

A Method To His Madness

Twelve people that first year had proved that the distances could be completed. The Ironman was possible. Haller and Dunbar had shown that if you had the guts to turn a few screws, you could even go fast – for a while, anyway. By January the next year, word of the event had spread, interest had grown, and there was even an official sponsor of sorts, since Hank Grundman had agreed to pay for the t-shirts if Collins would allow him to put the Nautilus logo on the back. Grundman also wanted to supply trophies to the top male and top female finishers (he knew there would be a woman because he was training one for the race at his center). Collins agreed to both offers, and then processed applications for 50 people. He decided to charge everyone an entry fee of eight dollars this time instead of the five he'd charged the year before because he'd lost twenty-five bucks on the race in 1978 and wanted to make it back. He'd charged the five dollars in the first place because he was afraid that some of the entrants would be so inexperienced they might head out without the basic necessities. The least he could do, Collins figured, was supply everyone with two gallons of powdered ERG, a product he'd become familiar with in San Diego. But he wasn't willing to do it at his own expense...

While the field in 1978 had been filled with locals – military guys and ultrarunners, men whose training goals and estimations of their own abilities were somewhat abnormal but who could walk down any street in Lincoln, Nebraska, and not be noticed – in '79 there was a fair share of oddballs from the mainland. Collins called them “professional characters.” They were people who had moved beyond the realm of excessive fitness-related behavior and into a world of excessive behavior, period. Ken “Cowman” Shirk was one of these – a big, long-haired, bushy-bearded hippie and self-proclaimed philosopher from the Lake Tahoe area of California who panhandled his way from event to event and talked to anyone who would listen about his experience at the rugged Western States 100-mile endurance run. He eventually moved to Hawaii and became something of a permanent Ironman – an “Ironbum,” according to a 1984 article in *Tri-Athlete* magazine.

Like most of the characters, Shirk was more dedicated to self-promotion than performance. (The “Cowman” came from his wearing a furry headdress with horns during competition. It made him look like a skinny, two-legged buffalo.) But he was friendly and harmless – a self-parody, a kind of street-corner transient in the world of endurance sports. Not everyone was enamored of his retarded sense of personal responsibility, however.

“Cowman was very upset that I wanted eight dollars from him the second year,” Collins said. “He said he didn't have it, I said that if he didn't have it he couldn't run. He went out and came back with a plastic bag full of nickels and dimes and pennies and quarters – I guess he'd begged it – and he counted out eight dollars. He also wanted me to find him a bicycle, someone to paddle for him, a support vehicle, a place to sleep, and by the way, he was hungry.”

Characters like Cowman became part of the Ironman legend during the first few years, reinforcing the oddball image of the event. It was an image that the serious triathlete who came later found mildly

offensive, and one that gradually disappeared as the sport of triathlon and the level of competence grew. But the characters were part of the appeal in the early days, and the Ironman seemed to attract them like some weird psychic magnet. In 1980, when the field of competitors was ten times as large as the year before, there were characters galore, soul mates of Cowman whose physical preparation for the 140 miles of competition was often less important than their being cosmically in tune with what was happening. The people – and the results – were often strange, and they created a context in which even the simple, obsessive devotion to physical fitness of many of the more normal participants seemed odd. There were men who had run fifty marathons, eighty marathons, run across the country, swum across channels and cycled over mountains, all for no particular reason other than to be able to tell people they'd done it. One entrant in 1980 called himself Born Again Smitty. He listed his "earthly age" as forty (having been born in 1939) and his "eternal age" as five. Smitty lived in a cave on Maui and said that before his rebirth he'd been a black-jack dealer in Las Vegas.

Unlike Cowman, though, Smitty was a heck of an athlete. About halfway through the bike course in 1980 he was clobbered from behind by the rearview mirror of a passing truck and knocked off his bike. Another competitor stopped, shocked at the obvious severity of the accident. "Are you okay?" he asked. Smitty, his head bleeding badly, proclaimed loudly that "The Lord will see me through!" He hopped back on his bike and sped off, completing not only the bike ride but the marathon too – in 3:34 – with a total time well under 12 hours. He placed 19th.

