

# 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

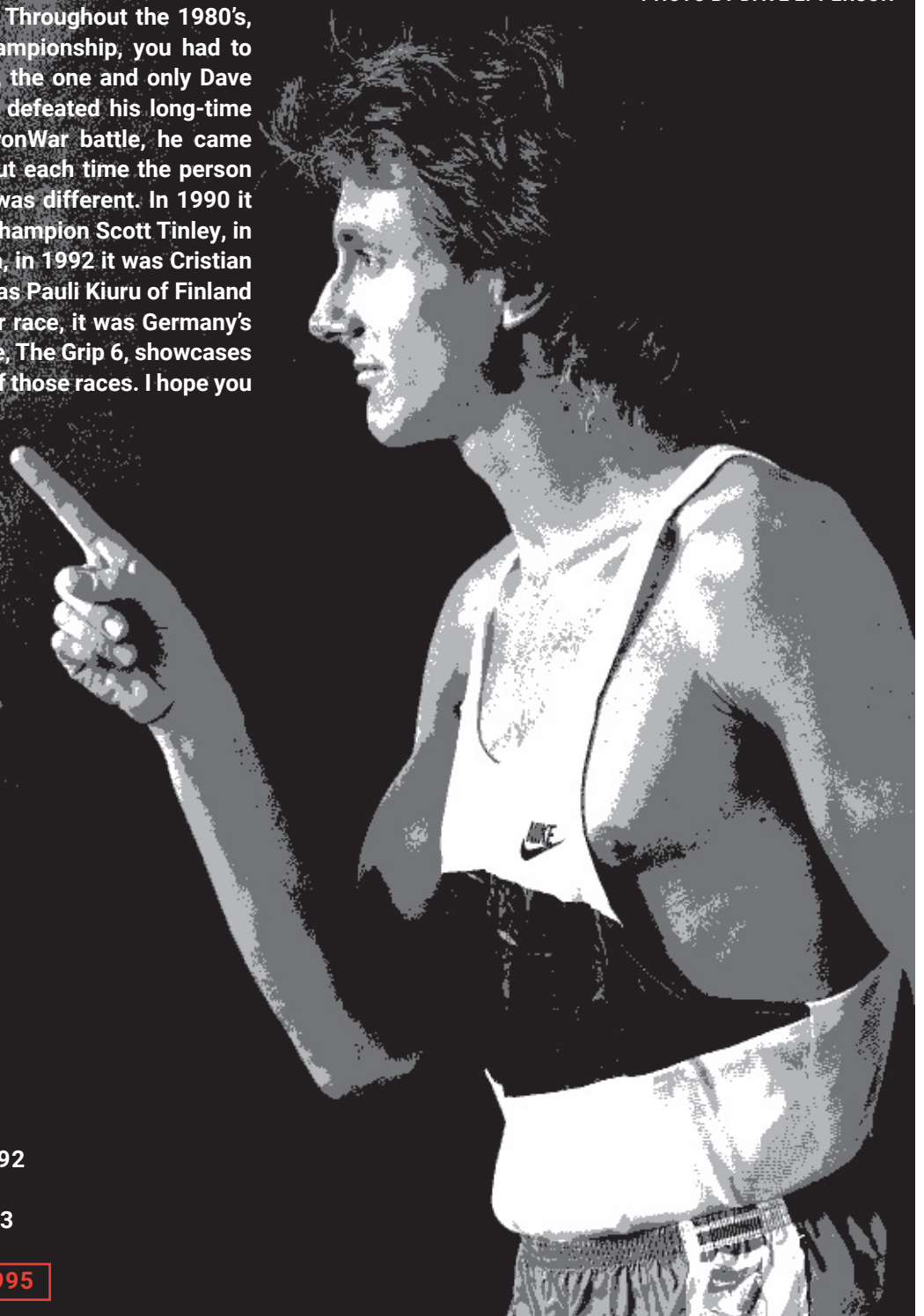
THE EQUALIZER / 1990

CHECKMATE / 1991

CON MUCHO BUSTOS / 1992

THE KILLING FIELDS / 1993

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE / 1995



## PHOTO BY RICH CRUSE

HIS HIGH RACE NUMBER SAYS IT ALL. WHEN THEY GIVE YOU RACE NUMBER 31, YOU'RE REALLY NOT EXPECTED TO BE A FACTOR IN THE RACE. NO ONE EXPECTED 24-YEAR-OLD KONA ROOKIE THOMAS HELLRIEGEL TO GO OFF THE FRONT AND DOMINATE THE IRONMAN.....EXCEPT THOMAS HELLRIEGEL.



# MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

BY BOB BABBITT

**GET OUT THE VCR AND PUT THIS BABY IN THE KEEPER FILE. THIS YEAR'S GATORADE IRONMAN WAS ONE FOR THE AGES.**

Kona once belonged to Mark Allen. Between 1989 and 1993, he won the Gatorade Ironman each and every time. But this is an MTV-short-attention-span world of three-second sound bites. Mark Allen took 1994 off so that he could recharge and spend some quality time with wife Julie and son Mats. In his absence, Greg Welch won the 1994 Ironman and Allen became a name from the past.

When Allen reappeared on race day 1995, he was wearing a blue one-piece swimsuit that he felt could save him a second every hundred meters in the swim. With the best men's field ever assembled and so much at stake—and at the age of 37—Allen was willing to seize every advantage as he approached what many thought would be his last Iron-go-round in Kona. His “girlyman” outfit, as he called it, attracted the attention of top German triathlete Jurgen

Zack.

Zack shook his head when he saw the getup. “Nice suit,” he laughed.

At 6:30 in the morning, World Triathlon Corporation President David Yates had received a call. It was Rich Havens, the gentleman responsible for hanging banners in their appropriate places.

“David, we’ve got a problem,” warned Havens. “The wind is howling out here on the course. There’s no way I can hang the banners.”

The wind started early and it was obviously going to be one of those classic Kona days. After the swim the leaders assembled quickly. Greg Welch, Mark Allen, Rainer Mueller, Pauli Kiuru, Tim DeBoom, Rob Barel, Chuckie V. and Cameron Widoff were just part of the group facing 45-mile-per-hour gusts out towards Hapuna on the Queen Kaahumanu Highway.

“There were 10-15 guys there, and I was assessing the

situation,” remembers Mark Allen. “I’d heard all the horror stories from the European Ironman where the Germans went off the front and put so much time on the field. I started looking around. There’s a German, another German, a guy from Holland, an Australian... there are two guys missing here.”

Just then, Jurgen Zack, the bike course-record holder, made his presence known.

“Here comes Jurgen, and my heart rate goes up 20 beats,” continues Allen. “Then here comes someone else, Thomas Hellriegel. I didn’t really get a chance to look at him. All of a sudden he and Jurgen were gone.”

Part of the German army, 24-year-old Thomas Hellriegel spent the summer establishing a triathlon beachhead for himself. After winning in Lanzarote and finishing second at the European Ironman in Germany, he flew to Rome to win the Military Olympic Distance World Championships two weeks before Hawaii.

Heillriegel’s style on the bike is all his own: “I don’t like waiting in a group,” he says with a shrug. “I go out as hard as I can the whole time.”

As Hellriegel’s lead advanced into the teens, Allen and the chase group could do nothing more than hope the torrid pace had at least taken something from the leader’s legs.

Simon Lessing, the world’s top male short-distance triathlete, was in town spectating. His assessment of Hellriegel the runner was less than good news for the chasers.

“I trained with him in South Africa,” said Lessing. “He runs very well. And he trains in the Canary Islands, so he’s use to the heat.”

13:31. That’s how big a lead Thomas Hellriegel had on the chase pack off the bike. Someone in that group would have to outrun him by 30 seconds per mile to win the race. If Hellriegel could piece together a three-hour marathon, Greg Welch, Mark Allen or Rainer Mueller would have to run sub-2:47 to win. Red Barber, the Old Dodger broadcaster, would call that sittin’ in the catbird seat.

“I thought we’d be about eight minutes back,” says Greg Welch. “I didn’t know it had gotten to 12 or 13.”

Not one to fluster, Thomas Hellriegel took off confi-

dently. “I did not want to go out too fast,” he says. “I knew when the group started to run they would go out very fast. I thought maybe they would die in the end.”

Mark Allen spends a fair amount of his time addressing groups about taking challenges, about facing their fears. He often uses a visualization technique where he tells the athlete to concentrate on the pain, to imagine opening a door, facing that pain, dealing with it and then moving on. Early in the run, he had to dig down to a place very few people could ever go, a place where doubt, pain and fear simply do not exist. From the first step of the marathon, Mark Allen was a man on a mission.



PHOTO BY RICH CRUSE

MARK ALLEN WAS OVER 13 MINUTES DOWN AT THE END OF THE BIKE RIDE AND HE KNEW HE'D HAVE TO HAVE THE RUN OF HIS LIFE TO CATCH THOMAS HELLRIEGEL. PHOTO BY RICH CRUSE.

**“Here comes Jurgen, and my heart rate goes up 20 beats. Then here comes someone else, Thomas Hellriegel. I didn’t really get a chance to look at him. All of a sudden he and Jurgen were gone.” -Mark Allen**

Thomas, did you think about riding with your fellow countrymen Holger Lorenz or Jurgen Zack?

