For many college students, waking up at 4 a.m. to run, swim and bike a 32-mile course in three hours might sound like a daunting task. For students on TriCanes—the University of Miami’s competitive triathlon team—it’s an exhilarating monthly ritual.

The TriCanes team accepts all levels of athletes and offers workouts that push each individual to their limits. Distraction recently caught up with two members of TriCanes, Katie Zgorski and Shereen Khatibloo, to learn more about the trials, triumphs and daily routines of a triathlete.

Getting involved in the Triathlon Club was no accident for UM sophomore and decorated triathlete Katie Zgorski. At age 7, Zgorski began competing as a swimmer in her home state of Maryland. In high school, she picked up both track and field and cross country, which allowed her to continue growing as an endurance athlete. When she got to UM, Zgorski realized that competing in triathlons was a natural next step. “I couldn’t decide what my favorite sport was,” said Zgorski. “So, I just combined them.”

A standard triathlon consists of running, swimming and biking a set course over a certain number of miles. This could range from a fun run for kids to a full-blown Ironman event—a mega-triathlon comprised of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run. Perhaps the most common types of triathlons, in which the TriCanes typically compete, are Olympic...
and Sprint races. An Olympic-distance event includes a one-mile swim, 25-mile bike ride and 6.2-mile run, while the shorter Sprint triathlon consists of a half-mile swim, 12-mile bike and 3.1-mile run.

Whatever distance, athletes spend hours each week training for these competitions and paying close attention to their diets. For Zgorski, a typical weekday begins at 6:30 a.m. with a quick banana for breakfast and a bike ride with her teammates around Key Biscayne. The TriCanes generally bike two to three times per week, while running and swimming once per week.

On top of that, individuals often work out together for added strength training. Zgorski frequents “TRX” and “Total Body Conditioning” classes at the Patti and Allan Herbert Wellness Center on UM’s campus.

Even though these races can be time consuming, Zgorski makes sure that she stays on top of her homework and classes throughout the season. Time management skills become especially important when a race day draws closer, as the TriCanes increase their training intensity and engage in “Brick” workouts to prepare their bodies for the big day. These workouts combine two to three elements of the race, such as a long swim followed by a run. Finally, when the week of a race arrives, the athletes taper down their workouts and bring up their carb intake. Zgorski, who is currently gearing up to run the Miami Man Race in November, describes a typical race day:

**Mid-afternoon, Day Before Race:** Race day begins a day before the gun goes off. Zgorski reports to the pre-race expo to register and set up her transition zone, which is the designated station where athletes stage their bikes and begin each phase of the race.

**6 p.m., Night Before Race:** The whole team meets for a pasta dinner. The athletes load up on carbohydrates to ensure that they have enough energy to get them through the race the following day. They also use this time to discuss strategy for the race and to build each other’s confidence.

**8 p.m., Night Before Race:** Lights out. A good night’s sleep is essential for a high-quality performance, especially since most triathlons begin early in the morning.

**3:30 a.m., Race Day:** Alarms go off. Zgorski and the team dress quickly, eat an energy-rich breakfast and carpool to race site.

**5 a.m., Race Day:** Athletes arrive at the race two hours before it begins and return to their individual transition zones, where they add last-minute supplies such as towels, food, water and running shoes. “Anything you need to get you through a race,” said Zgorski, “goes in that transition zone.”

**6 a.m., Race Day:** Transition zones close.

**7 a.m., Race Day:** Gunshots go off; the race begins in waves, following a swim-bike-run format. For Zgorski, a typical Olympic triathlon takes about 2.5 hours to complete.

**One mile in:** After the swim, Zgorski drinks a cup of Gatorade for a little extra energy before beginning the bike section.