two bikes, and my mom still helps me out with money if I need it."

"And then, when I got married and all the things my husband has done for me, I can't say enough about his support."

A typical week for Whitmore is a lot of time swimming laps in a pool in the morning, then an afternoon nap, then some evening bicycle rides. Saturdays are spent simulating a race, a 1-mile swim in some river or lake, 18-25 miles on a bike in the foothills around Salmon Falls or Auburn, then a 4-6 mile run.

Her coach, Rick Crawford, lives in Colorado and says Sunday is a day of rest. But the e-mails and telephone calls often



Special to The Bee/Rick Cruse  
**Jamie Whitmore competes in the Xterra Racing Series, which is an offshoot of the traditional triathlon run in the foothills and mountains.**

fall on the deaf ears of this perfectionist.

"I'm supposed to rest on Sundays, but I just can't," Whitmore said. "My coach says I can't do anything, but I have to go out for a bike ride or a swim."

To let Whitmore focus entirely on the circuit and the training necessary, Cardenas works three jobs. He also works out with her throughout the week.

Whitmore does have some

sponsors, but only two of them give her cash, and that is based on a percentage of how she finishes in a race. Most of her sponsors provide her with equipment.

Sunday's race at Incline is a blend of triathlon and adventure racing. It starts at the beach in front of the Hyatt Resort with a 1.5-kilometer swim. Two laps around the 750-meter course are followed by a sprint to the grassy transition area at Village Green.

The second leg incorporates a 32-kilometer, single-loop mountain bike course.

There is a 1,600 vertical feet climb up Tunnel Creek Road in just three miles, as bikers ascend to Tahoe's famed Flume Trail, known for its sheer rock faces and incredible sweeping vistas.

The final leg, a 10-kilometer trail run, begins at Ponderosa Ranch. The home stretch runs through the pedestrian pathway

along Lakeshore Boulevard to the Hyatt Beach.

Whitmore is tied for first with Canadian Melania McQuaid in the series standings. The next race after Sunday will be the Nissan World Championship in Maui, Hawaii, on Oct. 27, with a purse of \$105,000.

□ □ □

The Bee's Gary Voet can be reached at (916) 321-1179 or gvoet@sacbee.com.