In 1979 Dunbar got in on the weirdness himself. On the morning that the race was scheduled, on the heels of a tremendous storm that had been dropping swimming pools full of rain all over the islands for the previous week, with the skies still an ominous gray, the winds howling and gusting, and the water churning off Waikiki, he showed up in a Superman costume, ready to race. The conditions were abominable, but Dunbar's spirits were high. He was psyched. This was the kind of day he liked, by God. It made the whole thing even more of a challenge. Where's Haller?

Not all of the 28 people who showed up – out of the original 50 who had paid their eight dollars – felt the same way Dunbar did about the weather, though. Haller, who was not the best of swimmers under ideal conditions, sure didn't. He wasn't much afraid of running or cycling himself almost to death, but the Pacific Ocean out there was bouncing around like it could kill you. He had already proved that he was tough; did he need now to prove that he was insane?

Collins was having serious doubts himself. Aside from the rest of his concerns, there was his liability to worry about. It was an area in which he had always been, as his wife, Judy, said, "paranoid." He'd gone so far the first year as to have everyone sign a provision on the original entry form that made all the starters members of something called the "Hawaii Iron Man Triathlon Coordinating Committee."

"The purpose of the committee," Collins said, "was to put on the event. If you sued anyone, you were going to be suing the committee and therefore yourself. I hoped that by doing that it would spread out any deep pockets kind of thing that might have arisen."

The provision was part of the entry blank for the second year as well, but on that bleak and storm-tossed Saturday morning, its existence didn't make Collins feel any better. Not only was the ocean ugly

but the winds were so bad that the bikes would probably get blown into the automobile traffic on the other side of the island. He decided to postpone the race until Sunday – over the howls of protest from some of the competitors, the loudest of all Dunbar, who promptly challenged Haller to do the race man to man, one on one. Haller ignored him – ignored him so well in fact that he doesn't even remember Dunbar confronting him.

"Somebody asked me," Collins said, grinning, "what my criteria were for postponing the race. 'Hey,' I said, 'it's simple. I'm in charge, and if I'm afraid to do it, then we're not going to do it.'"

"Oh, it was a feeling of bitter disappointment," Dunbar said. "I mean, after all, it was an *Iron Man* race, wasn't it? From two or three days before I was preparing myself mentally for that day, to do it. And they cancelled it for some ridiculous reason – the weather." Dunbar chuckled softly, remembering how extreme the conditions really had been – and how extreme he must have sounded at the time. On the other hand, there is something inside that still eats at him a little bit.

"I felt more as if the individuals should decide to go or not to go. Between Gordon and myself it was competitive – along with it being an individual challenge. He had beaten me the previous year and I wasn't going to let him do it again. Unbeknownst to us, Tom Warren was in there and clobbered us both."

Warren was a kind of living moral to the story that year – soft-spoken, understated proof that almost anything you could think of was likely to happen in a race as long as the Ironman, and proof that as mean and as tough and as long-suffering as you thought you were, there was always somebody who was meaner and tougher.

But if Warren's performance humbled Dunbar, it had a broader, longer-lasting impact, thanks to the presence of a writer from *Sports Illustrated* named Barry McDermott. McDermott's specialty was, and still is, golf, although the story he wrote about the 1979 Ironman, published in the May 14 issue of the magazine, did more for the sport of triathlon than any single occurrence over the next decade, including the exposure that ABC television gave the race starting in 1980. McDermott's story was, in fact, what brought the "Wide World of Sports" cameras to Hawaii in the first place.

Warren was the hero of the article, an offbeat, mildly eccentric, thirty-five-year-old tavern owner from San Diego who seemed to take everything in stride, from the terrible weather, to Dunbar in his Superman outfit, to his modest acceptance of his own position as not just an underdog but as a total unknown-and-who-cares.

"To me it was going to be a two-man race," McDermott said, "Dunbar and Haller, the two guys who had almost killed themselves the year before. Warren was kind of around, but I didn't pay much attention to him, and I think he kind of felt that. It's as if he was saying: 'Hey, what about me? I'm going to win this thing.' And everybody was just saying, 'Yeah, sure, just go over there and sit down and be quiet.'"

“The other guys had obviously devoted themselves to it. They seemed, to me, to be unbelievable physical specimens. Back then, nobody did this stuff. But these guys had done it; they’d proven that it could be done. And Warren hadn’t done it, either. Plus he was a lot older, and he didn’t seem to be as committed as they seemed to be. It didn’t seem to me that this guy who was thirty-five years old or whatever was going to be able to compete against guys who were twenty-two and had been SEALs.”

