

Tim DeBoom. But Hurricane Ivan in 2003, a bike accident in 2004 and last year's rainout prevented Bonnet-Eymard from vying for the crown. But other victories made this 35-year-old pathologist's assistant from Florida a favorite for this year's win—his second overall last October at the ITU age-group world championship in Honolulu, two dominating age-group wins at St. Anthony's and a recent sixth overall against top pros at the Blackwater Eagleman half-Ironman.

Despite the odds, a hard-earned prudence tempered Bonnet-Eymard's race-day charge. Back in 2001, the former Tufts University NCAA swimmer took a running leap off a dock and over a kayak into the Tomoka River Basin in Florida. "It was a stupid stunt, and I landed in shallow water and the femur came down and shattered my tibial plateau," he recalled. "It was a time in my life when I was trying to prove something to myself and didn't think about the consequences." He wound up in a wheelchair with 11 screws in his leg—and plenty of time to think.

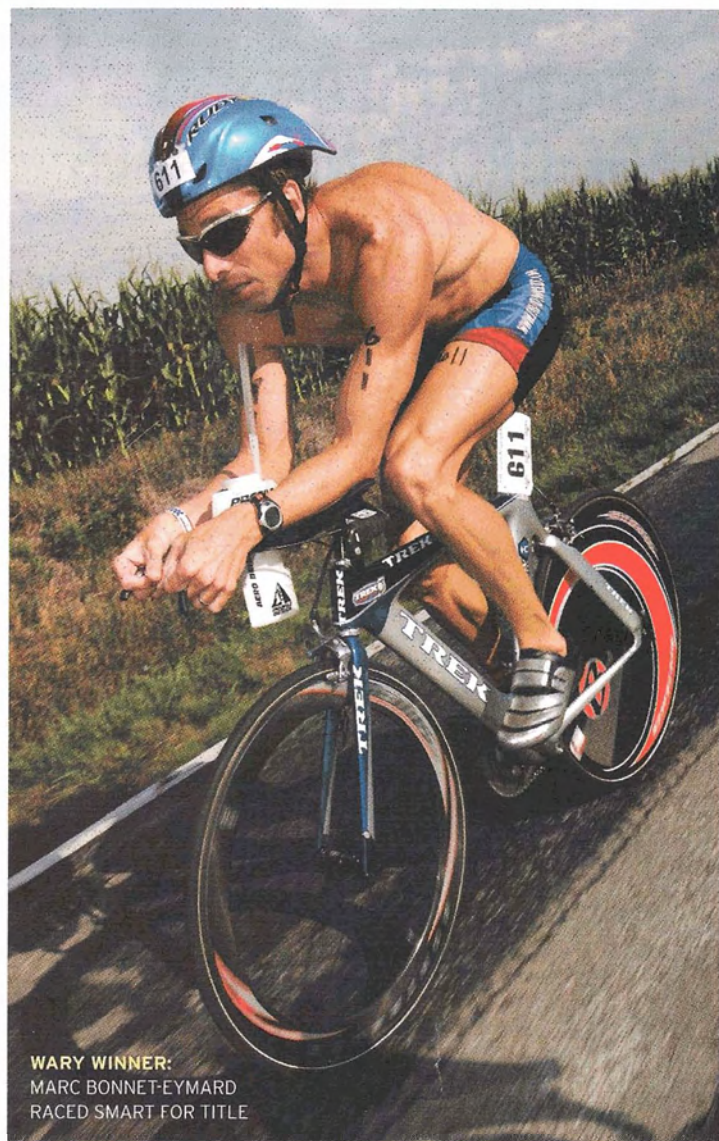
Ironically, he said, he wouldn't be in triathlon now if not for the accident. "My competitive instincts were reawakened and I was determined to be 100 percent again and not to take my athletic abilities for granted," he recalled of the days he was in rehab for the injury, mentally down in the dumps and worried that he would walk with a permanent limp. When a friend challenged the bed-ridden Bonnet-Eymard to do a triathlon, he incorporated swimming and biking into his recovery and started working his lungs for the first time in eight years. Half a year after the accident and still unable to run, he signed up to do a triathlon relay with a colleague at Orlando Regional Health Center in Clermont, Florida. "Amy ran the final leg," Bonnet-Eymard added with a big smile. Now, he's married to his relay partner, Amy, and they're expecting their first child.

