

THE GRIP 6

STORIES & COMPILATION BY BOB BABBITT

PHOTO BY DAVE EPPERSON

It's funny how things turn out. Throughout the 1980's, to win the Ironman World Championship, you had to dethrone the Lord of the Lava, the one and only Dave Scott. After Mark Allen finally defeated his long-time rival in 1989 in the classic IronWar battle, he came back to win five more titles, but each time the person who finished in second place was different. In 1990 it was two-time Ironman World Champion Scott Tinley, in 1991 it was Aussie Greg Welch, in 1992 it was Cristian Bustos from Chile, in 1993 it was Pauli Kiuru of Finland and in 1995, in Allen's last ever race, it was Germany's Thomas Hellriegel. This feature, The Grip 6, showcases the articles I wrote after each of those races. I hope you enjoy this trip back in time!

IRONWAR / 1989

THE EQUALIZER / 1990

CHECKMATE / 1991

CON MUCHO BUSTOS / 1992

THE KILLING FIELDS / 1993

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE / 1995



AFTER EIGHT HOURS OF RACING, DAVE SCOTT (LEFT) AND MARK ALLEN (RIGHT) ENDED UP SEPARATED BY A MERE 58 SECONDS, 8:09:15 TO 8:10:13. IRONICALLY, DAVE SCOTT TOOK MORE THAN 18 MINUTES OFF OF HIS COURSE RECORD THAT DAY...AND LOST. PHOTO BY LOIS SCHWARTZ



IRONWAR

BY BOB BABBITT

MARK ALLEN CAME TO KONA SIX TIMES

trying to win the Ironman and to beat Dave Scott and each time he came up empty. On his seventh try, it finally happened.

I am sitting in the back seat of a Ford Mustang convertible on the Queen Kaahumanu Highway in the middle of the afternoon on Saturday October 14, 1989. There is an entourage of vehicles surrounding two runners, one dressed in yellow and one dressed in green. The two have been within a second or two of each other since 7 am that morning.

It all started in October of 1982 when the 1980 Ironman World Champion, Dave Scott, was once again racing the Ironman. He was returning from the bike turnaround in Hawi with only one other cyclist in the same zip code. The other cyclist's name? Mark Allen, a lifeguard from San Diego who had come to Kona hoping to finish in the top 100.

The event was being televised by ABC's Wide World of Sports for the fourth time and the first time since February of 1982, when Julie Moss collapsed within 50 feet of the finish and, after being passed while lying on the ground by Kathleen McCartney, Moss crawled towards the line with most of America watching in a moment that to this day was the most important in Ironman history. McCartney won, Moss took second, but that was just the

beginning of the story. When Moss was carried off on a stretcher and Wide World of Sports moved on to Cliff Diving or Barrel Jumping without telling the audience what the heck had happened to this young woman, the switchboard lit up at ABC like a Christmas tree. Who was this young red headed co-ed, viewers wanted to know? Was she alright? And what was it about this crazy event on the Big Island of Hawaii that would push someone to actually crawl to get to the finish?

The response was so amazing that ABC flew Julie Moss and Kathleen McCartney to New York a week after the show aired to go on with celebrated journalist Jim McKay to reassure the American public that the two were okay and this Ironman event was pretty darn special.

How special? Ironman added a second event in 1982 in October that sold out immediately and a former UCSD swimmer by the name of Mark Allen, who knew Julie Moss from lifeguarding and would actually one day marry her, decided that racing this Ironman thing would be a nice diversion from possibly going to medical school.

Eric Heiden, the Olympic speed skating legend and cyclist, was doing the commentary for ABC that day and mentioned that young man Mark Allen looked great on the bike, definitely smoother than Dave Scott.

On the screen for the viewers at home, they had Dave Scott's name under his image and Mark Allen's as well

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under his. One problem. They knew so little about this newcomer that his last name was spelled ‘Allan.’

As Mark Allen came side-by-side with Dave Scott, the first words he ever spoke to The Man, were, “Hey Dave... how about we go for a run after the bike ride?”

“I was trying to be funny,” remembers Allen. “Dave wasn’t amused and went ‘who are you?’ I told him my name, he told me that he had heard of me, then he switched gears and took off. So I did the same thing.”

