

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





PHOTO BY RICH CRUSE

“TINLEY WAS TALKING CONFIDENTLY ABOUT THE RACE WEEKS AGO,” SAID TRAINING PARTNER AND 20TH-PLACE FINISHER TODD JACOBS. “HE SAID, ‘WATCH ME IN EIGHT WEEKS... YOU WON’T BELIEVE IT.’”

**THE
EQUALIZER**

BY BOB BABBITT

IT STARTED EARLY. If you looked to the East, the sun was rising unimpeded over the mountaintops, the fluffy clouds of the past three years only a faint memory. As it reached slowly over the edge, there was a brief respite, a catching of the breath, a final I-know-this-won’t-last moment of wonderful, life-giving shade before Old Sol’s Big Island Sauna burst into view and hung out his “Open for Business” sign.

As the 1,300 triathletes warming up in Kailua Bay and on the banks of Dig Me Beach scanned the sky, they could almost see the outline of a menacing frown. It was payback time. The Equalizer was back after several years of cool and calm Ironman weather, and he was none too happy. A lot of people had been talkin’ trash in his absence. “The Ironman ain’t that tough,” they said. He was about to show the Iron Wannabes treading water in Kailua Bay on October 6, 1990, that they could take their Aero stuff and stuff it all where he normally don’t shine. Bo may know football, baseball, basketball and nuclear physics, but The Equalizer knows wind and heat.

After the cannon set loose the hordes of swimmers on their 2.4-mile journey, spectators, loved ones and journalists alike searched the horizon for a hint of cloud cover. Somewhere... anywhere. But there was absolutely none.

A little more than 49 minutes after the cannon, Rob Mackle and Wolfgang Dittrich bounded from the bay, mounted their high-tech machines and spun off towards the quaint village of Hawi (pronounced Ha-vee). They would be the first in a long line of triathletes to spend

time in the K-Tel combination Ironman wind tunnel and rotisserie.

Behind Mackle and Dittrich was defending champion (and pre-race favorite) Mark Allen riding side by side with recently crowned Olympic Distance World Champion Greg Welch. Just over a minute behind them was the Not-Quite-Dirty Dozen, a group of riders who rode what you might call the gray line of the drafting law. The rules say you have to stay two bike lengths apart. They were. But the rules don’t say anything about someone having to force the pace. No one did. The group included, at one time or another, Paul Huddle, Ray Browning, Pauli Kiuru, Rob Barel, Scott Molina, Scott Tinley, Ken Glah, Jurgen Zack, Dirk Aschmoneit and Henry Kiens, among others.

“It’s not the way the race is supposed to be,” insisted Paul Huddle. “It was kind of a joke. I’m not even breathing hard and this is the Ironman, the hardest race around. It was so easy it was ridiculous. Everyone was legal, but it was cheating. People weren’t racing. The event is supposed to be a time trial.”

Huddle finally got frustrated with the pace and took off. “I got really pissed at one point and went off the front for about 30 miles,” he said. “When this van went by, I yelled, “Those guys back there aren’t working. When I get off the bike they’re going to run me down!”

They didn’t wait that long. Huddle was swallowed up whole by the pack long before that, on the narrow road leading to the turnaround at Hawi. “The way back was harder,” Huddle continued. That’s because he went 30

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miles fighting the wind all by himself. “Everyone in that pack was racing for second place. We figured Mark was going to get first... but second place was wide open.”

It didn’t take a brain surgeon to figure out what was going on. Mackle and Dittrich were great swimmers and riders, but when it was time to hoof it for 26.2 miles, the consensus was that they’d be lunchmeat. Mark Allen dropped Welch and worked his way up to the pair of front-runners. Welch, after doing time in the Twilight Zone (the gap between Allen and the chase pack), was finally sucked up and became a member in good standing of the Chase Club.

If Allen stayed with Mackle and Dittrich until the end of the ride, he’d be off the front in the run and the race would be his. The guys in the pack all knew Allen’s history of blowing up at Ironman, so why give chase? Either the guy runs well and wins or blows up and dies. Why pursue? With prize money going 15 deep, why not cruise the ride and save themselves for the marathon? Then let the best runner win.

