

# NIPPING AT THEIR HEELS

ATHLETES PUSHED TO RUN PERSONAL BESTS TO WIN

Triathlon - (Santa Cruz Sentinel)

9.24.07



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

The first wave of women sprint toward the water as their heat gets under way on Main Beach at the Santa Cruz Sentinel Triathlon Sunday. **BELOW:** Kelly Couch cruises toward the finish line to win the women's race. **BOTTOM:** John Dahlz of San Francisco bikes toward his overall win.

## Couch keeps tabs on Ironman champ

### Dahlz claims a second title

By RYAN MOSES  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Kelly Couch knew what she needed to do as soon as she splashed into the water at the start of the 25th annual Santa Cruz Sentinel Triathlon on Sunday:

Stay on Joanna Lawn's heels.

Lawn, from Auckland, New Zealand, has won the last five Ironman-New Zealands, and was the pre-race favorite. But Couch thought if she could just keep up with her through the 1.5-kilometer swim and 40k bike, she might be able to catch Lawn in the 10k run.

**'I felt her hitting my feet and thought, "Why do you have to touch? We have the whole ocean out here." But, that's just racing.'**

JOANNA LAWN OF  
WOMEN'S WINNER  
KELLY COUCH

The strategy worked perfectly, as Couch passed Lawn as they raced down West Cliff Drive to win by 30 seconds. Her time of 2 hours, 3 minutes and 41 seconds placed her eighth overall behind men's winner John Dahlz [1:54:18] of South San Francisco.

"It was good just to stay with Joanna on the swim," said Couch who may have taken the "stay on her heels" tactic a bit too literally. "I kept tapping her feet because I didn't want to lose her. I think it annoyed her a bit."

Lawn could tell Couch was coming after her from the beginning.

"She had planned that she wanted to stay with me. I was here to train but others were here for maybe a different reason," said Lawn, who finished in 2:04:11. "I felt her hitting my feet and thought, 'Why do you have to touch? We have the whole ocean out here.' But that's just racing."

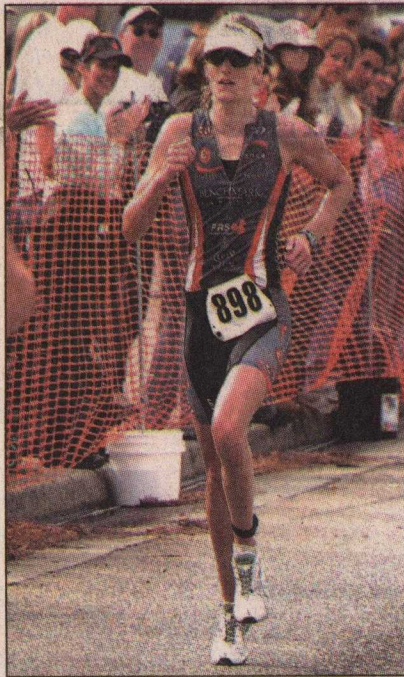
Lawn used the Sentinel as preparation for Ironman World Championships in Hawaii in three weeks, an event that includes a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike and 26.2-mile run. Though the Olympic triathlon isn't her best distance, she said Santa Cruz's conditions are perfect for getting ready for Kona.

"Except for the cold," she said. "My feet were numb

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■ Check out the complete results of all 835 finishers and more photos of the Sentinel Triathlon. **PAGES B5-B6**



### Top finishers

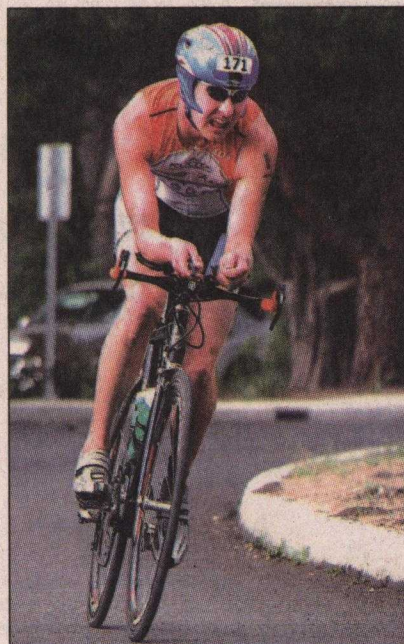
**OLYMPIC DISTANCE: 1.5K SWIM, 40K BIKE, 10K RUN**

■ Men's winner: John Dahlz, South San Francisco, 1:54:18

■ Women's winner: Kelly Couch, San Mateo, 2:03:41

■ Top local men's finisher (6th overall): Martin Spierings, Santa Cruz, 2:03:19

■ Top local women's finisher (3rd in women's, 31st overall): Katrin Tobin, Santa Cruz, 2:11:39



## Just one foe on mind of '86 champ Harper

By I.A. STEWART  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

SANTA CRUZ — Dean Harper's proven all he needs to prove in the Santa Cruz Sentinel Triathlon over the years. The 1986 champ, now 54, is known and respected by other contestants. But during the Sentinel's 25th anniversary race Sunday, there was still one person he needed to beat: his son.