Warren *was* committed, however – to a degree that caused McDermott’s respect for him to soar. And the respect was reflected in the story. Not that McDermott lionized the event; he painted the race as just this side of insane. “They were all characters,” he would say ten years later. “They were all crazy, obviously certifiable. Even the guy Cowman, who is bizarre, you know, but in that group he was like *normal*.”

Still, however, there was a lot of left-handed praise that seemed to just build and build – a broad, do-you-believe-this portrait that ended with an F. Scott Fitzgerald-ish scene of Warren walking alone down a rainy Honolulu street at one-thirty in the morning, having yet to go to bed, looking for someone who could keep their eyes open long enough to have breakfast with him.

To some, the picture McDermott painted proved irresistible. The skin on the back of their arms tingled and they flipped back to the first page of the story and started again, and then again after that. To this day, many of the top triathletes in the world recall the piece and remember it being their original inspiration. McDermott was besieged by requests for information on how to get into the race. He finally photocopied a form letter telling the people where to write for information in Hawaii. The article even prompted a somewhat awkward appearance by Warren on “The Tonight Show” and there were feelers about a movie.

“What happened,” McDermott said, “was that right about that time the movie *Running* came out, the one with Michael Douglas, one of the all-time bombs at the box office, and that ended all running, exercise-type movies for the next three or four years.”

In 1980, the year after the article appeared, 108 people started the race, up from 15 in 1979, and ABC was there with its cameras, launching the Ironman star into television heaven.

“I thought it would be a good story,” McDermott said, “but when I went there, I knew it would be great.” He had been turned on to the race by an acquaintance who had sent him an account of the 1978 event, hoping to have it published in the magazine. That wasn’t possible, but McDermott convinced his editor that the event might be worth a look in ’79. What he saw left an impression that hasn’t faded much in a decade.

“To me,” McDermott said in 1986, “There was always this one Iron Man of Hawaii contest, and there’s always going to be just one Iron Man – Tom Warren. These other guys, yeah, they can do it, and they beat his time by three hours and all that stuff, but so what? That’s like saying Babe Ruth can hit home runs. Big deal. If you can hit home runs, you can hit home runs; if you can do the Ironman in nine hours and 30 minutes, great, but no one in my mind can ever approach the spectacle I witnessed. The way Tom Warren won that race was incredible. And to do what he did for a silly little trophy made out of

nuts and bolts – that to me was special. He'll always be the Iron Man. He did it in a way and for a reason that will never exist again."

Warren himself heard about the race during the summer of 1978 from, of all people, John Dunbar. The two raced against each other in a small, informal triathlon in San Diego, which Warren won. To him, the Ironman sounded like the kind of event he would do well in. In fact, it sounded a lot like the challenges he'd been setting for himself in San Diego for years. At the time, he was probably better prepared for an ultra-distance triathlon than just about anybody in the world.

"I didn't train for that first one," Warren said. "I could do it anytime I wanted. I'd already swum a 15-mile ocean race. I'd already done a 75-mile run in the mountains, and I'd already done a 1,600-mile bike ride in two weeks."

Warren is a handsome man with a full head of curly hair and a big walrus mustache. He looks somehow like the kind of guy who would have done something like the Ironman back then, although seeing him in his running shorts, you'd never believe he could actually *win* the thing. But he was somehow right for the part, an original, something of a loner who has always seen the world from a perspective just over the horizon from most of the world. He is unique.

"I like 'unique' better than 'weird'," Warren said. "Most people say I'm weird."

It was early in 1986. He was sitting at a popular surfside restaurant in San Diego's Pacific Beach, eating breakfast. From the big windows he could look out over the piled up sand that guarded the cement boardwalk and the front of the restaurant from the high winter tides, and see the waves breaking out around the end of the pier. Warren was dressed in his "business suit," a beat-up sweater, a pair of sweatpants, white socks, and leather sandals. His hair was long in back, brushing his shoulders, and his eyes were almost hidden behind a pair of prescription glasses with photo-gray lenses. As he did most morning, he'd driven his motor home to the beach and parked. It would be his base of operations for the day.