And there were a ton of them. Kiuru had won the German and New Zealand Ironman events. Barel had a great run (2:54) at last year’s Ironman. Tinley had won Ironman twice and ran well in Canada just eight weeks before. Greg Welch finished third last year and ran a 2:56 marathon even though he walked through a number of the aid stations Browning had won both the Canadian and Japan Ironman races. Molina had the fastest run of the

day (2:47) in Canada.

One of these guys would take second, one third, one fourth and one fifth. Ironman World Series dollars were also at stake. Money there went 10 deep, and Hawaii was a double-points race. Second place in the Ironman was worth \$12,000 all by itself. Third was worth \$8,000. Go off the front on the bike and lose \$4,000? No thank you.

“I would have ridden faster by myself,” said Scott Tinley. “Nobody wanted to go to the front. It was pretty slow there for a while, a lot more tactical than I’m used to. I was thinking, ‘I’m certainly not going to pull you guys for 112 miles.’”

Everyone else was thinking the same thing. So no one moved. In the meantime, Allen was playing 30-mile-per-hour leapfrog with Dittrich, Mackle and the ABC van. While Dittrich and Mackle were happy to get some PCT (Prime Camera Time), Allen was in his usual zone. And he likes to say in his zone... alone. ABC’s reportage went something like this:

ABC: So, Wolfgang, how is the ride today?

Dittrich: It’s windier than last year. But it’s nice to have other people to ride with. Last year, I was all by myself.

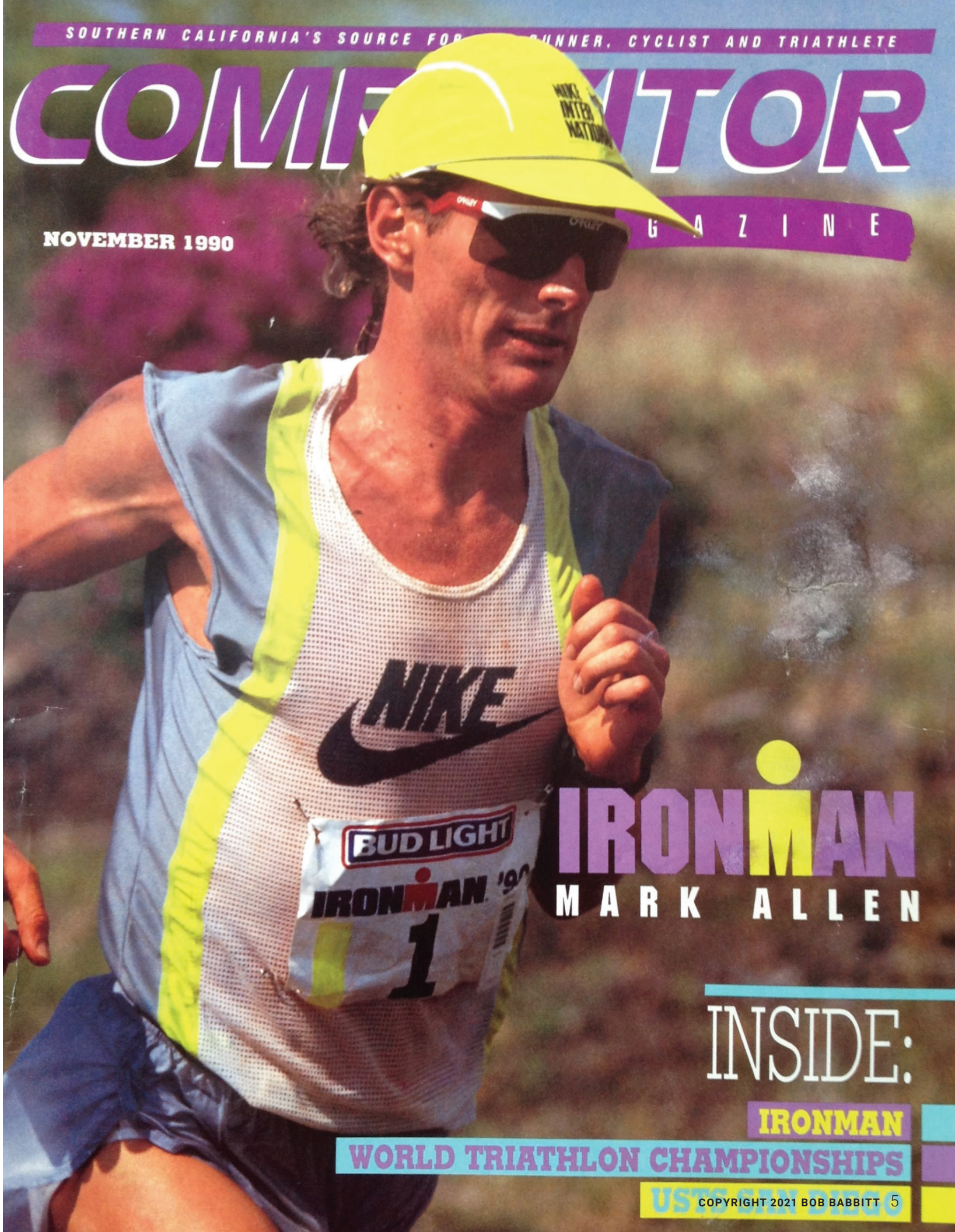
ABC: Rob, how’s the ride going for you?

