

Fish Out Of Water

You're a 21-year-old college student with four days to kill in France. You could (a) drink Champagne on the Champs-Élysées, (b) soak up the sun on the Riviera, or (c) ride your bicycle 400 miles through unfamiliar countryside to raise money for diabetes research.

University of Florida swimmer Kevin Nead—in France at the Institut Pasteur de Lille last year as part of the university's HHMI-funded Science for Life program—chose the third option and raised nearly \$4,000 for the American Diabetes Association.

From his broad shoulders and apparent lack of body fat, it's clear Nead is no stranger to strenuous physical activity. As a member of his college swim team, he typically swims as much as 20,000 yards (over 11 miles) a day. So when his laboratory in Lille closed for a week last August, he decided to do something different.

"Originally, I got on a bike when I realized I couldn't just go to a swimming pool whenever I wanted, like I can here," says the soft-spoken Nead as he sits in the lobby of the University of Florida's swimming and diving complex.

Soon Nead was cycling hundreds of miles a week. He had already started

mapping out a cycling vacation when he stumbled on an article about cycling fundraisers. That night he brainstormed the entire project.

Nead drafted letters to family, friends, teammates, and others he had met during a college career that included athletic and academic All-America honors as well as numerous awards for community service and scholarship. He steered anyone interested to a blog he created on the Website of a Gainesville, Florida, newspaper.

By the time he climbed on his bike on August 1, Nead had thousands of dollars in commitments. Four days and 471 miles later, he arrived in Nantes, on the Atlantic coast, and boarded a train back to Lille, tired but triumphant.

The next week, it was back to work looking for genetic markers for diabetes.

Though the cycling bug had bit, Nead wasn't ready to hang up his customized orange and blue body suit just yet. When he returned to Florida in December, he dived back in the pool with his teammates, doubling his daily workouts to regain his form as quickly as possible.

At a team meeting before the spring season, each swimmer was asked to

write down the times he hoped to achieve. Instead, Nead set as his goal to make the finals of the Southeastern Conference Championships in the 200-yard and 400-yard individual medley, and the 200-yard backstroke.

"I was more interested in how many points I could score for the team," Nead says.

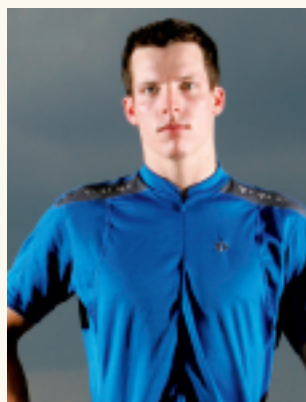
In the end, Nead achieved his goal, making a significant contribution to the university's second-place finish and recording personal bests in all three events.

Then, despite qualifying for the Olympic Team Trials in two events, he retired.

"I felt like ending my career with my team was how I wanted to go out," Nead says.

Although his collegiate swimming career has ended, Nead, who extended his senior year to take an extra class, has started a new research project with University of Florida diabetes researcher Mark Atkinson and has begun applying to M.D./Ph.D. programs around the country.

And now that he's mastered swimming *and* cycling, he thinks he'll try triathlons. —Joe Kays



While in France on a research fellowship, two-time Academic All-American swimmer Kevin Nead switched gears for a long-distance bike race to raise money for diabetes research.