



ROGEEMA KENNY: *Electrical engineer* World Traveler **Runner** **Triathlete**



I was never really into athletics, but late in 2009 my sister and I decided to train for a 5km road running race. At the time we couldn't even run 2km. It was a bumpy road to start with, but by mid-2010 we were completely hooked and had already done our first 21km half marathon.

What made me go into triathlon?

In 2014 I was challenged by a friend to do a sprint triathlon, which is a race in which you swim, cycle and run.

I didn't see the running to be a problem, but I had a tiny problem in that I could not swim at all. I now had to learn to swim from scratch at the age of 33.

When I finished that first triathlon, which was a 500m swim, a 20km mountain bike trail, and a 4km run, I knew that I wanted more and that this race would not be my last. I loved the challenge that came with it, the effort and the discipline that you are forced to observe during the weeks and months of training, and the final feeling of exhilaration at the finish.

As an added bonus, the training load meant my fitness peaked and it helped my running form tremendously. There were many, many moments of doubt that crept into the journey. I almost bailed out of doing my first triathlon with an ocean swim (at Big Bay in Feb 2015), but thankfully I didn't. To my utter surprise at the end, I ended on the podium with a 2nd place in my age category. I am not a natural in terms of ability, so I had to work really hard on all 3 sports, and especially the swimming, and I had to fit all the training in between a full time job, family and social commitments.

Triathlon attire

While I still had a lot of work to do on improving my swim and to go on to bigger distances, another huge obstacle I faced was what to wear during my triathlon.

Triathletes usually compete in a trisuit, which is an all-in-one skin, a cross between a bathing suit and cycling shorts. This is something I would definitely not feel comfortable being out in public in, as I am used to covering up and I would need something a lot more modest to wear.

Why was this a big challenge?

Dressing modestly in individual sports is tricky, but it's not that much of a problem. In the swim there is the wetsuit that we wear, and I have been doing running (and some cycling)

in long pants and tights, skorts and long sleeve tops for a long time.

But when you combine the 3, it brings a very intricate complexity because once you are done swimming; you have to get ready for the cycle in the transition area, which is completely out in the open. There is no changing room to quickly run into to change.

Triathletes aim to make this transition as fast as possible, and while a typical good transition time for an amateur is around 5 minutes, I was taking closer to 15 minutes to transition between each sport in the beginning.

Then there is also the chance that on the day the race officials could announce that the swim is non-wetsuit legal, which means that we would not be allowed to swim in a wetsuit due to the water temperature being too high. (This hasn't happened to me yet, but is always a possibility) What would I swim in then? Would I be forced to wear a normal bathing costume? Well, I simply had to come up with a plan that would have me racing comfortably, functionally and as modestly as what I could in the sport.

How did you eventually overcome this challenge?

When I decided that I was going to commit to this sport, I decided to think long and hard about what gear I would race in, that had to fulfill the following requirements at the very least:

- It must be comfortable to race in, and not hamper me during any of the 3 sports

- It must be functional – moisture wicking, cool, technical fabrics

- It must offer adequate body and hair coverage, and still fulfill the other requirements

- I want to be able to wear my official club gear over it (highly desirable, although not essential)

It didn't take long for me to

find something that fulfills all of the above requirements, and it was then time for me to start testing the gear during training sessions. My triathlon gear therefore consists of

For the swim:

Layer 1 – long sleeve rash vest and long tights

Layer 2 – Club tri-shorts and tri-top

Layer 3 – full wetsuit and swim cap

This meant that I would only have one more layer under my wetsuit than other triathletes have, and it doesn't feel bulky at all, neither does it hamper my swim.

And once I'm done swimming, I'm already almost ready for the ride once the wetsuit comes off.

For cycle:

Just remove wetsuit and put on head buff under the cycling helmet.

Put on socks and cycling shoes.

I may or may not put on a skirt at this point, depending on the race and whether it hampers my bike ride.

For run:

Remove cycling helmet and put on running cap or visor.

Change from cycling shoes into running shoes.

After these changes, my transitions have now become much shorter, and no longer feel like I need to leave more time to spend in transition than actually swimming. Hehe.

I know that there are still people, and will always be those, who criticize that I am not covered enough. I am not claiming to be an example of what everyone should do either.

At the end of the day, hijab is a choice I've made and I am truly striving to do the best that I can in any particular situation. I want women to know that hijab is freedom, it is not a chain.

You can still do anything you want to do, in any area of life, including sport.

You never have to stand down because of your religion or your gender. It might take a lot more work and planning, but ultimately you can do anything.

About me:

- Electrical engineer, co-author, certified mentor, runner, triathlete, world traveller.
- Completed numerous half marathons, 4 x full 42.2km marathons, 1 x 56km ultramarathon, 4 x sprint triathlons.

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