"My girlfriend told me I was weird again last night," Warren said almost petulantly.

"Weird about what?" came the question.

"Pretty much everything," Warren said. Then he looked up and grimed a toothy, Teddy Roosevelt grin. He never minded being a little different at all, really.

He owned a tavern in Pacific Beach called Tug's (an early nickname of Warren's), which sat at the corner of Mission Boulevard and Emerald Street, just steps from the ocean, a block and a half from Crystal Pier, and just a short walk from where he was born. It had been a lesbian bar when he bought it for \$10,000 in 1969, \$2,500 down. The place became a perfect reflection of Warren himself, who had been raised at the water's edge with a surfboard in one hand and the other curved perfectly to accept a can of beer. Like Warren, Tug's seemed comfortable with the full range of Southern California beach life. It attracted

an impossible mixture of mean-looking, black-jacketed bikers who clanked like old cowboys when they walked, punked-out surf rats, transients who had managed to scrape enough change together for a taco, and clean-cut athletes in jeans and running shoes and freshly laundered t-shirts. Tug's served wine and beer and cheap Mexican food, with a special on Thursday nights where you could get three rolled tacos, a bean tostada, and a green salad for \$1.15.

"If you wanted extra cheese on the tostada it would be \$1.25," said one Tug's regular. "I haven't had a square meal on Thursday night since they closed."

Warren sold Tug's in 1982, thinking that he might be ready to retire, but he bought it back six months later. The new owners had wanted him to take it back after two. Business was bad, the staff was unhappy.

"I don't think anybody, including myself, realized that I had a job," said Warren. "Everybody always thought that all I did was sit around and collect money. They all of sudden realized that things didn't get *done*. There wasn't that energy level. In all honesty, though, it was never the same after I bought it back."

He got rid of Tug's for good in 1985, mildly offended over the creeping yupification of Pacific Beach, disgusted with city officials who weren't willing to grant him the full liquor license he needed to compete with the new, upscale bars that had opened all around him. The authorities seemed to want his dignity as well as his money. It was too high a cost. The night Tug's closed, the place was jammed so tight there were people standing on tables to make room for the others who were flooding in the door. All three local television stations were on hand to record the demise of a San Diego landmark. Warren, as delightful and as baffling as ever, mentioned on camera that he was probably going to invest in property up north in Oceanside, where there were more derelicts.

To Warren, how he got to a place was always as important as getting there. If he marched to a different beat than the rest of the world, he did so with precision. His life was well-defined, singular, perhaps, but well-ordered and efficient. Even the off-the-wall athletic goals he set for himself were accomplished methodically and analytically. He liked goals; his life was a series of goals being set and then almost regretfully achieved, with each being rated not just for difficulty, but for feel and setting.

"You should never really think about yourself," Warren said. "You can't go forward if you do. If I was going to talk about myself it would be what I'm *going* to do."

He had a callous on his tailbone from doing sit-ups in the sauna, because he could never simply do one thing at a time. The stories about him exercising and making business calls from a phone in the sauna made him sound peculiar, but it was Warren's way. About the only time he ever let someone else's opinion affect him was during a competition, when he was starting to hurt. He'd never let you see that he was straining, pushing his limits, because if he looked tired, then you might get it in your head that you could beat him the next time out. He might let someone have the physical edge on him – he might even enjoy the contest more if you did – but he always like to keep one leg up in the psychology

department. If there were a hundred ways to beat you, Warren would know ninety-nine of them and be halfway to having the hundredth figured out. He didn't like to lose, ever.

"He was so smart," McDermott laughed. "He could be marooned on a desert island and somehow he'd build a jet runway and build a jet and fly off it. Or when you got there he would have colonized the place somehow, and he'd have this great setup with a bar – Tug's Tavern West."

Some of the endurance adventures Warren launched himself on he trained hard for, others he didn't. To him, the goals he achieved without really being in good enough shape for them were the most satisfying, because he had beaten longer odds. And far from buying the best equipment to achieve his goals, Warren preferred to use the worst – at least when he was competing casually, or simply against himself – because that too made it tougher. He'd take long bike rides on his single-speed Huffy bicycle, racing against anyone who tried to pass him. One time, while he was riding north along the Pacific Coast Highway, a large group of competitive cyclists did just that, flying by in the kind of superior, everyone-else-is-a-slob way that cyclists are apt to exhibit. To their amazement Warren stayed with them for miles, riding in the middle of the pack and forcing the pace, teasing them, until he was pedaling his under-gearred bike so furiously that he finally threw the chain and had to pull off the road.