One problem. Allen’s derailleur failed and he was left with one gear—the hardest—for the rest of the bike ride.

He ended up hitchhiking back to town and his race was over.

“Even though my goal was to finish the race in the top 100 and I didn’t finish at all, I still came away feeling like I could be good at this sport,” remembers Allen. “I was right with the best guy in triathlon when I had a mechanical problem. I was looking forward to coming back and giving it another go.”

Mark Allen made a name for himself around the world, eventually winning the Nice Triathlon ten times and earning the nickname ‘The Grip’ for his ability to simply push the pace to the point where no one could hang with him. He didn’t show pain and his facial expression never changed. Other athletes feared Mark Allen in other places, at other races. But when it came to the Ironman, that race belonged to Dave Scott.

“When a race was over six hours, that was when Dave really shined,” admits Allen. “He also thrived in the heat and wind of the Ironman. As soon as I got off the plane in Kona, I couldn’t believe that I would have to race in those

conditions in a few days. I dreaded and feared the place. Dave embraced it.”

Allen took third in 1983 and in 1984 had a 12 minute lead heading out on the marathon. “I thought the race was in the bag,” Allen says. “The run was my strength and I couldn’t imagine losing that big of a lead in 26 miles. I was high fiving people as I ran down Ali’i Drive. When I got to the base of Palani as we headed out of town, I knew I was going to win the Ironman. A few minutes later, at the top of Palani, as I headed out on the lava fields, I had absolutely nothing left and knew I was going to lose.”

Dave Scott stormed by Allen as he was walking about 13 miles into the run. “A 12 minute lead doesn’t last long when you’re walking the Ironman marathon,” Allen admits.

Allen ended up in fifth place as Dave Scott won his fourth Ironman World Championship title.

In 1986, Allen took second to Scott and in 1987, he took second again after building up a five minute lead with about eight miles left in the marathon. This time he was forced to a walk as Scott stormed by once again, using the ABC van to shield him from Allen as he went by. “I was in bad shape,” admits Scott. “I went around the van because I didn’t want to run up next to Mark and have him try to go with me. Those last four miles to the finish were horrible.”

While Dave Scott was celebrating his sixth Ironman title, Mark Allen was rushed off to the hospital with internal bleeding. He was beginning to wonder if this race was healthy for him or if it was time for him to listen to his friends and family and simply move on.

