

Triathlon (Santa Cruz)
Sentinel

Kearns runs to record win

10-7-91

1:44:47



No. 1 pro pulls away in final leg

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SANTA CRUZ — For the professional triathlete, the men and women who attempt to make their living through the sport, winning is everything.

"Second, third or fourth, doesn't mean anything," says Brad Kearns, who Sunday crossed the finish line first in the Santa Cruz Sentinel Triathlon.

Sunday's triathlon was without a doubt the most competitive in the event's nine-year history as three

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pros were virtually tied after the second of three legs, a 23-mile bicycle jaunt from the corner of West Cliff Drive and Bay Street to Davenport and back.

Kearns, defending champion Harold Robinson of Santa Rosa and Garrett McCarthy of Colorado led the way after the second leg and headed out for the final stage, a 6.2-mile run, within 8 seconds of each other.

Once on the road, Kearns was able to pull away from the other two, but not by much, for the win in his first appearance at the Sentinel Triathlon.

As Kearns says, "Racing for the rent is hard, and that's what most of us do."

For winning Sunday, in a course-record time of 1 hour, 44 minutes, 47 seconds, Kearns collects \$1,000 in prize money, good for a couple of month's rent anyway. Perhaps more importantly to him, the victory adds fuel to present sponsors that could translate into added endorsement money — the real lifeblood of pro triathletes.

Sue Latshaw, 30, of Oakland won the women's race and \$1,000 in a

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Brad Kearns, the top-ranked triathlete in the country, punched his way to victory in the 9th Sentinel Triathlon.

9th Sentinel Triathlon



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Defending champ Harold Robinson took 2nd place.

Race winner

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time of 1:55.6. Terry Schneider-Egger, 29, of Watsonville was top local woman, third overall. The top local finisher among men was Dan Perry of Santa Cruz in a time of 1:54.49.

Kearns, currently the top-ranked triathlete in the nation on the U.S. Professional Athlete's Commission poll for Olympic-distance events, has been a pillar of strength over the last two seasons — especially during the run portion of events.

After sitting just behind the lead group after the 1-mile swim around the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf, Kearns was able to catch Robinson and McCarthy by the time the bike leg was headed back from Davenport and the three hit the transition area at the Dream Inn at the same time.

It was then that Kearns, who lives in Cool, Calif., near Auburn, felt he could win — on the run that winds out along West Cliff Drive and then back to the Dream Inn.

"There's only been one guy to outrun me in the last two years," said Kearns, referring to Australian Greg Welch at the Chicago Bud Light event in early July. "This year I'm on fire."

Neither second-place finisher Robinson, who set the previous

course record of 1:45.09 a year ago, nor two-time Santa Cruz champ McCarthy could argue that point. They both wilted under Kearns' pressure over the final leg.

"I would have had a better chance if I didn't have trouble coming out of the transition area (after the bike leg)," said Robinson. "My feet were so cold and numb they felt like pillows. I had a hard time getting into my running shoes. But Brad is a strong runner. Normally I can stay with him, but I couldn't get contact."

McCarthy set the pace early, emerging from the murky, 59-degree Monterey Bay waters first after the wharf swim with a 15-second lead. Robinson was fifth out of the water, followed shortly by Kearns.

"I was happy to see Harold in the transition area after the swim," said Kearns, who knew then that he wasn't too far behind to catch up.

Once on his bike, Kearns caught Robinson at about the 6-mile mark and then those two reached McCarthy after about 15 miles.

"I knew when we were riding together that it would be hard to get a lead," said Kearns. "I would try to push but couldn't get very far."

All three of the frontrunners knew it would come down to the run, ensuring an exciting finish to this test of endurance.

Perhaps because both Robinson and McCarthy suffered from what McCarthy called "frozen feet," after the bike, Kearns was able to run to victory, despite taking a wrong turn around the lighthouse instead of going in front of it.

In fact, both Kearns and Robinson took the long way around the lighthouse, which left McCarthy wondering if the course hadn't been altered without his knowledge.

"I kind of slowed down a little to see what was going on," said McCarthy. "I didn't know if they changed the course, so I just jumped in behind (Kearns and Robinson)."

From there, Kearns had control and took the title, one of many for the 26-year-old. Kearns is the reigning Bud Light Triathlon Series champion and now adds the Sentinel title to his impressive resume.

McCarthy looked the part of a winner until he reached halfway point of the bike leg. "But after we went through Davenport my bubble burst," said McCarthy, who

won the race in 1988 and '89. "They caught up with me so fast, I just had to hang on. It was like they instantly caught up with me and I just said 'Oh, hell.'"

A soldout field of 1,100 participants filled the field in what is becoming a popular stop on the triathlon tour. Race officials said they could have easily expanded the field to 1,500, but the city of Santa Cruz limits it to 1,100.

In addition to the men's and women's field, a team competition was also held. Three teammates, one for each leg, worked together. The team of Mike Bennett of Santa Cruz (swim), Michael Egger of Watsonville (bike) and Steve Rigor of Watsonville (run) took the team title in a course-record time of 1:43.48.

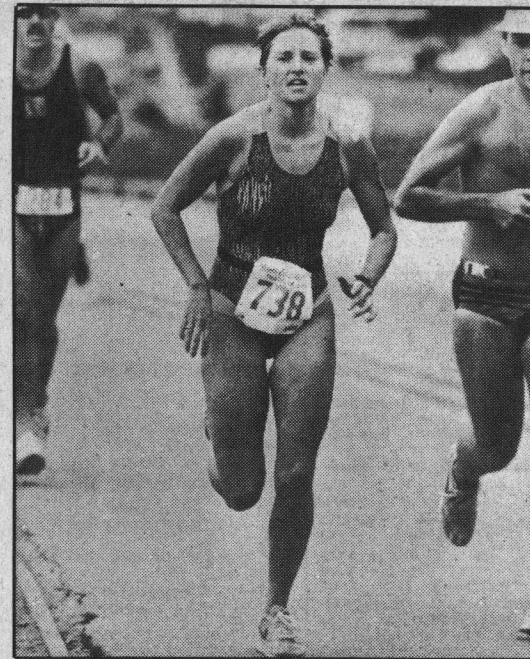
But Sunday belonged to Kearns. In fact, most every triathlon Kearns enters these days is his. The man who believes winning is the only way to survive professionally in the sport backs it up by doing just that.

"In order to really be good, you have to devote all your time to it," Kearns said. "I can't have a job if I'm going to be a winner."

If he keeps on winning like he did Sunday, he won't need a job.



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos



Sights and sites

A woman brushes her hair, far left, before mounting her bicycle in the transition area following the swimming portion of the Triathlon; spectators wait for their loved ones at water's exit, above, at Cowell Beach; and, during the running phase, left, a woman tries to keep her form in the race's final leg.