More important than beating the other guys, however, was beating himself, or at least what he perceived to be the structure of the problem that confronted him. If he bet you a six-pack that he could do more sit-ups than you could, he wouldn't stop just because you stopped. He'd keep going, perhaps because he'd secretly set for himself a number of sit-ups that you would never have agreed to, almost as if he'd used you to get him going in some new direction. If things went too smoothly, if he achieved whatever he was trying to do without what he deemed to be sufficient difficulty, it was worse for him than never having done it at all.

So the conditions even on that Saturday in 1979 didn't bother Warren a bit. In fact, he pretty much agreed with Dunbar when the SEAL raised the point that this was, after all, the Iron Man, and shouldn't be canceled for anything short of a major volcanic eruption.

As it was, only 18 of the 28 people who had shown up on Saturday returned to try again on Sunday. Most were enthusiastic, some were not, but the options were limited since many of them had plane tickets back to the mainland or jobs they needed to return to. It was either do it now or do it not at all.

The situation was less clear for Collins. Almost all of his volunteer help had evaporated. Most of them had signed on for Saturday only and had other commitments. Or they had looked out their bedroom windows on Sunday and simply rolled over.

Then there was a boat problem – another complication caused by the postponement – and his wife Judy ran off a second time to find someone at the Outrigger Canoe Club willing to pilot a substitute safety boat. While that was being done her husband called for a vote on whether or not to move the swim west to the Ala Moana basin, where a breakwall cut even the biggest waves down to mere ripples. Dunbar, dressed again as Superman, his hair blowing in the strong wind, demanded that the swim be held in the ocean. Warren agreed and so did most of the others. Collins gave his assent. When he did,

a friend of Debbie Anderson, one of the two women who had entered the race, began protesting loudly, threatening to sue Collins if he didn't call it off and offering legal assistance to anyone who competed and was subsequently injured. Anderson, the woman who had been trained for the race at Grundman's Nautilus Center, was a good cyclist and runner, but not much of a swimmer. There wasn't any way she was going to step into the raging ocean.

Collins by this time had had all he was willing to take. His fun little adventure was turning into a massive pain in the ass. Friends of his who had volunteered to help on Saturday were pissed off because the race had been postponed. The competitors were upset with him for the same reason. Dunbar was running around like a madman in his Superman outfit raising hell. The damn weather was screwing up the entire deal and Collins was so woefully short of help that he couldn't even race in his own race. He was worried about liability as it was, now this crazy woman was screaming at him, threatening to sue. This was fun?

Collins gathered the entire group around – it was chilly and windy, so everyone huddled close in their rain gear – and in his loudest and deepest and most commanding Commander's voice explained the situation. He could barely be heard over the howling wind.

"This woman over here has informed me that if I run this thing and anybody's hurt, that she'll sue me for everything I've got. I want you to understand that in accordance with the piece of paper you signed that this is voluntary, that you are the sole judge of whether or not it's safe. If anybody wants to reconsider, I'll give you your \$8 back right now."

Two men took him up on his offer. So did Anderson, of course.

"To give the money back right there I had to come up with a lot of dimes and nickels and quarters," laughed Collins. "Coming up with \$24 on Sunday morning was tough."

But the controversy was resolved; Collins fired the starting gun and sent fourteen men and one woman into the rolling, dark gray ocean. It was a little past eight o'clock in the morning on February 14, about an hour past the scheduled starting time.

"I seriously thought that someone might get killed," McDermott said. "You cannot believe how bad the weather was. The ocean was the most threatening thing I'd ever seen. It was a life-threatening situation."

Open-water swimming is not like swimming in a pool. Navigation is a real concern. To make sure they are headed in the right direction, triathletes must lift their heads repeatedly to sight landmarks or buoys, a procedure that uses a tremendous amount of energy. Choppy seas and big swells make navigation more difficult; they made it almost impossible on this occasion. The winds and currents threatened to blow the swimmers off course and turn the 2.4 miles into 2.7 or 3 or more. A good paddler was invaluable, for he or she could do all the sighting, set a straight line, and make it unnecessary for the swimmer to look up at all. Neither Warren nor Dunbar had any special problems.

