

Wonder Women

These D.C.—area sports groups have a female focus

By Jeremy Shweder

At this year's New York City Marathon, the top women's finisher will walk away with \$130,000, which is \$30,000 more than the first-place man. By all accounts, this will be the first time that a woman takes home a bigger guaranteed prize than a man in any major sports competition.

While this is a good step for women's sports, let's face it: men still have better opportunities than women when it comes to athletics. That divide is less gaping in the fitness activities like running, swimming, cycling and triathlon, where pretty much every race has women's and men's divisions. Still, sometimes women don't want to play with the guys. That's why the D.C. area has so many women's-specific athletic groups. On almost any weekend you can hike, bike, run or climb with a group of supportive, fit, gals. Here are some of D.C.'s best women's-specific sports groups.

Washington Women Outdoors

Perhaps the broadest and most extensive outdoor group for women in the D.C. area, Washington Women Outdoors organizes hiking trips, non-competitive cycling outings, paddling days and other excursions throughout the year. Check out the group's website for a full idea of the breadth of activities offered. Washington Women Outdoors has about 250 members, though all the activities are open (at a slightly higher cost) to non-members.

Get More Info: See www.washingtonwomenoutdoors.org, or call 301-864-3070. A basic membership is \$30 a year, with a small fee for each outing.

sheclimbs

Rock climbing is one of those sports where women often have as much—or more—success than men. And the D.C./Baltimore region happens to have the largest chapter in the country of a national women's climbing group called sheclimbs. Nationally, sheclimbs is about 300-women strong. The local chapter has about 100 members. "We are constantly growing," says Wendie White, co-coordinator of the D.C./Baltimore chapter. "We talk to people at the crags, we talk to people at the gyms." sheclimbs was started in 1995 by a few women climbers who wanted to provide other women with a supportive environment to grow in the sport. The D.C. chapter follows that model, hosting outdoor climbing events at Carderock, organizing group trips to Seneca Rocks or the

Gunks, and holding social potlucks every other month. "It's not at all competitive, it's more supportive, trying to help women gain confidence and strength," White says.

Get More Info: See www.sheclimbs.org or e-mail White at wendfish@aol.com. Membership normally costs \$30, but the group is offering free membership to new signups. E-mail White for info.

Artemis Racing

While Artemis Racing is technically a co-ed bike racing team, it's also nationally recognized as one of the best teams for supporting women riders. The club has about 60 members, nearly half women, though it has typically featured some very strong male riders as well. "A lot of people ask, 'are we just for women?'" says Team Coordinator Evelyn Egizi. "When the guys want to get on the team I make sure that they are down with the mission—which is to support women." In 2000 and 2001, USA Cycling named Artemis the women's club of the year. In 2002 and 2003, Artemis won honors for best overall club in the division II level (based on club size). Artemis' focus is to get women comfortable in a racing environment, not just riding for fitness.

Get More Info: See www.artemisracing.org.

WOWskate

Speed skating may be a niche sport, but the D.C. area does have a women's team for skaters who like to move fast. WOWskate, started by Barbara Fox in 1997, is a group of about 20 women who inline skate, mostly on specialized, five-wheel skates. WOWskate trains at Hains Point irregularly three times a week, and everyone in the group should be relatively comfortable skating in a pace-line and stopping. When they are off the skates, Fox says that the group also cross-trains together by cycling, running or climbing.

Get More Info: See www.wowskate.org.

Fast Girls

Ready to run fast? Fast Girls, a low-key running group made up of just five women, is looking to add a few more fleet runners (women or men) to its roster. But be warned: these ladies are quick. Two members include top D.C. runners Casey Smith



and Emily Richard, both who competed in the National Half Marathon Championships in 2004. "It's a bunch of women who like to run," says Jamie Hagerbaumer. "Most of us have run in college. We're the type of group that's going to run hard and have a good time." Expect to pound out 10-milers at under 8:00 per mile pace with the Fast Girls on their weekend Rock Creek Park workouts.

Get More Info: E-mail Hagerbaumer at jamie_hagerbaumer@yahoo.com.

Babes on Bikes

For cycling lovers looking for a non-competitive group of women riders, Babes on Bikes might be the perfect fit. Since the club holds all of its rides on weekdays, most of the members are stay-at-home moms or retirees, says club member Marla Schnall. Most rides start in Arlington and vary between 10 to 40 miles. There are about 60 people on the Babes on Bikes e-mail list, and usually no more than 15 show up for any particular ride. The big event for the Babes on Bikes is the MS 150 ride, when the Babes organize a large group outing.

Get More Info: See www.babesonbikes.org.

Start Right Fitness

This relatively new group—founded in 2004—takes mostly new or beginning women runners and gets them ready for the 5K, 10K or half-marathon distance. The goal of Start Right Fitness is to get women feeling comfortable as runners, even if that means a very slow beginning process. "I can start them at 30 seconds of running with a five-minute walk in between, and I can get them to a 5K race in three months," says founder Carla Gregor. Start Right Fitness has about 80 members. The group trains at Lake Accotink in Springfield, Va., and weekend sessions include guest speakers who educate members about shoes, safety, cross training, injuries and more.

Get More Info: See www.startrightfitness.com, 703-407-7470.