



In the end, Tobin's on top again

Triathlon, (Santa Cruz Sentinel)

9.25.06

Finish-line confusion gets straightened out; Duff wins men's race

By RYAN PHILLIPS

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Katrin Tobin was enjoying a perfect weekend. On Saturday, the Santa Cruz triathlete skipped her usual day-before-a-triathlon preparation routine to watch her daughter Kira's soccer match. She closed a deal in her work as a real estate agent.

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Complete results, PAGES B5-6

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She usually doesn't sleep much the day before a race, but Tobin slept soundly Saturday night.

Then on Sunday, Tobin won the women's race at the 24th Sentinel Triathlon, joining overall winner James Duff of Oakland atop the podium. Or so she thought.

Tobin's time of 2 hours, 12.17 seconds was the top women's time posted, but Allison Zamanian of Orinda (2:13.41), not Tobin, was announced as the winner.

After consulting with race officials, Tobin found out she was docked a two-minute penalty for drafting on the bike course. Convinced that couldn't be the case, Tobin appealed and showed her bike to a race official. Once they saw the number on the bike, Tobin was told they wrote down the wrong number and penalized the wrong person. Tobin, in fact, was the champion again, for the third time in her career.

"This is why, when I cross the finish line and people



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

TOP: A big wave intercepts the first triathletes to hit the water on Sunday. **ABOVE:** Katrin Tobin heads out of the transition area, starting her run on the way to her third victory in the event.

FIRST PERSON

This hurts:
Second time
isn't any easier

I want names.

Then I want a phone number and an e-mail address. Where can I file my complaint?

I want to know who, exactly, said it is easier the second time around?

I've checked my Bartlett's Book of Quotes, even Googled the phrase in the hopes of tracing those words back to a real person. But it's been no use. That person has done a good job of putting distance between him or her and that saying —

with good reason. It doesn't help that I'm so worn down I can only make it through three entries before nodding off.

Either way, after Sunday, I can tell you with certainty that it isn't easier the second time around. At least not when it comes to the Sentinel Triathlon.

It felt like it should be when I signed



JULIE

JAG

Sentinel triathlete

Triathlon

Continued from Page B1

ask me, 'Did you win?' I say I don't know," Tobin said. "I don't even try to figure it out."

Tobin wasn't the only one dealing with some confusion at the race. Some athletes in the first wave of men were misdirected and came in to the transition area the wrong way after the bike portion. All of the 857 individuals and teams that finished had to run an extra half-mile after a volunteer misjudged the turnaround point.

The men's winner Duff, of Oakland, was in the second wave and avoided most of the chaos. Unlike Tobin, Duff didn't sleep much the night before the race — he was in San Francisco at a friend's wedding, dancing with his girlfriend until late in the night, and said he slept only about four hours.

A recent law school graduate at UC Berkeley, Duff finished in 1:57.49, one of three Cal triathlon team members to finish in the overall top five. John Dahlz, the 2005 Sentinel champ, was fifth (2:04.23) and Justin Laue (2:00.47) was third.

Duff said he was motivated to catch his two teammates, who were in the first leg and started before him.

"I wanted to race head-to-head with them," Duff said. "But it was fun playing catch-up."

A former professional triathlete, Duff said he's just getting back into the sport after getting hit by a car in a cycling race in 2003. After taking some time off to heal and finish law school, Duff said he's happy to be back competing.

"I'm hoping to race a lot," he said.

Tobin isn't sure how much she'll be racing. She talked about taking a year off from competing, but also said she would love to win the Sentinel next year when she'll be 45.

"I'm struggling with the fact that I'm getting slower. How long do I want to keep grinding and getting slower?" Then she remembered her run and was upbeat. "I wasn't slower today."

Tobin said it's not just that she thinks she's slowing down — it's that winning triathlons isn't a top priority in her life. Spending time with her family is.

"That's more important than any of my racing," Tobin said. "I enjoy that I can do well in racing and still be a good mom. I feel like that's the priority."

However, Tobin is finding she can spend quality time with her kids while she's on the course. Kira, 14, and younger daughter Niki, 11, both competed with their mom at the Mermaid Triathlon last weekend.

"It was great to hear them say, 'We want to do

it, mom,'" Tobin said.

And if this was Tobin's last Sentinel, she said it worked out perfectly. She felt unbeatable and raced her best, and none of the confusion at the finish line could take that away.

"This feels like icing on the cake," Tobin said. "It doesn't feel like the main focus or goal. To do well is a treat. But it's not like it's my main mission in life."

■ Martin Spierings was the top male finisher from Santa Cruz. Spierings, who won the Sandman Triathlon in August, moved to Santa Cruz from Melbourne, Australia, in February. Spierings, who works in Scotts Valley, said he's made some friends on the Santa Cruz Triathlon Club, and now that he's settled, is loving his new home.

"It's nice to jump out of bed, roll down the road and do a race," Spierings said. "There's not many places in the world where you can do that."

■ Including Tobin, four Santa Cruz women were age-group winners: Erin Hunter (ages 20-24 group), Bronwen Coleman (25-29), and Marguerite Meyer (45-49). Santa Cruz's Dave Reid, the 2004 Sentinel champ, finished 54th overall. Laura Home, of Santa Cruz, who will face Tobin in the Xterra National Championships next weekend, didn't compete Sunday.

■ A group of around 30 current and former UC Santa Cruz swim team members competed. Justin Smith of Jackson, a 2004 UCSC grad, said the group gathers each year in remembrance of former swim team member Ian Carney. Carney died in a climbing accident in 2004.