"I told him about the bell curve," Harper said. "He's on the way up, and I'm coming down."

Harper succeeded, finishing 19th overall and first in his age group with an overall time of 2 hours, 7 minutes and 29 seconds. Son Greg Harper, 15, was second out of the water and finished in 2:11:58, good for 34th overall and first in his age group.

"Two weeks ago he killed me in a sprint," the elder Harper said. "I questioned if he could take me in an Olympic distance."

Greg Harper, a swimmer and cross country runner at his high school in Walnut Creek, is the faster Harper in the water and running. But Dean Harper has still got it on the bike.

"If I do some really good training it would be really close," Greg Harper said. "But I don't do any cycling, really."

And father knows his days of beating son are dwindling.

"If he trained for four weeks, he'd kill me, no question," Dean Harper said. "These young guys just get in phenomenal shape so quickly."

**IF AT FIRST YOU DON'T SUCCEED, TRY, TRY AGAIN:** Ken Hale doesn't train for any of the triathlons he runs.

See HARPER on PAGE B6

### On the Net

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A competitor looks back to shore after being battered by a large wave upon entering the surf.

# Sentinel

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getting out of the water.”

While Lawn is a veteran professional athlete, Couch is new to the job. The 29-year-old San Mateo resident took this year off from her job as a high school history teacher to train and race.

“The Sentinel was actually my second triathlon ever in 2004,” said Couch. “I’m a full-time athlete now, so that’s pretty cool.”

It took two professionals to dethrone Santa Cruz resident and three-time Sentinel winner Katrin Tobin, who was the top women’s local finisher in third place with a time of 2:11.29. Tobin, 45, won in 2003, 2005 and 2006.

“I can’t keep the door closed forever. When I won two years ago, I left a huge crack but nobody came through. Last year I left a small crack. This year I just decided I wanted to have a great race and I did. No excuses,” Tobin said.

Dahlz knows what it’s like to have to competition catch up. After winning the Sentinel in 2005, he finished fifth last year and was determined not to let that happen again.

He improved his personal best Sentinel time by nearly a minute on Sunday, and beat second-place finisher Gregory Ahlback [1:57.40] with three minutes to spare. Alan Archard was third at 2:01:09.

“A win is always really good, but I’m happy to redeem myself after last year,” he said.

Dahlz was the third swimmer out of the water, and took over the race with the top bike and run times of the day.

“I grew up a swimmer, and tried to become a better biker and runner. You can’t really win races in the swim, but you can lose it,” he said.

Dahlz is already looking over his shoulder at a guy who could prove that theory wrong. Greg Harper, the 15-year-old son of 1986 Sentinel Triathlon champion Dean Harper, was second out of the water, finishing the swim course around the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf in 18:23. He finished the race in 02:11:58 for 29th place in the

men’s division.

“He’s going to be something special,” said Dahlz. “I’m on borrowed time.”

Martin Spierings finished sixth overall with a time of 2:03:19 as the top local finisher. Other Santa Cruz County finishers included the women’s 20-24 age division winner, Erin Hunter of Santa Cruz [2:14:40].

The 103 relay teams entered into the race this year were a record for the Sentinel. Team Bay Area All-Stars, a coed group, took first in the division and third overall [2:00:58].

Other division winners included: Robyn Shaffer [women’s 17-19, 2:26:15], Jocelyn Wong [women’s 25-29, 2:24:59], Amanda Erwin [women’s 35-39, 2:14:45], Shari Kain [women’s 40-44, 2:21:26], Lura Damiano [women’s 50-54, 2:30:44], John Madden [men’s 30-34, 2:02:13], Todd Hinders [men’s 35-39, 2:04:18], Paul Paradis [men’s 40-44, 2:10:26], Ariel Parrish [Athena division, 2:43.39] and Steven Chavez [Clydesdale division, 2:08.02].

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