They had experienced people with them and they knew the ocean well themselves; they had seen it at least this bad before. Others were not so fortunate, including a petrified Gordon Haller.

The only athlete in the group with anything close to a sponsorship, Haller had the most sophisticated support of the day waiting for him on the beach, a team from the Nautilus Center eager to take him smoothly through the bike ride and the run. But he had chosen his paddler himself – for all the wrong reasons: the guy was Haller’s buddy; Haller was staying at his house. Unfortunately, the man’s swimming ability was not equal to his hospitality. If Haller’s apprehension of the rough weather that day ranked eight on a scale of ten, his paddler’s was up there around nine. Less than halfway through the swim he panicked, stopped paddling, and was blown out to sea.

There was no alternative but to rescue him. Judy Collins, who was bouncing around in the substitute safety boat she had commandeered at the Outrigger Canoe Club, was nervous about leaving the swimmers, but she had no choice. On the other hand, perhaps it was for the best since the pilot of the boat, an old salt who didn’t seem to believe in life vests and insisted on zooming all over the course at full throttle, was causing Judy Collins to wonder if he might be more of a hazard than a help. The whole incident greatly annoyed her husband, who was standing on the beach with nothing to do but wait for the swimmers to come out of the water, hoping against all his fears that no one was drowning.

“I figured the goddamn paddler could sit out there and bounce up and down for as long as he needed to,” the Commander fumed. “The boat was out there for the swimmers.”

Meanwhile, Haller floundered along, his nearsightedness not helping the situation at all. When the boat that had fetched his friend passed him on the way into shore, Haller tried to tell the crew in between gulps of salt water that he would like someone to guide him. “I’m drowning!” he said. They told him he looked great and zoomed off.

“I just wanted someone to get back in the water and guide me,” said Haller. “I had no idea, outside of the general direction of the waves, of where I was supposed to be going. I was in the middle of nowhere – a mile behind me, a mile from the beach, a mile in front of me and three thousand miles in that direction,” Haller pointed west, toward Japan. “Of course, that was the way the wind was blowing. I would have gotten there quicker.”

Finally another swimmer came by with his paddler – a woman who obviously knew what she was doing – and Haller followed them in. He came out of the water well behind, 49 minutes down on the leader, Ian Emberson, 45 down on Warren, 42 on Dunbar. His time for the 2.4 miles was an hour and 51 minutes. It had been an hour and 19 the year before. When he finally staggered up the beach, mildly hypothermic and dizzy, his eyes glassy, there was a mixture of concern and relief on his sponsor Grundman’s face. The good news was that Haller was still alive. The bad news was that he looked as if he might fall down and die right there in the sand.

“Do you want to quit, Gordon?” Grundman asked.

“Hell no,” mumbled Haller. “The hard part’s over.”

The race had been billed as a rematch between the two former Navy men, Dunbar and Haller. They were the only two people who had actually raced the year before, and they had both trained specifically for the event in '79. Having learned a long list of logistical lessons the year before, Dunbar had recruited a sophisticated support crew. The team's yellow VW van was filled with food, water, a spare bike, and four helpers, including Kent Davenport, a local orthopedist.

Now that he was out of the ocean, Haller was in good shape too. The Nautilus Center van was loaded with supplies. Grundman himself was on board to help, along with several of his employees.

"It was like one camp against the other camp," McDermott said. "The Big Confrontation."

Warren, on the other hand, was working with a Honda Civic and a pickup crew, having scrounged both from Grundman, who reluctantly lent two of his employees, but only after extracting a promise to have them back by midnight—whether Warren had finished by that time or not. Warren figured that he was likely to beat the deadline by about five hours, but he didn't tell Grundman that. When the gun went off to start the race, his two helpers were still somewhat skeptical but they had already been impressed by his intelligence and enthusiasm. By the time the bike ride was several hours old, with Warren grinding away into the winds along the north shore, building his lead as the day cleared temporarily and began to get hot, they became true believers, as confident as the man they'd been assigned to, and even more enthusiastic. McDermott called them Warren's "Katzenjammer support crew."