In 1988, Dave Scott pulled out the night before the race

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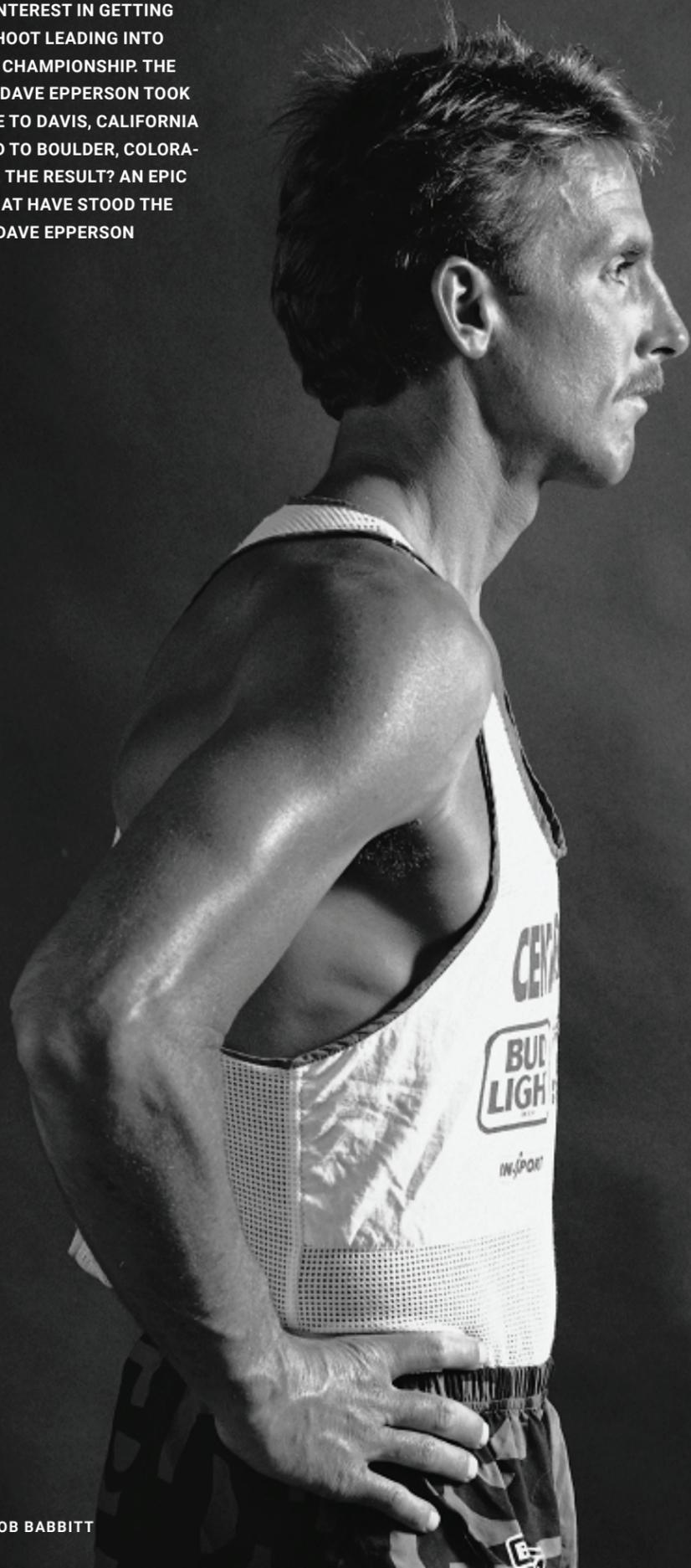
SHOWDOWN ON THE KONA COAST

MARK ALLEN vs DAVE SCOTT:
IRONMAN '89

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HISTORY WAS WAITING, BUT DAVE SCOTT AND MARK ALLEN SHOWED NO INTEREST IN GETTING TOGETHER FOR A PHOTO SHOOT LEADING INTO THE 1989 IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP. THE ANSWER? PHOTOGRAPHER DAVE EPPERSON TOOK HIS EQUIPMENT AND DROVE TO DAVIS, CALIFORNIA TO SHOOT DAVE SCOTT AND TO BOULDER, COLORADO TO SHOOT MARK ALLEN. THE RESULT? AN EPIC COLLECTION OF IMAGES THAT HAVE STOOD THE TEST OF TIME. PHOTOS BY DAVE EPPERSON



"THE RACE WENT EXACTLY HOW I PREDICTED IT WOULD GO," INSISTED DAVE SCOTT. "EXCEPT THE FINISH WAS WRONG." PHOTO BY LOIS SCHWARTZ



"There's no reason to out-bike Dave because he'll just run you down. It was really difficult to resign myself to the fact that I'd have to run with the guy for 18-26 miles. But I had tried everything else." -Mark Allen

and Allen thought this would finally be his year. Not quite.

He ended up with three flats and took fifth. In March of 1989, I reached out to both Dave and Mark to do a photo shoot with them leading into the 1989 Ironman. In my mind, this was the year that we were going to have a real race. I would shoot them back-to-back for my Showdown on the Kona Coast cover of Competitor Magazine.

One small problem. Dave was in Davis, California and Mark was in Boulder, Colorado and, while they both agreed to do the shoot, neither was going to travel to make that happen.

"Have Dave fly here to Boulder," said Mark Allen. "Happy to do it," said Dave Scott. "Have Mark fly here to Davis."

Neither would budge so I hired photographer Dave Epperson and had him bring a backdrop with him, shoot Dave in Davis and Mark in Boulder. Then we put them back-to-back on the cover of the magazine and created some fun shots inside.

Who knew it would work out so well? In the spring of 1989, Allen spent time training in New Zealand with Erin Baker and Scott Molina. Life was simple. Ride, run, swim, eat and sleep.