“I don’t think Jurgen wanted to ride with me,” responds Hellriegel.

The point is, no one could ride with him. With the wind in their faces, the chase pack averaged a tough 13-14 miles per hour on roads where they would normally be going 25.

By the turnaround in Hawi, Hellriegel had 3:20 on Zack and 6:20 on the chase group. “I figured I might be able to give up 6-8 minutes to Thomas during the bike,” admits Allen. “He had that by the turnaround.”

“I had 12 minutes on Dave Scott back in 1984,” recalls Allen. “But I was polite enough to start walking so he could catch me. I’m not saying the Germans aren’t polite, but Thomas was running very fast.”

He was running a sub-three-hour marathon, but he was still losing 30 seconds per mile to a driven Mark Allen. By mile 13, Allen had disposed of Greg Welch, Cameron Widoff (“The first guy with dreadlocks I’ve ever raced against,” says Allen), Rainer Mueller and Jurgen Zack.

The lead was 4:10 at mile 16. “I had to have absolute trust in my power and my ability to just continue to stay on the pace,” insists Allen. “I could never once have an ounce of doubt about what I was doing out there.”

What he was doing out there was comparable to hitting a grand slam in the bottom of the ninth to win the seventh game of the World Series. In the glare of the media, with the NBC helicopter hovering overhead, he never faltered.

“When Thomas kept gaining ground on us during the bike, I had to make an executive decision,” remembers Mark Allen. “Do you panic and chase, or do you stay where you’re at and get completely ready to have the run of your life.”

The choice was obvious. He took the curtain and had the run of his life.

His mission was to drive his body to the very brink of destruction if need be, while driving his opposition into collapse. Hellriegel was not cooperating.

“In the National Energy lab, here comes the man I’ve never seen,” says Allen. “I didn’t think he was looking bad. When I came out of the Energy Lab, I told myself, ‘You’ve got to go NOW!’”

If Hellriegel felt pressure, he has a weird way of showing it. When Allen eventually caught him at 23 miles, Hellriegel surged back by him. Not your typical Kona rookie.

“I thought maybe Mark Allen would get tired,” says Hellriegel. “I tried to stay with him, but he was too strong.”

After a tough bike ride, Mark Allen ran an amazing 2:42:09 marathon. Hellriegel ran 2:58:05... and lost.

It’s one thing to be off the front and run a fast marathon. It’s another to HAVE to run 2:42 to win the race. If Allen had run 2:44:34, Thomas Hellriegel is the new King of Kona.

“This was special, my most satisfying win every,” says Allen. “I feel like I graduated this year.”

With honors, big guy. If this turns out to be your last Ironman, if we never see you racing on the Kona Coast again, you left us with a memory we will never, ever forget. **THE GRIP6**



FOR THOMAS HELLRIEGEL OF GERMANY, IT WAS ONE HELLUVA WAY TO INTRODUCE HIMSELF TO FANS OF THE IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP AND TO FIVE-TIME CHAMPION MARK ALLEN.

HE MADE UP FOR LOSING A LITTLE OVER THREE MINUTES IN THE SWIM BY OUTRIDING ALLEN BY NEARLY 17 MINUTES AND GETTING OFF THE BIKE WITH A LEAD OF OVER 13 MINUTES. THERE WERE TIMES DURING THE MARATHON WHERE ALLEN DOUBTED IF HE WOULD EVER CATCH HELLRIEGEL WHO FINISHED OFF HIS INCREDIBLE DEBUT IN KONA WITH A 2:58:05 MARATHON. BUT DURING THE LAST FEW MILES, IN WHAT WOULD TURN OUT TO BE HIS LAST EVER IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP, ALLEN DUG DEEP AND HIS 2:42:09 MARATHON GAVE HIM HIS SIXTH AND FINAL VICTORY BY A MERE TWO MINUTES AND TWENTY FIVE SECONDS.

PHOTOS BY LOIS SCHWARTZ AND RICH CRUSE



BASEBALL LEGEND TED WILLIAMS HIT A HOMERUN IN HIS LAST EVER TIME AT BAT IN THE MAJOR LEAGUES. MARK ALLEN? HIS DROP-THE-MIC MOMENT CAME WHEN HE ERASED A LEAD OF OVER 13 MINUTES TO WIN HIS LAST EVER RACE ON THE BIG ISLAND OF HAWAII AND TO FINISH HIS HALL OF FAME CAREER WITH HIS SIXTH IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP. PHOTO BY LOIS SCHWARTZ

