

The Women Who Would Be Ironmen

Both Natascha Badmann and Lori Bowden expect to win this year's Ironman Triathlon World Championship. At least one of them is wrong. BY KARA DOUGLASS THOM

AT 7 A.M. ON OCT. 19, 1,500 ELITE TRIATHLETES and eager age-groupers will plunge into the warm waters of Kona's Kailua Bay for the 2.4-mile swim of the Ironman Triathlon World Championships. Some 55 minutes later, two very noteworthy women will emerge from the surf. These two women, who between them have won the world's most prestigious triathlon every year for the past four years, will

head out for the 112-mile bike ride and the 26.2-mile run with the same expectation—to cross the finish line first. But they'll have very different strategies for getting there.

Defending champion Natascha Badmann of Switzerland, the superior cyclist, will spin through the dreaded 45 mph *ho'o mumuku* winds on the Big Island's Queen Kaahumanu Highway—winds that have actually blown competitors off their bikes—trying to pull far enough ahead to hold off one of the fastest runners in the pack, Canada's Lori Bowden whom Badmann beat by just over four minutes last year.

Badmann's victories over Bowden—in 2001, 2000 and 1998—have all been by a margin of a few minutes, less than two seconds per

mile over the 140.6-mile course. Bowden's sole Hawaii Ironman win was in 1999, the year Badmann didn't show up. Not since the late '80s and early '90s, when Erin Baker and Paula Newby-Fraser traded the winner's lei for eight years, has there been such a close rivalry.

The intensity is underscored by the fact that a successful triathlon career hinges on a win in Hawaii. "There's no greater victory

for Natascha's or Lori's portfolio," says Dave Scott, a six-time Ironman world champion and now a triathlon coach. "Their whole focus for the year is that race." Although there are other Ironman-distance triathlons, the world championship in Hawaii is the best known and offers the largest purse \$325,000, with the winner taking

home \$70,000. Perhaps most important, it offers the most sponsor-friendly exposure, with the race televised on NBC on Nov. 23.

Though Badmann has beaten Bowden in all of their Big Island meetings, Scott (who knows a thing or two about winning this particular event) doesn't discount the Canadian. "Lori hasn't ridden to her potential, and Natascha hasn't been pushed on the run—she just rides

BADMANN		BOWDEN	
35	AGE	35	
Swiss	NATIONALITY	Canadian	
Toni Hasler, coach	HUSBAND	Peter Reid, Ironman	
Anastasia, 18	CHILDREN	None	
1991	FIRST TRIATHLON	1988	
Co-worker, Hasler	INSPIRED BY	Triathlete parents	
1996	FIRST HAWAII	1989	
4	IRONMAN TITLES	10	
9:11:19	FASTEST HAWAII TIME	9:13:02	

away from everyone," Scott says. "Natascha is a phenomenal athlete, but I think Lori can beat her."

In the past Bowden has competed in as many as three Ironmans a year, including Ironman Canada, which falls less than eight weeks before Hawaii. This has led watchers to wonder if she races too much, but after winning Canada four years in a row Bowden decided to pass in 2001. "I had always wondered if I'd be stronger in Hawaii if I didn't race," she says. "Last year was an experiment. I don't think it made a difference in my performance. I actually feel that you can gain strength from doing an Ironman if you recover in time for the next one." Bowden won Ironman Austria in July in 8:51:22, less than 30 seconds off the world-record time, and was scheduled to return to Canada for the Aug. 25 race.

Badmann races less frequently, instead training up to 35 hours a week and going to the Canary Islands three times a year (January, March and September) where dealing with the heat and fatigue prepares her for Hawaii. "Everyone who does a triathlon comes to that place where the inner voice says, Why don't you stop? You're tired," says Badmann. "If you realize it's all in your mind, then you can try to manage it. I wasn't born that way. I work at it every day."

Neither athlete will admit to keeping her eye on the other. "If it's not Lori, it's somebody else," says Badmann, who is one of only four women to have won Hawaii more than once in the race's 24 years. "Everyone wants to win. I have to put my energy in my race. I don't think, Oh, she can run five minutes faster, I should bike five minutes faster. The calculation wouldn't work if I started thinking, What's she going to do?"

If the always-the-bridesmaid thing is getting to her, Bowden doesn't let on. "I've been second in Hawaii four times now," she says. "A lot of people would kill to be second." ♦

PAULA NEWBY-FRASER, 40, U.S.

Semiretired eight-time champion, Ironman-record holder (8:50:53) and holder of most career Ironman victories (23). How high can she place?



KAREN SMYERS, 41, U.S.

Not likely to win but a crowd favorite. Champion in 1995, mother in 1998, diagnosed with thyroid cancer in 1999. Of Hawaii in 2001, says, "I threw up like mad about halfway through, but I ended up running the last 10 miles faster than the first 15 miles."



HEATHER FUHR, 34, Canada

Twelve Ironman victories, including Hawaii in 1997. Most recently won Ironman USA in Lake Placid, N.Y., in July.



JOANNA ZEIGER, 32, U.S.

Finished fourth in triathlon's Olympic debut, in 2000. Swam the fastest split in Hawaii in 2001 but dropped out after the bike with back problems.



Kona Contenders

Past and potential future champions likely to place in the Ironman top 10



LISA BENTLEY, 33, Canada

"Anyone who's won an Ironman before knows what it feels like to lead," says Bentley, who won Ironman Australia this year. She dropped out of Hawaii 2001 during the run because of a hip injury.

FERNANDA KELLER, 38, Brazil

Has placed third six times, and in the top 10 for the past 10 years.



WHAT'S NEW

If you worry that the world has gone to hell since the demise of the Reebok Pump, cheer up: The inventors of Gore-Tex fabrics have prompted a new wave of sartorial inflation, Airvantage. Blow two breaths into a mouthpiece near the collar of Burton's Radar Type Z jacket to fill chambers in the internal vest with six to eight liters of air, which warms you. Too hot? Open the valve and release air. Cold again? Reinflate. Five hours of après-ski? Consider it practice for the Breatherizer. —MARY CATHERINE O'CONNOR



COURTESY OF BURTON; JACKET: CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: ROBERT LATOZE/ALLOTT; ROBERT OLIVER (4); BOB DUKE/ATV/WWW.XTRM.COM