Then repeat. "I realized that if I was going to go back to Kona, I couldn't worry about beating Dave," Allen insists. "I wanted to finally have the best race I could over there. In the past, I had done well in races six hours and under. Ironman was a different beast and I had to put in those eight and nine

hour training days to be really ready for race day." He did and he was.

Allen and Scott were together out of the water and then, during the ride, Allen was close behind Scott, watching his every move. "I never saw Mark's face during the bike ride," admits Scott.

But he knew Allen was there. "There's no reason to out-bike Dave because he'll just run you down," says Allen. "It was really difficult at first to resign myself to the fact that I'd have to run with the guy for 18-26 miles. But I had tried everything else."

Off the bike, Dave Scott set a brutal pace. "We were side-by-side and the first eight miles through town were really fast," remembers Scott.

As they entered the meat of the marathon on the Queen Kaahumanu Highway, our entourage of vehicles surrounded the two and it was dead quiet, the only sound their running shoes hitting the pavement. It was like they were racing in this cocoon of silence. Why were we all so silent? Because we realized we were witnessing history, that the closer Scott and Allen came to downtown Kailua Kona still side-by-side, the more exciting and legendary this day was going to be for the sport of triathlon, for the Ironman and for Dave Scott and Mark Allen.

Allen was finally having the day he had been dreaming about and he did his best to quiet his mind as they approached mile 23.

"Dave had been stronger on the downhills throughout the run," remembers Allen, "but I was stronger on the uphills. As we approached the last long climb a little past mile 23, we came to an aid station. Dave reached out to



IN WHAT TURNED OUT TO BE THE BEST RACE IN IRONMAN HISTORY, MARK ALLEN AND DAVE SCOTT WERE NEVER SEPARATED BY MORE THAN A SECOND OR TWO FOR NEARLY EIGHT HOURS. PHOTO BY LOIS SCHWARTZ

IT WAS THE RACE THAT IRONMAN FANS HAD BEEN DREAMING ABOUT FOR MOST OF THE PAST DECADE. MARK ALLEN AND DAVE SCOTT WERE SURROUNDED BY AN ENTOURAGE AS THEY BATTLED DEEP INTO THE MARATHON. PHOTO BY LOIS SCHWARTZ



“I went through hell to finally win that race. But looking back on it now, the fact that it took me seven tries to finally win the Ironman and the fact that Dave and I had such an epic battle that day made that victory much more special than if I had won it earlier in my career.” -Mark Allen

get fluid and I did as well. Then something told me that it was time to go and I pulled my hand back without taking aid and sprinted as hard as I could.”

The move surprised Scott who was hoping to make his move at the top of Palani. “Mark looked back and in about 15 seconds he had put 20 yards on me,” remembers Scott. “My legs were pretty empty but I kept thinking ‘I’ve got to stay with him...I’ve got to stay with him.’”

He couldn’t.

Allen looked back up the hill at the bottom of Palani and at that point he saw the most beautiful sight ever: an empty road.

As Allen came down Ali’i Drive knowing that he was about the win the most important title in his career, the reality set in and the tears started to flow.

Dave Scott ran a 2:41:53 marathon and finished in 8:10:13, a time that was a full 18 minutes faster than

the six-time Ironman champion had ever gone in his life. Mark Allen had not only won the Ironman, he ran the fastest marathon ever with a 2:40:04, set a new course record of 8:09:15 and beat ‘The Man’ on the best day he ever had in Kona.

“I went through hell to finally win that race,” says Mark Allen. “But looking back on it now, the fact that it took me seven tries to finally win the Ironman and the fact that Dave and I had such an epic battle that day made that victory much more special than if I’d won it earlier in my career.”

Dave Scott hated losing that day, but he knew deep down that he had had a great race, but that Mark Allen had simply been better.

“The race went exactly how I predicted it would go,” Dave Scott said at the time. “Except the finish was wrong.” **THE GRIP6**



MARK ALLEN, ON HIS SEVENTH TRY, FINALLY WINS HIS FIRST IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE. EVEN BETTER? HE DID IT BY KNOCKING OFF HIS LONG-TIME RIVAL, SIX-TIME CHAMPION DAVE SCOTT, ON THE BEST DAY SCOTT EVER HAD ON THE BIG ISLAND. PHOTO BY LOIS SCHWARTZ