Mackle: It’s tough, but I’m feeling OK.

ABC: Mark, how are you feeling?

ABC: Mark?????

While Mackle and Dittrich knew their time in the camera’s glare would quickly disappear, Allen wasn’t out there



THERE WAS LITTLE DOUBT GOING IN THAT THE RACE WAS MARK ALLEN'S (CENTER) TO WIN... OR LOSE. COULD HE WIN IT WITHOUT DAVE SCOTT AS HIS TOUR GUIDE? EVERY TIME HE LEFT DAVE IN THE PAST, HE BLEW UP. "ONCE YOU BLOW UP OVER THERE, YOU NEVER FORGET IT," TODD JACOBS SAID SOLEMNLY. THIS WAS THE YEAR FOR MARK ALLEN TO PROVE THAT HE COULD NOT ONLY WIN, BUT HE COULD DOMINATE THE RACE WITH HIS PRESENCE, JUST AS DAVE SCOTT HAD IN THE PAST.

ROB MACKLE (LEFT), MARK ALLEN (CENTER) AND WOLFGANG DITTRICH (RIGHT) LEAD THE WAY ON THE QUEEN K HIGHWAY.
PHOTO BY LOIS SCHWARTZ





PHOTO BY RICH CRUSE

"TINLEY HAD THE RACE OF RACES. HE CLEANED UP ALL THE WRECKAGE," SAID TODD JACOBS. HOW GOOD WAS SCOTT TINLEY'S RACE? HE RAN HIS FASTEST MARATHON EVER IN KONA (2:53:30) ON ONE OF THE TOUGHEST DAYS EVER!

THE GRIP6

/ THE EQUALIZER

"If Tinley could have seen a problem or smelled it, it would have been different out there. The rest of us worry about the conditions, **Dave Scott and Tinley can race in Hell." -Todd Jacobs**

riding both directions into a headwind in 100-degree heat just to get a little press. No, the only thing on his mind was the \$20,000 that went to the overall winner. In 1989, he exorcised the Dave Scott demons that had tormented him since his first visit to Kona in 1982. The incredible times the two had put together in 1989 had made Ironwar a household word, and the elusive win had finally come home to papa.

But 1990 was different. Dave Scott's chronic knee problem kept him from training early in the season, and then a mountain biking crash in late summer put him out of the race for sure. Even before that, Allen had an idea that 1990 might be a Scott-less year. "I remember the day exactly," said Kenny Souza, Mark Allen's long-time training partner. "Mark and I were out riding with Paul Huddle and Julie Moss in Boulder when we rolled up on Dave. We all took turns riding together, and eventually Mark was riding next to Dave. Dave goes, 'I have some news. I don't think I'm going to be racing you this year.'"

