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John's Epic Battle with the Nun

Another post from the back of the pack by John Lierle

As the 2006 version of the Soma ½ Ironman nears, I was thinking back to the 2004 race where, at age 46, I not only finished my first ½ Ironman but also went toe-to-toe in an epic battle with one of the legends of triathlon.

It was Wednesday morning of race week and I was luxuriating in my pre-race taper sitting on the sofa with a strong cup of Starbucks and reading the Wednesday Arizona Republic. This was a real treat since virtually every morning for the past 6 months I was out the door by 5 am training for my first ½ Ironman distance race. As I looked through the sports page I noticed an article about the upcoming race that featured a story on Sister Madonna Buder. I recounted the article to my wife. Sister Madonna Buder was racing in the same race I was doing that weekend. I had read about this lady in the triathlon magazines. She was a legend in the sport. She entered triathlon late in life, was chastised by some of her fellow nuns because they did not think it was appropriate for a nun to be running around town in a Speedo. And she had set countless age group records at virtually every race distance. This would be sooo cool. I was racing with a legend.

When Sunday morning arrived, my family unit actually came down to the race venue to see dear old dad race in a triathlon. This was a first for my family unit as they usually have other extremely important duties to attend to while I am racing. Sleeping in, going out for breakfast, having a root canal, even cleaning their room seems to take on added importance on race day. I don't mean to sound like my family unit is not supportive or anything *BUT* even when I take them on vacation to a triathlon destination they seem to find an excuse not to get up at 4:00am to cheer their favorite triathlete on to victory. OK, so there has never been anything close to a victory and never will be, but you get my drift. I pay the bills. I slave away all day to provide the family unit with things they take for granted. I drive them to and from school (OK, my wife does most of that). You would think the *least* I could expect would be a little encouragement and support from planet home RIGHT!but I digress.

When I entered the transition area to set up for the race, there she was. Sister Madonna, the 75-year-old-triathlete-nun and wearing running shorts with pumpkins. Classic! The race itself went as well as I could have expected. All the training I had done paid off and not only did I beat my time objective but really felt good and strong for all but the last 4 miles of the run (so what else is new?).

As I made the final turn to the finish I heard none other than Paula Newby-Fraser announce my name as I crossed the finish line. "Our next finisher from Scottsdale Arizona, JOHN LIERLE!" Yessss, I had done it! The family unit was there in the stands cheering for me and followed me to the transition area where, while stretching, I heard Paula's voice again. "And our next finisher, Sister Madonna Buder". I turned to my wife with a victorious smirk on my face and proudly announced, "Well, at least I beat

the 75 year old nun.” No sooner had I uttered those words than I thought to myself “Hey...those ladies started five minutes AFTER my wave.” DOOH!

After frantically looking for the official results on the race web site for two days, I finally discovered that Sister Madonna, the 75-year-old-triathlete-nun, had, in fact, beaten me by 40 seconds. 40 SECONDS! Now in this sport, I have been beaten by men, and I have been beaten by women. I have been beaten by people younger than me and I have been beaten by senior citizens, but I have never *ever* been beaten by a nun! And my father is an Episcopal priest for crying out loud. You would think that contact alone with the Almighty would be good enough for at least 40 seconds. Right? Anyway, this experience is just another reason why I love this sport. Yeah I got beat by a 75 year old nun, but who cares.maybe I'll wait until she turns 80 and demand a grudge rematch.