



CHRISSIE WELLINGTON AFTER WINNING HER SECOND IRONMAN WORLD TITLE IN 2008.

p. 23/→ she has yet to lose any Ironman-distance event. That's three times in a row in Kona, two times in Australia and two times in Germany. In Kona this past October, she broke Paula Newby-Fraser's 17-year-old course record and went 8:54:02. At the Quelle Challenge in Roth, Germany, she took nearly 14 minutes off the existing course record and went 8:31:59, the fastest time ever for a woman at an Ironman-distance race.

Her rise to the top of the sport has been meteoric to say the least. At her first triathlon in England, she borrowed a wetsuit and a bike and rode in running shoes. Her shoelaces came undone during the ride and wrapped around the crank as she came into transition. Wellington fell over sideways before getting up and starting the run. "That was a pretty impressive first race, don't you think?" she asks. At her second race, she invited her parents to watch her compete in England's national sprint championship. She again borrowed a wetsuit, one she had never tried on before race day.

Big mistake.

"It was a schoolgirl error," Wellington admits. "The water was really cold and when I jumped in, the wetsuit flooded and I froze. I had to be saved by a kayaker. That was an auspicious start to my career."

Her coach, Brett Sutton, saw something in Wellington before she did. It was her ability to push hard and suffer for long periods of time. Hmm. What event would those qualities connect well to?

Bingo. Sutton sent her to Ironman Korea and the rest, as they say, is history.

The first time she won Kona, in 2007, very few triathlon journalists had even heard of her. When she met Dave Scott, Mark Allen and Paula Newby-Fraser after the race, she had no idea who those legends of Ironman were.

But Chrissie Wellington is a quick study—and she has realized that not only does she have a talent for going long, but she can also

"Everyone knew Chrissie was a special talent, but after she ran with us for the better part of the next mile, I realized just how special"  
—Chris McCormack

use that talent to impact others.

"When I first started working with Coach Sutton in February of 2007," she says, "I told him I didn't know how long I could stay in this sport because it feels so self-indulgent to be out running, riding and swimming every day. He told me that I can use triathlon to make a difference, that the more I achieve in it, the more I can achieve outside of it. I want my legacy to be more than fast times and records. I want to educate and empower people—especially women—through what I accomplish in triathlon."

And she has. She supports a group called [gotribal.com](http://gotribal.com) that helps women get the tools they need to give fitness a chance. She has also used her platform as an athlete to create exposure for the Blazeman Foundation, a non-profit that raises awareness and research funds for ALS. "When I first won the Ironman World Championship, I didn't understand the significance of the event and the win," Wellington says. "I do now."

It was in Nepal, trying to make a difference by working for Rural Reconstruction Nepal, where she met Billi Bierling—a kindred spirit and her soon-to-be BFF. The two would get up early and go for morning mountain bike rides that tested both of them. "In Nepal, the trails are washed away and you have potholes that you and your bike can disappear in," says Bierling. "Because the water quality was so bad, we spent a lot of time standing over our handlebars with our stomachs cramping from having parasites in our bellies. Chrissie feels that the cycling there made her strong because of the altitude, the nasty trails and the fact that most of the time we'd be riding despite being sick as a dog."

In 2005 the two did a 1,000K mountain bike ride to the Mt. Everest Base Camp. "A lot of that was more of a mountain bike push than a mountain bike ride," says Bierling. "It was bloody tough!"

Bierling knows a little bit about tough. The woman reached the summit of Mt. Everest in May of 2009 and was part of Seb and Tina's honeymoon adventure last winter. She is asked to sum up her friend, to analyze why Chrissie Wellington has taken the sport of triathlon by storm and destroyed every record and every athlete standing in her way, all with a smile on her face. "What makes Chrissie so successful," Bierling answers, "is that her physical strength is out of this world and her mental strength and ambition have never changed. At the end of the day, she is still the same woman who I rode the Kathmandu Valley with."

"Chrissie told me once that these adventures that we go on make any race seem so much easier—because in a race, you know what you're doing and what you have in front of you. But when you're out in the wild, you never really know what might be awaiting you." **CM**

Listen to interviews with Chrissie at [competitorradio.com](http://competitorradio.com).