But another Scott was. In the surprise of the year, Scott Tinley, good ol' ST, got off the bike and ran the best marathon he's ever run in Kona. Allen had put a gap on Mackle and Dittrich during the last three-mile stretch down Alii Drive to the Kona Surf Hotel. Off the bike first after the

best bike split of the day (4:43:45), Allen ran up the hill, hung a right, descended into the new section of the run course (appropriately named "The Pit") and tried to get comfortable. Seven minutes back, running with Paul Huddle and others, two-time Ironman champion Scott Tinley was trying to do the same.

"He was talking confidently about the race weeks ago," said training partner and 20th-place finisher Todd Jacobs. "He said, 'Watch me in eight weeks... you won't believe it.'"

"I felt bad going down into the Pit," said Tinley. "I thought, 'I don't want to be running with these guys for three hours.' From miles 3 to 10, I was averaging 6:05s. I felt great."

At the start of the run, Greg Welch took off and Tinley thought he'd never see him again. "I thought, 'This guy is going to run forever.' He put 30-45 seconds on me right away," said Tinley.

But Tinley caught and passed Welch, leaving only Mark Allen between himself and an unbroken tape. Behind him, Pauli Kiuru and Rob Barel were also having great runs. Could they catch Allen? "Although I never thought I could catch Mark," Tinley admitted, "I never gave up hope. I've seen Mark blow up before."

At one point, Tinley whittled the lead down to 5:10, but

That's what you get when you pack your bike bag and travel to the Big Island of Hawaii and dare tempt The Equalizer. That's what you get when you do the Ironman.

that was about as close as it got. "The lead went from 5:10 to 7:10 between miles 17 and 19," remembers Tinley. "Obviously, Mark was well in control."

After blowing up in 1984 and 1987, Allen decided to stick with Dave Scott all day long in 1989. He took absolutely no chances. The closer the two got to the finish in downtown Kailua Kona, the more the magic arrow pointed in the direction of Mark Allen. With less than two miles to go, Allen took off and won the Ironman, the only major triathlon prize to elude him.

This year, Allen geared his whole season around defending the Ironman title and even skipped the World Triathlon Championships in Orlando, Florida, on September 15 to maintain his long-distance focus. There was little doubt going in that the race was his to win... or lose. Could he win it without Dave Scott as his tour guide? Every time he left Dave in the past, he blew up. "Once you blow up over there, you never forget it," Todd Jacobs said solemnly.

This was the year for Mark Allen to prove that he could not only win, but he could dominate the race with his presence, just as Dave Scott had in the past. He did just that, never looking back after the ride and running a 2:52:48 marathon to settle things once and for all.

"Mark looked pretty good at mile 18," said Tinley. "I felt he'd have to fall apart for me to catch him."

When the two passed each other along the marathon course, each heading in the opposite direction, the old training partners exchanged a mid-five. After cruising in with a nine-minute cushion, Allen said that one of the high

points of the day was seeing that the old guard (meaning Tinley and himself) was still alive and well.

"He was a man with a mission," said an impressed Paul Huddle about Tinley's 2:53:30 marathon and second-place finish. While Mark Allen was nearly 20 minutes slower than last year, Tinley was only 40 seconds off his 1989 time. "This was probably the second hardest day I can remember," said Tinley. "Not as hot as 1984... not as windy as 1983."

But plenty tough nonetheless. Fortunately for Allen, he never got into any serious trouble. If he had, according to Todd Jacobs, he would have had a closer look at Mr. Tinley. "If Tinley could have seen a problem or smelled it, it would have been different out there. The rest of us worry about the conditions. Dave Scott and Tinley can race in Hell."

Kona 1990 was as close to Hell as any of the Ironman starters ever hope to get. "There were 1,300 private battles being waged out there," commented Jacobs. "Tinley had the race of races. He cleaned up all the wreckage."

There was plenty of human wreckage for him to choose from. But that's what you get when the Mumuku winds start howling across the lava fields in all directions, destroying even the strongest riders physically, emotionally and spiritually. That's what you get when you look up from your bicycle towards the Kohala Mountains and see nothing but a brilliant blue and cloudless sky. That's what you get when you pack your bike bag and travel to the Big Island of Hawaii and dare tempt The Equalizer.

That's what you get when you do the Ironman. **THE GRIP6**