



Masters athletes pursue many sports

Interest in individual and team sports is not limited by age. Older adults continue to enjoy their sports and pursue a “personal best” by improving individual performance or seeking out the competitive atmosphere of an organized event.

Since the attention of the world is largely focused on inactive and overweight populations, older adults who are motivated and physically active are easy to overlook. Yet, these individuals also benefit from physical activity conditioning that helps them maintain their participation.

“Masters” is the term used to designate individuals or events that are based on age groups, generally over 35 years of age and typically over 45 years. Masters athletes can be highly experienced veterans of the sport, recreational enthusiasts or people returning to a sport after many years of absence (AHA, 2001).

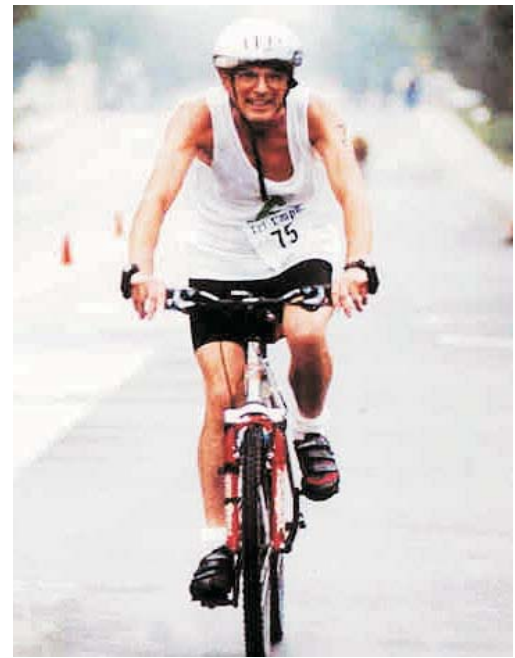
Scope of masters events

The competition at a masters event is usually divided by age groups. Each organization determines the groups, which may be divided by decades or 5-year increments.

Internationally, there are more than 50 countries sponsoring masters events, estimated the authors of the AHA Scientific Advisory on preparticipation screening for masters athletes. Participation is greatest in the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and parts of Asia and South America.

The next World Masters Games in 2009 will feature 29 sports. The most recent games in 2005 attracted 21,600 recreational and elite athletes from 88 countries. An example of a regional event is the 2007 Australasian Masters Games, which will feature 50 sports and is expected to attract 10,000 participants from 19 countries.

In the United States, the National Senior Games - The Senior Olympics sponsors games in 50 states and involves more than



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250,000 older adults in training, competition and education on a year-round basis. In the 2007 Summer Games, 12,100 individuals participated.

Choices of athletic activities

Participation in the events offered at The Senior Olympics Summer Games is a way to gauge the sports that older adults are interested in. A list of the participants in the 2007 Summer Games (page 15) confirms that older adults enjoy a variety of sports.

In active adult retirement communities, sports and outdoor activities are of high interest, according to a survey conducted by developer Del Webb. A group of 3,584 current and prospective residents of its Del Webb communities ranked the following activities as “extremely important” (8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale):

Activity ranked “extremely important”

Swimming	55%
Golf	49%
Bowling	34%
Fishing	30%
Canoeing/Kayaking	26%
Tennis	nearly 25%
Softball	nearly 20%

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Resources

National Senior Games Association
www.nsga.com/about.html

National Veterans Golden Age Games
www.va.gov/vetevent/ag/2007/Default.cfm

The Senior Golfers Association of America
seniorgolfersamerica.com/

United States Masters Swimming
www.usms.org/

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Adaptive sports also welcome older adults. For example, the (US) National Veterans Golden Age Games provides competition for men and women 55 years and older with the goals of engaging the mind as well as the body through physical activity and friendly competition. There are 7 age categories, as well as divisions for people who use wheelchairs or have visual impairments.

Competitive events include: swimming, bicycling, golf, shot put, discus, 10-meter air rifle, table tennis, dominoes, shuffleboard, horseshoes, nine-ball, bowling, checkers and croquet.

Why participate?

At the ICAA Active Aging Conference 2006, presenter Gwen Hyatt (herself a masters athlete) included a roundup of reasons why older adults continue in their sports. The list included having fun, maintaining health and personal pride. Older athletes tend to be less focused on winning, and more focused on enjoyment and continued participation.

In a qualitative study of masters athletes, researchers in Australia identified 4 themes that explained participants' motivation: a shared sporting interest, comrades in continued activity, relevant life purpose, and giving back (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007).

Rethinking the masters

While people at the Athlete level of the ICAA Functional Levels may make up a small segment of the older adult population, they are still an important segment. The number of people who participate in age-designated competitions indicates that athletics are a way to keep older adults interested and engaged in life.

—Pat Ryan

2007 Senior Olympics Summer Games

Event	No. of participants
Track & Field	4,163
Swimming	3,819
Softball	2,184
Basketball	1,902
Cycling	1,771
Bowling	1,241
Tennis	1,167
Volleyball	1,140
Table tennis	827
Badminton	700
Road race	554
Golf	508
Shuffleboard	491
Race walk	474
Archery	366
Racquetball	319
Horseshoes	204
Triathlon	159

References

Hyatt, G. (2006) "Training the Athlete Over 50." ICAA Active Aging Conference.

Lyons, K. and Dionigi R. (2007) Transcending Emotional Community: A Qualitative Examination of Older Adults and Masters' Sports Participation. Leisure Sciences, 29(4):375.

National Senior Games Association. Participation by sport. Personal communication, Sept. 5, 2007.

Pulte Homes, Inc. (April 2007) "Active Recreation Tops Lifestyle Desires for Over-55 Crowd and Baby Boomers." Downloaded August 31, 2007, from <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/phoenix.zhtml?c=147717&p=irol-newsArticle&ID=981725&highlight=>

AHA Science Advisory: Recommendations for Preparticipation Screening and the Assessment of Cardiovascular Disease in Masters Athletes. (2001) Circulation, 103:327. Downloaded August 31, 2007, from <http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/full/103/2/327>

World Masters Games 2005. Website statement. Available September 9, 2007, at <http://www.2005worldmasters.com/>