

The Challenge of the Ironman Triathlon

By Matthew Kresser

They told me that I would never forget my first Bud Light Ironman World Triathlon Championship in Kona on October 10 and they were so right. I realized the truth of their statement at mile three of the marathon.

After swimming 2 1/2-miles and biking 112 miles in the howling winds and searing hundred degree heat of Kona, my entire existence began to collapse in upon me at mile three in the final marathon segment of what is labeled the world's most grueling endurance event, the Ironman Triathlon.

I had hit what seemed to be an insurmountable wall of pain, frustration, and total depletion. My intestinal tract was clinched into a knotted constriction. My head felt as if it would blow to pieces like an egg in a microwave and every muscle in my body was screaming to be rushed directly to the massage tent.

Then, as I staggered down Alii Drive, he appeared like an angel in dis-



Matt Kresser crosses the finish line of the Ironman Triathlon. He was 11th finisher from Hawaii.

guise. A roadside spectator, seeing that I was wounded, handed me a frosty cold beer from his cooler.

As a last resort, I nursed that beer, hoping that it would help. In minutes, my stomach relaxed, my head deflated and I was on my way again out towards Keahole Airport and the marathon turnaround.

Sounds a bit crazy, doesn't it? To most, the Ironman seems psychotic, but to those who do it, it is more than an

athletic event.

It becomes a journey into the depths of one's unknown: your potential, your strengths and weaknesses, and everything else that combines to form a totally unique and infinitely valuable self.

This year's Ironman hosted close to 1,500 competitors from over 40 countries, all of whom had to qualify at selected races held worldwide during the year.

As with any other race, the key to handling the Ironman is preparation. Standard weekly mileages average 10 miles swimming, 300 miles biking and 60-80 miles running. Acclimatization to the Big Isle's heat factor is another area of focus for non-local triathletes. And probably, the most demanding aspect of the Ironman is mental fortitude. Having one's mind right can mean the difference between exuberance and agony.

Being a member of the OCC contributed greatly to my 10 hour, 55 minute finishing time. The Club is a perfect place for an aspiring triathlete.

Many thanks to Peter Bourne, another Club Ironman, and Jill Cheever of the Bikeway, for their support and also many thanks to everyone at the Club for all their encouragement. I can hardly wait for next year! ☺