After years of filling his triathlon databank with wisdom from top Orlando-area triathletes like Alec Rukosuev, Jeff Cuddeback and Marty Gaal, things seemed to be going smoothly for Bonnet-Eymard. But on the flight to Kansas City this July, wife Amy was clearly in distress. "We went to see a high-risk obstetrician at the hospital for four hours the night before the race," said Bonnet-Eymard. "But when we heard that everything was fine, that the baby was fine, I said to myself, 'People better watch out because I am just going to let loose tomorrow.'"

THE TOP STEEDS—AND A DARK HORSE

Before the race, Bonnet-Eymard had carefully scouted his contenders. They included Chris Martin, last year's Best of the U.S. champion; J.J. Bailey, the top amateur at the Los Angeles Triathlon; Colorado's Craig Greenslit and Oklahoma's Greg Rouault. But one dark horse had flown in under his radar. While Bonnet-Eymard had just four years of triathlon under his belt, the unknown Ben Collins, a 23-year-old former NCAA swimmer from Columbia University, had done just four triathlons. Collins lives in Haleiwa, Hawaii, and his day job at the University of Hawaii is designing a deep-sea robot that can pick up items from the ocean floor. Collins won a few local races but had no idea how his 3:51 PR in the 200-meter individual medley and 10 to 15 hours of triathlon training per week would translate to his new sport.

Collins shouldn't have wondered: He rocketed through the swim in a second-best time of 18:51 and charged onto the bike alone in his wave. At age-group nationals, separate and randomly assigned wave starts leave competitors largely in the dark about overall placement until the race is over. Lucky for Collins, his 20-24 men's wave was paired with the 30-34 men's wave, and, 20 miles into the bike, he had J.J. Bailey, the 31-year-old Category 1 cyclist and veteran road racer from Des Moines, Iowa, come charging up after a slow swim. Bailey, a close friend and sometime training partner of second-year pro and 2004 USAT age-group national champion



WARY WINNER:
MARC BONNET-EYMARD
RACED SMART FOR TITLE

T.J. Tollakson, shifted into fifth gear when he saw prey on the horizon. "When I saw Ben, I spent the last five miles catching him and ended up with the fastest bike split," Bailey said of his 58:38 ride. As Collins and Bailey ran out of T2 together with the clock at 1:20 elapsed time, Bonnet-Eymard, whose wave started 20 minutes after the two, was completing a well-balanced 19:18 swim and 59:58 bike that put him in place to leave T2 in a virtual three-way tie for the overall win.

For Bailey, a full-time project manager for a biogenetic company who is reluctant to turn pro because he "doesn't want to embrace the pauper lifestyle," the competition with Collins was ultimately too tough, especially given the run's demanding hills. "We ran together for two and a half miles, but I had to let him go or I would blow up," said Bailey, who closed with a 38:33 10km—70 seconds short of Collins but good enough to hold off fast-closing 30-34 runner-up Mark Harms of Madison, Wisconsin, by 73 seconds.

Collins was on cloud nine. "I'm ecstatic," he said, looking dazed after a closing 37:23 run gave him second overall and a win in the 20-24 age group. The Ivy Leaguer next graduated to the IV league, receiving a liberal dose of intravenous fluids. "I love everything about this sport," said Collins, who is eager to try ITU-style draft-legal racing. "It's quite a trip to go from swimming, where you wait around all day to race for five minutes, to a two-hour test where you go through every emotion, from joy to sadness, fear to exultation."

Bonnet-Eymard crossed the line minutes later, and his carefully

USA TRIATHLON AGE-GROUP NATIONALS

SMITHVILLE, MISSOURI
SATURDAY, JULY 8, 2006
S 1.5KM/B 40KM/R 10KM

Your logo could be here.

OVERALL MEN

1. Marc Bonnet-Eymard (Winter Garden, FL) 1:57:10
2. Ben Collins (Haleiwa, HI) 1:58:40
3. J.J. Bailey (Des Moines, IA) 1:59:50
4. Mark Harms (Madison, WI) 2:01:03
5. Scott Myers (Wellston, OH) 2:01:30
6. Craig Greenslit (Berthoud, CO) 2:01:34
7. Christopher Martin (Lawrenceville, NJ) 2:01:38
8. Greg Rouault (Broken Arrow, OK) 2:02:06
9. Jason Schott (Atlanta, GA) 2:02:24
10. Adam Webber (Lebanon, PA) 2:02:26

