

Aussies repeat at Copenhagen

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COPENHAGEN, Denmark -- Tim Berkel and Rebekah Keat defended their 2010 titles at Challenge Copenhagen Sunday with very different degrees of difficulty.

Berkel had to overcome Bjorn Andersson's big lead after the bike, his own hotly disputed penalty for drafting, a late race mini-bonk and the red hot runs of Denmark's Jimmy Johnsen (2:44:01), Croatia's Dejan Patricevic (2:44:00) and Denmark's Iron newcomer Mads Vittrup-Pedersen (a sensational 2:38:59!).

By the finish, the 27-year-old Australian recouped his energy to surge in the last two kilometers for a defensive 2:46:16 marathon, an 8:11:15 finish and a 35-seconds margin of victory over Johnsen. With all his ups and downs, Berkel's effort was 3:36 slower than last year's far smoother victory. If not for his 4-minute penalty, he would have topped his 2010 course record by 24 seconds.

"I had Jimmy and Dejan breathing down my neck, so I got my nutrition and water in and I think Jimmy had worked hard to catch me," said Berkel. "I managed to pull away towards the end but that last 8 km is something you don't wanna do in an iron distance race."

Keat, on the other hand, combined a 49:33 swim that outpaced her fellow podium finishers by 14 and 12 minutes respectively, a 4:54:41 bike that added 12 and 19 minutes to her big lead, and a 3:05:02 marathon that piled on 16 and 17 minutes.

The Men

Berkel almost lost his composure with the drafting call which was ordered served by a race marshal as the 27-year-old Australian was a mile into the run. "When I got the penalty I thought my day was over," said Berkel. "I was so angry and frustrated, I ran out hard and I just told myself to calm down because I know I am one of the best runners in the field."

Once he settled down, Berkel said "I ran really hard and then got tired and Jimmy caught me with about 8k to go. I think I used up a lot of adrenaline with all the drama. So Jimmy and I ran together and passed one another for the next 6k. Then I just put it on the line and gave it everything I had and managed to get away with 2k to go."

Johnsen was exhausted and exhilarated in equal measure after his close second place finish - his next best result after a win at Challenge Barcelona last October. "I started the run about 5th place and I was feeling pretty good," he said. "Then Tim served his penalty, went out hard and got tired about 30k and I came up with about 8k to go. We both tried to get away from each other and it was a great duel. We were just running faster and faster, shoulder by shoulder for about 6k. And then he put in a good effort and I could not answer. My quads just shut down."



Dejan Patricevic from Zagreb, Croatia, is 35 and has been doing triathlons for a decade. In 2002 he placed 10th at an European Cup in Belgrade, and placed 19th at an ITU World Cup in Rio de Janeiro and took 19th at the 2007 ITU European Cup. More recently, he was 7th at the 2010 ITU long distance race in Ibiza. But his best performances have come in the Ironman as he placed 24th in his Ironman Hawaii debut in 2008 -- two places and one minute back of Marino Vanhoenacker - capped off by a 2:50:58 marathon. After Sunday's close third place finish, Patricevic should also be known for the all-around excellence of his 49:32 swim, 4:34:47 bike and second-best 2:44:00 run.

Patricevic says he was not worried about Andersson's big lead off the bike. "Andersson is crazy," said Patricevic with Croatian candor. "I will ask him what he is training for marathon? I think this guy is running only once a week."

Perhaps the biggest splash outside the podium was made by near rookie Mads Vittrup-Pedersen, 27, of Horsens Denmark, who notched a great Ironman marathon of 2:38:59 in just his third Ironman distance effort to take 4th place. None other than the now-retired Danish great Ironman Torbjorn Sindballe had touted Vittrup-Pedersen before the weekend, noting that Mads had run sub-three hour marathons in his first two Ironman races in Nice, where he finished 22nd, and Kona, where he placed 42nd.

"This guy is someone to watch," said Sindballe.

Indeed he was, but there was little or nothing in his background before triathlon to base this hunch on except genetics and a coach. "I did not compete in University," said Vittrup-Pedersen. "Never. And I have only been doing triathlon for three years now. But I have one of the best coaches in the world. Tommy Nilsen is one of the great Ironman competitors from Denmark and he knows how to get you to run right."

Sweden's Bjorn Andersson gave another bravura kamikaze bike performance, setting a course record 4:19:47 for the two-loop course that runs north up the coast and back to Copenhagen via curvy roads on cozy farmland. That bike split was 15:43 faster than Stephen Bayliss, the fastest of the chasers. That difference accounted for almost all of Andersson's advantage at T2, as he trailed Bayliss by just a few seconds after the swim.

Andersson then held on to the his lead for halfway through the run before pulling out in exhaustion.