The Oahu bike course was quite different from the present Ironman course on the Big Island, where the Queen K highway is so nasty that foul weather would probably make things easier. The Oahu route was beautiful and green, climbing and falling as it twisted along the rugged coastline, following in a counterclockwise direction the single highway that runs completely around the island. One drawback was that the road is narrow in places, with barely enough room for both a bike and a car moving in the same direction. Dunbar had been run onto the shoulder by local residents twice during the race in '78. Several other competitors had similar experiences. The highway was also exposed in portions, and the terrible weather in '79 made things much worse. Each breathtaking vista along the eastern coastline gave the wind another chance to blow the cyclists completely off the road, which was slick and wet and covered by debris from the storm.

The worst part of the ride, though, was the climb inland from Haleiwa on the north shore, through the pineapple fields along the King Kamehameha Highway. It's a hard pull – a long, five-mile, thousand-foot grade made all the more difficult that day because the wind was blowing in the cyclists' faces.

It was certainly the toughest part of the day for Warren. He slowed for food just outside of Haleiwa and for a moment looked a little rocky. He lost time during this segment because some of the triathletes inadvertently took an alternate, and what turned out to be a more sheltered and thus faster, route, taking the Farrington Highway south instead of the King Kam. It was here that the only woman in the race, a competitive cyclist named Lyn Lemaire, gained a lot of ground. She had already passed an astonished John Dunbar into second place, waving as she went. Now, on a flashy chrome bike, and unlike most of the competitors wearing her own (not borrowed) cycling clothes and cleats, she had her

sights set on first place. By the time the two roads merged nine miles later, she had closed from more than a half hour back to within 20 minutes.

Warren, however, was never even aware of Lemaire's presence. With the long climb over and just 15 miles left to ride, his mind was beginning to change gears, beginning to focus on the marathon. After almost six hours of on-the-job training his makeshift team was working like a clock. Once again, Warren was beating the odds. He had taken a bargain-basement operation and turned it into a gold mine.

"They were perfect," he said of his crew. "They couldn't have been any better."

The Iron Man run on Oahu followed the route of the Honolulu Marathon, a course that accommodates thousands of runners on marathon day, but only because the streets are closed to automobiles. Without road closures, which the Iron Man certainly did not merit, the last event was something of a free-for-all. The runners shared the sidewalks and intersections with Sunday evening traffic, both pedestrian and automotive. That was not unusual, since the route was one that recreational runners normally took through the city. And the traffic was relatively light because of the bad weather. Still, it was confusing to someone who wasn't familiar with Honolulu. And there was certainly no one for Warren to follow, since he'd headed east toward Diamond Head with a 20-minute lead over Lemaire. After seven and a half hours of competition, he needed to deal not just with his fatigue but also with the difficulty of following an unmarked course.

"He didn't know *where* he was going," McDermott laughed. "It was rush-hour traffic in downtown Honolulu – five o'clock in the afternoon, and here's this guy in running shorts and no shirt dodging among the cars. He was running across crosswalks, pushing people out of the way. We're following in a car and he's beating us because we have to stop for stoplights."

Warren never wavered. He didn't flinch from the pace he'd set during the first few miles, although he did begin to tilt a bit. Warren's running style, his tilt, was well known back in San Diego. To this day it's a trademark, like his mustache. He broke his right leg when he was two years old, and it didn't heal cleanly. So he shuffles when he runs, his head and upper body listing farther and farther to the right as he tires, his right foot pointing out. In the heat of competition he looks more like a wounded great blue heron than a marathoner. Unless you know the history, you'd think he was about to collapse and die.

So as Warren ran, the word went out that he wasn't going to make it to the finish line. McDermott, who empathized and had watched the best efforts of the well-equipped Haller and the well-equipped Dunbar fail miserably while Warren's ragtag forces moved on and on, was by this time unabashedly partisan. He threw his journalistic impartiality to the winds and jumped in and ran with Warren.

"The other guys, Dunbar and Haller, had guys running in front of them to break the wind," McDermott said. "I thought it was so unfair. Everybody was rooting for these two guys to beat this poor, misshapen, weird little guy from San Diego. Everyone was predicting his demise, how he was going to collapse. That's why I jumped in and started running with him. It was more out of compassion than anything, to kind of urge him along. It was the most fantastic thing I'd ever seen."

