

New Orleans is good for McMahon and Badmann

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Canadian ITU and XTERRA racer Brent McMahon ran down the 2007 Ironman World Champion Chris McCormack to win the inaugural Ochsner Ironman 70.3 New Orleans. In the women's race, Swiss Miss Natascha Badmann showed that she is finally back after an 18-month battle with severe, career-threatening injuries stemming from a bike crash at the 2007 Ironman World Championships.

McMahon overcame a one-minute deficit off the bike to run down 2007 Ironman World Champion Chris McCormack – 1:17:14 to 1:21:00 – and hit the tape in famed Jackson Square in 3:52:08 for a 2 minute, 25 second margin of victory. Former multiple U.S. Armed Forces champion and cyclist extraordinaire Timothy O'Donnell uncharacteristically lost 5 minutes on the bike, then unleashed the day's fastest 1:15:45 run to take third, just 25 seconds back of McCormack. Ironman distance and Ironman Hawaii record holder Luc Van Lierde, now 40, cruised to a 4th place finish another 2 minutes 5 seconds back.

For McMahon, the win was another clue that current ITU racers have just the right firepower to tackle the 70.3 distance and enjoy an advantage on those who have fully committed to the Ironman distance. The win was also a shot of career encouragement after the Canadian Olympic officials chose Colin Jenkins over the higher-ranked McMahon so Jenkins could work team tactics in Beijing in support of team leader Simon Whitfield.

In the women's race, Badmann put the hurt to a high quality women's field with a vintage, blazing fast 2:15:52 bike split, then hung on to win by 53 seconds over Catriona Morrison with a 4:17:50 finish that overshadowed all other performances at a great new Ironman 70.3 race venue in the Big Easy.

What Badmann's performance meant

Badmann is a triathlete with absolutely nothing to prove. She has 6 Ironman Hawaii wins and two runner-up finishes, three Powerman Zofingen titles, and a multitude of Ironman and Ironman 70.3 wins. Her unquenchable positive spirit and radiant smile inspires fans all over the globe. And when she is down and out, such as her stomach troubles in 2006 that left her throwing up, walking, and finally gathering enough energy to finish 10th at Ironman Hawaii in 2006, she finished heads up, smiling to all, no excuses - like a champion. And when she was still so badly hurt in that bike crash in 2007 that she could barely sling a leg over her bike and swim with painfully weak arms, she still made the starting line for Ironman Hawaii's 30th anniversary race.

That alone would have sufficed as a career valedictory in courage. And now, with her 43rd birthday looming, and newcomer Chrissie Wellington tossing off sub-9 hour Ironmans like Kobe Bryant knocking down free throws, many observers sighed and said it was too bad that Badmann's apparent last shot to take on the new women's Ironman phenomenon head-on had been wasted two years ago in that crash on the Queen K.



But what Badmann did Sunday at the inaugural Ironman 70.3 race in New Orleans put a hold on those career wrapup tributes.

So what if she dreams things impossible for a woman a year older than Dara Torres was at Beijing - who only had to push back her athletic prime 20 years for 50 meters in the pool to win an Olympic silver medal at age 41. Even with 70.3 or 140.6 miles to go, Natascha Badmann remains a very good bet against any other Ironman woman on the planet.

With a shoulder, rib and joint tendons still scrambled after two lengthy operations and a hardware store drawer-full of metal holding her together, here is what Natascha Badmann did Sunday:

She whipped the runner-up, two-time ITU Duathlon World Championship medalist Catriona Morrison, by eight minutes on the bike and by 53 seconds overall.

She whipped the defending Ironman 70.3 World Champion Joanna Zeiger, by contrast a mere baby at age 38, by 4 minutes 35 seconds.

She left old rival and multiple Ironman distance winner Nina Kraft, now 41, behind by 5 minutes 27 seconds.

She rode five minutes faster than 2008 Ironman Hawaii 5th place finisher and killer cyclist Linsey Corbin.

Her 2:15:52 bike leg was between 8 and 16 minutes faster than the rest of the top 14 women finishers. That same bike leg was within 13 minutes of the men's fastest cyclist, and within 9 minutes of overall men's winner Brent McMahon.

She also soundly beat current Ironman stars Kate Major and 11-time Ironman champion Lisa Bentley by 11 minutes, and topped 5-time Ironman winner Heather Gollnick by 15 minutes.

Looking forward to the Impossible Dream, a rendezvous clash with Chrissie Wellington at Kona just 7 weeks shy of her 43rd birthday, Badmann still has work to do. Her swim at New Orleans was still 30:55, four minutes down to Zeiger. And it was 91 seconds slower than swim-challenged Catriona Morrison. Perhaps the havoc wreaked on her shoulders and arms in the accident won't allow her to return to her best form. Badmann's 1:27:50 run was still 5 minutes slower than top runner Morrison's mark – albeit faster than World Champion Zeiger. Perhaps the damage from the crash won't let Badmann run fast enough to stay in Wellington's area code.

But given Badmann's rate of improvement since last September, when she was first able to ride and swim again, it is tempting to dream along with the Swiss Miss that she would give Chrissie the gift of a truly great duel all the way to Alii Drive.

Ochsner Ironman 70.3 New Orleans

April 5, 2009 / New Orleans, LA
1.2m swim / 56m bike / 13.1m run

Top 10 men

1. Brent McMahon (CAN) 3:52:08
2. Chris McCormack (AUS) 3:54:33
3. Tim O'Donnell (USA) 3:55:08
4. Luc Van Lierde (BEL) 3:57:18
5. Ben Hoffman (USA) 3:57:52
6. Brandon Marsh (USA) 4:00:13
7. Brian Fleischmann (USA) 4:00:55
8. Dennis Devriendt (BEL) 4:03:03
9. Justin Park (USA) 4:03:41
10. Herve Faure (FRA) 4:04:13

Top 10 women

1. Natascha Badmann (SWI) 4:17:50
2. Catriona Morrison (GBR) 4:18:43
3. Joanna Zeiger (USA) 4:22:25
4. Caitlin Snow (USA) 4:22:51
5. Nina Kraft (GER) 4:23:17
6. Magali Tisseyre (CAN) 4:24:40
7. Linsey Corbin (USA) 4:26:28
8. Kate Major (AUS) 4:28:02
9. Lisa Bentley (CAN) 4:28:57
10. Jessica Myers (USA) 4:31:34