Other top competitors who went hard but faltered with troubles included Great Britain's Stephen Bayliss and last year's runner-up Keegan Williams.

Bayliss looked strong throughout the bike and was the closest to Andersson starting the run. But Bayliss had to serve a drafting penalty he also hotly disputed. "I don't mind getting a penalty when it is my fault," he said. "But I was trailing a group of riders who almost came to a stop at one corner. Everybody bunched up temporarily rounding the corner, and that is where the marshal pulled me for drafting."

Bayliss's race really turned south due to nutritional woes -- "I didn't eat enough for the first half of the bike, then I ate too much" -- and he finished 8th after a sub-par 3:07:13 marathon. "It was my fault about the eating," said Bayliss. "Which is too bad - I was in great shape."

Keegan Williams also suffered a bike penalty and basically bonked and fell out of contention on the run.



The Women

Keat gave major credit to fellow Team TBB teammate and 2010 Ironman 70.3 World Champion Jodie Swallow, who pushed Keat on the swim and bike and hit T2 with her teammate.

"I really have to thank Jodie," said Keat. "She did all the work on the bike. I went to the front a couple of times, but she didn't want to share the work. So the bike wouldn't have been here without Jodie. She rode absolutely amazing."

Keat anticipated that Swallow would not be there at the end because of a stubborn foot injury she has been battling since Swallow was forced to pull out of Ironman St. George with a 15 minute lead off the bike.

"I knew she couldn't run because of her foot," said Keat. "I would have been scared if she did. She would have been with me on the run to the end if she wasn't injured. So I am probably lucky she couldn't finish today."

Swallow gave it a try, but had to pull out 2 kilometers into the run with her chronic plantar fasciitis injury.

At the end, Keat's 8:52:42 finish gave her a 42:51 margin over runner-up Asa Lundstrom, a Swedish native living in Denmark, and another 2:44 ahead of third place Linda Schuecker of Germany.

"Despite my big lead late in the run I'm not the type that's backing off," said Keat. "It's not in me, and I always run as hard as I can. I wasn't happy with my last two 3:13-ish marathons, so I wanted to show I could run fast. I'm happy about my marathon performance today but would love to crack three hours again."

Runner-up Asa Lundstrom, a two-year triathlete from rural Sweden who is halfway to her medical degree in Denmark, was ecstatic.

"I can't believe it!" she said at the finish. "I still don't believe it. It is amazing. Unreal."

Lundstrom is 27 and in addition to long hours devoted to her medical studies she managed a 10th at the Half Challenge in Kraichgau and 7th at the recent Half Challenge in Aarhus, Denmark.

Last year in her first Ironman-distance event in Sweden, Lundstrom was an hour slower than her 9:35:31 finish at Copenhagen.

So where did all this talent come from?

"I don't know," she said. "I played some soccer and did some casual everyday workouts in the gym."

While her natural talent is evident, Lundstrom's long hours in medical studies definitely limit her training. She struggled to hold off Germany's Linda Schuecker by 2:44 at the end.

"I got updates from friends and family where I stood," said Lundstrom. "I thought my competitors would catch me any minute. I lost some time the last 3k and I had to dig real deep to get to the finish."

Does she have more triathlon ambitions?

"I do now," she said.
Challenge Copenhagen
Copenhagen, Denmark
August 14, 2011
S 2.4 mi. / B 112 mi. / R 26.2 mi.

Results

Overall Men

1. Tim Berkel (AUS) 8:11:15
2. Jimmy Johnsen (DEN) 8:11:50
3. Dejan Patricevic (CRO) 8:12:18
4. Mads Vittrup-Pedersen (DEN) 8:13:21
5. Esben Hovgaard (DEN) 8:21:07
6. Egoitz Zalakain Erbiti (ESP) 8:26:52
7. Christophe Bastie (FRA) 8:27:32
8. Stephen Bayliss (GBR) 8:34:52
9. Hans D. Nillson (DEN) 8:36:18
10. Frank Horlacher (GER) 8:39:37 *M40-44

Overall Women

1. Rebekah Keat (AUS) 8:52:42
2. Asa Lundstrom (DEN) 9:35:31
3. Linda Schuecker (GER) 9:38:15
4. Karina Ottesen (DEN) 9:42:59
5. Helene Pallesen (DEN) 9:45:54
6. Julia Bohn (GER) 9:46:15
7. Ann Sophie Claire Lonborg (DEN) 9:55:08
8. Liz Pinches (GBR) 10:17:44 * W35-39
9. Lillian Lilliso (DEN) 10:18:55 *W30-34
10. Lillan Sindahl Gluemer (DEN) 10:24:27 *W35-39