MEN'S AGE-GROUP DIVISIONS

- 18-19: 1. Javier Beuzeville (Tampa, FL) 2:04:05; 2. Daniel Agnew (Edmond, OK) 2:08:07; 3. Michael Williams (Maple Grove, MN) 2:11:52
- 20-24: 1. Ben Collins (Haleiwa, HI) 1:58:40; 2. Richard Swor (Dearborn, MI) 2:02:42; 3. Joshua Shadle (Boulder, CO) 2:03:54
- 25-29: 1. Greg Rouault (Broken Arrow, OK) 2:02:06; 2. Adam Webber (Lebanon, PA) 2:02:26; 3. Chuck Sloan (Oklahoma City, OK) 2:03:21
- 30-34: 1. J.J. Bailey (Des Moines, IA) 1:59:50; 2. Mark Harms (Madison, WI) 2:01:03; 3. Scott Myers (Wellston, OH) 2:01:30
- 35-39: 1. Marc Bonnet-Eymard (Winter Garden, FL) 1:57:10; 2. Craig Greenslit (Berthoud, CO) 2:01:34; 3. Jason Schott (Atlanta, GA) 2:02:24
- 40-44: 1. Brian Bich (Duluth, MN) 2:02:36; 2. Donny Forsyth (Memphis, TN) 2:06:06; 3. Ahmed Zaher (Dallas, TX) 2:06:37
- 45-49: 1. Kyle Welch (Sunnyvale, CA) 2:07:06; 2. Jay Marshall (Billings, MT) 2:07:23; 3. Dave Irion (Naperville, IL) 2:07:23
- 50-54: 1. Curt Eggers (Henrietta, NY) 2:11:42; 2. Kim McDonald (Del Mar, CA) 2:14:38; 3. Douglas Hill (Tacoma, WA) 2:17:23
- 55-59: 1. Steven Smith (Granger, IN) 2:16:14; 2. Tim Kerr (Charlotte, NC) 2:20:41; 3. Larry Krutka (Tulsa, OK) 2:23:59
- 60-64: 1. David Roadhouse (Wilmette, IL) 2:22:13; 2. Tom Dutton (Livonia, NY) 2:24:16; 3. Dave Winfield (Vero Beach, FL) 2:26:49
- 65-69: 1. George Toberman (Malibu, CA) 2:34:06; 2. Patrick Wickens (Redondo Beach, CA) 2:35:24; 3. Jon Adamson (Alpharetta, GA) 2:38:56
- 70-74: 1. Craig Kuglen (Austin, TX) 3:07:23; 2. Roger Brockenbrough (Pittsburgh, PA) 3:11:48; 3. William Perloff (Baileys



SILVER MEDALISTS: BEN COLLINS AND WENDY MADER



BRONZE MEDALISTS: J.J. BAILEY AND MICHELLE LEBLANC

award went to 60-64 winner David Roadhouse of Wilmette, Illinois, accompanying his two-minute margin over runner-up Tom Dutton of Livonia, New York. Roadhouse, last year's 60-64 world champion, was third out of the water and was able to pull into the lead just one mile into the bike. "One of my goals was to have fun, and I had to remind myself of that, because I was working really hard in every leg," said Roadhouse, a psychologist.

Dueling to the bitter end, Ken Nash of San Jose, California, eked out a 16-second victory over Winston Allen of St. Augustine, Florida, to win the men's 75-79 crown in 3:26:33. But no one had a more impressive performance than Charlie Futrell of The Villages, Florida, who won the 85-89 title with a stellar 5:03:16 finish.

In addition to the first three overall finishers, standout women's performances included St. Louis, Missouri's Jillian Petersen's 2:16:45 finish to win 20-24 by seven minutes. Shannon Donley carved a slim 19-second margin of victory over runner-up Jeannie Samson to take the women's 35-39 in 2:18:15. Holly Nybo battled for a seven-second margin over runner-up Cassie McWilliam to win 40-44 (and take fifth overall) in a swift 2:16:08. Perhaps the best age-graded performance was Laura Sophia's 80-84 winning time of 2:21:59. Sophia credits her stunning 1:08:15 bike split to an enjoyable 500-mile training week as part of the famed Ride the Rockies in Colorado. Trish Kimper of Solana Beach, California, took home the grandmaster and 60-64 women's titles with a 2:50:37 clocking. Lexington, Kentucky's Susan Bradley-Cox took another national title with an impressive 2:59:40 finish time in 65-69, and Pat Fossum of Montgomery, Alabama, won 70-74 in 3:31:54. And rounding out the women's winners was Peggy Gudbrandsen, who won 75-79 in 5:13:15. ■