For his part, Warren was weary, ready to end it. He'd been getting word of where Dunbar and Haller were, and then calculating how fast they had to run to catch him. About ten miles from the finish it finally got to the point where he could have walked in and still won. So the challenge faded. And he was a little irritable. A runner not connected with the race whom Warren didn't know, who was concerned, like McDermott, about Warren's condition, had started running with him. "Just don't run in front of me," Warren told him. With a big lead and what looked like a sure win he didn't want anyone to think he hadn't done it by himself.

So the man stayed behind, and other runners joined the first as they moved along the beach. A pack formed, and that frustrated the hell out of Warren's competitive instinct, which after a full day of competition was still racing. His instinct was to surge ahead and drop the whole bunch, or at least to push the pace hard enough so that they'd have to stop talking, but he was just too tired.

Finally it was over. Remembering a promise he'd made to Grundman when he'd borrowed his employees, Warren pulled a Nautilus t-shirt over his head for the big finish. The t-shirt was white, and so from a distance you could see him coming, listing. There was a crowd of perhaps thirty people standing in the rain under the Nautilus banner along Kalakaua Avenue. ("I had no idea *why* they were there," deadpanned McDermott.) They cheered and applauded when Warren crossed. His time was 11:15:56. Despite the terrible weather, he'd broken Haller's record by more than half an hour. He removed the shirt and the sweatband he'd been wearing, then sat for a while in the grass, talking with a reporter. Then he walked across the sand and down to the water by himself, his head low, his hands on his hips.

"Maybe I ought to take a swim," Warren thought. "Maybe a swim would feel good." But he didn't go in. He just stood there calf-deep in the water for a while.

McDermott: "He's such a... I don't know if egotist is the word, but he's so strong-minded he didn't want to fall over or collapse. It was important for him to stand up and look as good as he could. When the other guys crossed he wanted to be standing there fresh."

Another time that might have been true, for it was like Warren. This time, though, all he wanted was to get a shower, find something to eat, and drink a beer, as many beers as he could. It had been a long day. "I felt kind of empty," Warren said, as if he'd beaten his family at Monopoly or something. Winning was terrific, *having* won was a bummer. But he knew he should stay, for the sake of sportsmanship, at least until second place arrived.

He waited 45 minutes, getting bored. The second finisher finally appeared. It was Dunbar. He was in pain, a too-hard bike ride having once again taken everything but the SEAL out of his legs. He was humbled, no longer a superman. Before they wrapped him in a blanket and carted him away, Warren asked him if he might be interested in going bar-hopping. At least Dunbar, who was dazed at the time and unable to respond, remembered it that way. So did McDermott. Warren, who has an accurate memory, doesn't. He was uncomfortable talking about the scene, as if he'd kind of removed it from his mind. Besides, Dunbar hadn't impressed him that much. Of all the people on the beach that morning, Warren had thought less of Dunbar's Superman outfit than anyone. To him it was a sign that Dunbar

could be beaten. "It's like a boxer who smiles at you when he gets hit," Warren said. "Like maybe you should see how many times you can hit him to see how long you can keep him smiling?"

In any case, Warren didn't feel a need to say too much. He wasn't happy with the idea that he might have rubbed his victory in, even a little. "See," he said with that sly grin, "after I win a race, I really don't have a whole lot to prove, do I?"

He didn't. After Haller finished, in fourth place, then Lemaire in fifth, surviving a courageous cramp-filled marathon that had taken her an agonizing five hours and ten minutes, Warren hitched a ride with McDermott over to the Nautilus Center on King Street, where he and the writer and Haller sat in a Jacuzzi for a couple of hours and talked. Finally, McDermott, convinced that neither man was going to admit to the other that he was ready to go off to bed, suggested they call it a night. So they stepped outside and he watched Warren wander off into the night, "cursed to win so that he would not lose, the bright-eyed Mariner, all alone," McDermott wrote.

But not alone for long. Though neither man could know it, the warm, gentle rain that Warren walked through on the way back to his hotel was just the calm before another storm. Beneath the hissing sound of passing traffic on the shiny wet streets of Honolulu was the distant whirring of well-oiled chains and the thinner hiss of thinner tires. A new sport had been born. The high-tech Super Jocks were coming.