"Everyone kind of does it for him," Smith said. "It's a very sentimental race."

Smith finished seventh overall with a time of 2:05.33.

■ Santa Cruz's Paul Stephens, 63, competed in his 24th Sentinel, and is believed to be the only athlete to compete in all 24.

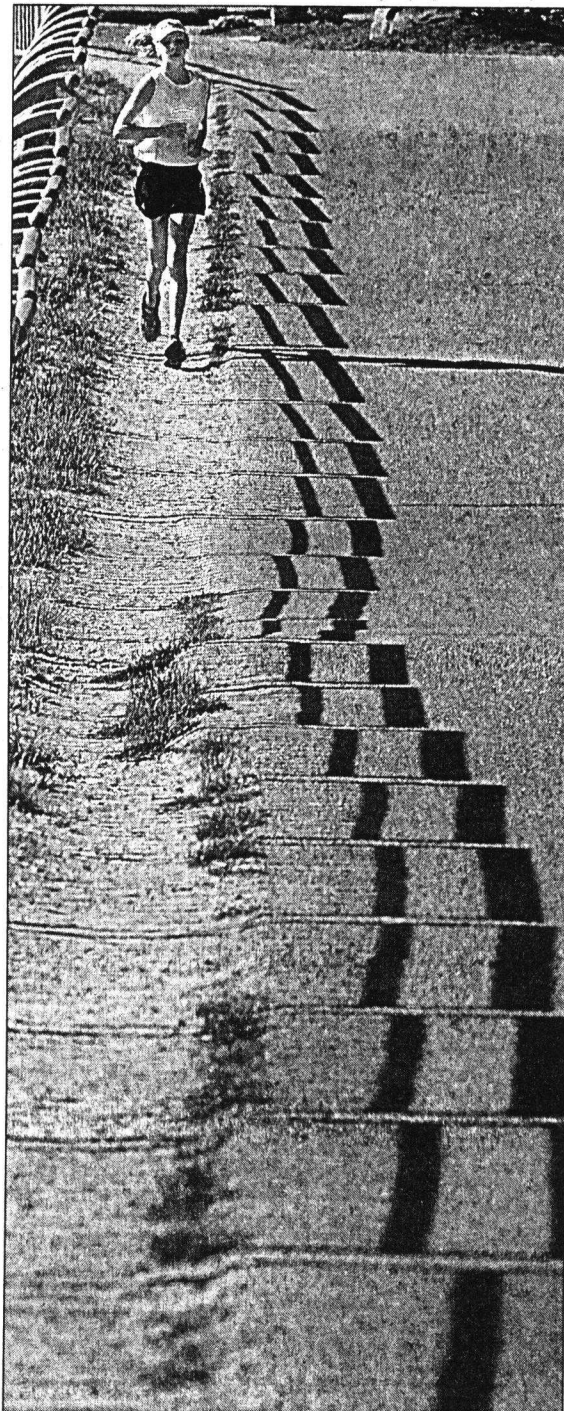
"Once I got the streak going, I wanted to keep it going," Stephens said.

Stephens finished in 3:25.44, about an hour slower than his fastest times when he was "a kid" as he put it, in his late 40s.

When asked what's changed the most about the race, Stephens mentioned the lengthening of the bike course in 2002 stuck out most to him. He was wondering if the run course was lengthened as well this year.

"Today the run was longer," Stephens said. "What's up with that?"

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

The shadow of the West Cliff Drive railing leads the way to the finish line for a Sentinel Triathlon runner on Sunday.

Jag

Continued from Page B1

up, and again as I stood on Main Beach at 7:45 a.m., watching the first heat of swimmers prepare to dive into some increasingly menacing shore break for their 1-mile swim around the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf. It all looked and felt familiar. I wasn't even hyperventilating as the announcer ticked down my turn to dive in.

The swim would be followed by at 26.2-mile bike to Davenport and back, just like last year. And then there was supposed to be a 6.2-mile run along West Cliff Drive, which perplexingly turned into a 6.7-mile run this year. I convinced my body to drag me across all of it, eventually finding the finish line 2 hours, 55 minutes and 12 seconds after I started, good for 22nd in my age group.

After comparing my time with last year, it

looks like I took it easy. Yet, the race felt exponentially tougher. Why? I have a few ideas.

For one, last year the swim was my Everest. After getting out alive (and not even in last place) I felt like I more or less floated through the rest of the course. This time, I expected to survive. Maybe that's why I seemed to be slogging through the water like a salmon swimming upstream.

Then there was the run. No iPods allowed + an additional half mile = torture. Aside from the partial chorus of the hip-hop song "Lean With It" — which I somehow picked up along the course — looping through my head for the 40th time, all I had to think about was how far I still had to go. Well, that and how much I just wanted to join the guy up ahead, who was sitting on a bench under an umbrella and drinking something chilled.

Perhaps it felt tougher because my entourage was smaller. Last year I talked a small town's worth of people into cheering for me. This year

my pleas weren't so convincing. (Still, thanks to all the people I knew and didn't know who offered encouragement out there).

More than likely, though, I made the second time harder. I just wasn't as committed. Without fear driving me, I tended not to push so hard. I didn't seek out any training partners, I tinkered with my training schedule, and when I went on vacation last week, I really went on vacation (but looking back, the caramel rolls were worth it).

I took it for granted I would finish, and I did. But the overwhelming sensation that came over me when I got there was relief, with a small side of pride. I couldn't help but wonder, "Does this ever get any easier?"

There's only one way to find out.

I'm not making any promises, but does anyone know who said, "The third time's the charm?"

How did your race go? Contact Julie Jag at
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