



BY NOEL MCMAHON, PHOTOGRAPHY BY DELLY CARR

Siri Lindley, On top of the World

It is hard to believe, but the best thing that ever happened to Siri Lindley's career was not making the USA Olympic Triathlon Team, and despite the devastation and upheaval it caused her at the time, the current ITU World Champion wouldn't have it any other way.

"Not making the Olympics was the most devastating thing in my career but also the biggest blessing in disguise. Had I made the USA Olympic team for Sydney I would never have changed anything because, when you make a team like that, you think you are on track.

"Not making the team caused me to make a drastic change. It was my last hope, I had try something different or give it up."

Enter svengali Brett Sutton and a training regime Lindley describes 'as the hardest thing you will ever do in your life'.

"Training with Brett's squad was a real shock - it is tough. But as each day went by and I was getting stronger and faster, that led to my becoming more confident; just believing in myself and knowing that I was stronger. It gave me the inner confidence to enable me to reach that next level," Lindley said.

That "next level" consisted of the 2001 triathlon season that saw Lindley collect five ITU World Cup wins, an Aquathlon World Championship and then back-up within a week to win the Triathlon World Crown.

Eight years ago, if you had suggested any of this to the former US National level hockey and lacrosse player, who moonlighted as an aerobics

instructor, you would have been laughed at. Lindley couldn't swim and her total biking experience was limited to toddling around on a kid's 'banana bike'; not exactly great credentials for a budding world triathlon champion.

Dreams do come true in triathlon and the ever-smiling Lindley is now a worthy world champion, embodying all that is good about our sport...a hard worker, determined and courageous. With Siri you get the extra bonus of a good sense of both humour and sportsmanship.

Lindley's fairytale story began in Greenwich, Connecticut, the good ol' USA where she got a taste for sport at an early age, indulging herself in the crash and bash of ice and field hockey and lacrosse.

Graduating high school, she attend Ivy League college, Browns University, Rhode Island, studying psychology and playing NCAA level Lacrosse, coaching for a few years before trying out for the USA National Lacrosse team.

Lacrosse was Siri's total passion; she just loved it. Devastated when she didn't make the final cut on the national team (there is a common theme here) she was looking for a new outlet for her talents.

But lacrosse's loss was to be triathlon's gain, when a friend invited her to come along to a race and watch.

"I didn't have a clue what triathlon was but I went to the race and thought it was awesome and so much fun.

"My friend asked me to do some training with

her and that was a disaster. I got in the pool and looked like a human whirlpool. I knew the basics but had never really swum. I could save myself, I could float and I could swim out to the dock at the beach but had no swimming or cycling history. My only background was running up and down a field, which I had done quite a lot of," she recalled.

Lindley did her first triathlon in 1993, but fearing she would make a fool of herself, she traveled from her home in Massachusetts out to a sprint race in Anglewood, Colorado on the pretence of visiting her mum.

"I was hiding, I wanted to do it way far away from anyone. The swim was in the pool and before the race they asked me what my 100m split was. I said 1:20, and I was swimming more like two minutes. So I got in my 1:20 lane and got destroyed...swum over a hundred times. It was a horrible experience.

"I had rented a bike from the shop down the street which weighed a 100 pounds and had a 10 speed. I struggled on that, got onto the run and took off as if I was chasing after a loose ball on a lacrosse field ...100 mph. I went like that for as long as I could and then had this massive hyperventilation. I stopped and I sprinted and then stopped. That was how I did the whole race.

"It was a blast, I was faced with so many challenges on that day. In my head I was saying 'I am so bad' but just imagine how great it would be if I started learning and put a lot of effort into this sport," she said.

In 1994, with her goal 'to do a race without being totally embarrassed', Lindley started putting in time before work and during lunch hours, desperately trying to improve her skills and get in shape for age group qualifiers for the ITU Worlds in Wellington.

The top 12 places qualified for NZ and Lindley came in thirteenth. But as fate would have it, a late withdrawal had her on the plane bound for the Land of the Long White Cloud.

"I actually started training because I wanted to do the best that I could. Again my motivation was that everyone would be looking at me thinking why is she here. 'She wasn't good enough, she didn't qualify'. I was really determined to prove to everyone, for some reason that was important at that time, that I was there as an okay athlete."

Siri came seventh in her age group, which at the time, was "the best thing in the world" and she went home more pumped up than ever.

Siri's mum knew that she was getting into triathlon and with wisdom only a mother can possess, she called up and asked her daughter to spend a week in Colorado. The sales pitch

was that it was summer time and the mountains were beautiful, but deep down mum had another agenda.

"The first thing she said was 'Oh I just have to stop in Boulder', she went the long way around where you pass the big reservoir and see all the running trails with people out running and biking. I was looking around thinking this is pretty amazing out here and she knew that it would get my interest going.

"We drove back to Vail where mum lived and I went out on the golf course and went for a run and tripped and fell. There was a group of people getting their picture taken and this woman walked over and asked me if I was okay and helped me up. Somehow we got onto how I was just starting in triathlon. She said she was a triathlon coach and she lived in Boulder.

"Everything was just falling into place and this woman ended up being my first triathlon coach, Yoli Casas. She hooked me up with a wonderful lady who ended up renting me a room and I moved to Colorado two weeks later," Lindley said.

The fickle finger of fate had intervened and Lindley was now hell bent on being a triathlete.

RIGHT: Siri Lindley playing with the Aussie lifesavers. BELOW: 2001 "Victory" at the World Championships in Edmonton, CANADA.

In 1995, at the Worlds in Cancun, Lindley came in third in her age group and US champ Karen Smyers suggested she turn pro.

"Originally I said I would turn pro when I won a world championship in my age group, national championship and all these crazy things you just can't count on happening. Not that I was good enough but Karen said it would be the best thing for me because it would raise my standard because I would be racing better people. So she convinced me, and the next year I turned pro."

Lindley's first pro race was in 1996 in Chile and a nerve-racking experience for a seasoned athlete, let alone a rookie pro.



"I was dating Wes Hobson of the US, who had been given an invitation to race in Chile and he couldn't go because he got sick. Wes convinced the organizers that they should use his ticket for me, so they flew me down and put me up in this house for a week with Mark Allen and Mike Pigg and I thought 'Oh my god I do not belong here'.

"I was this total loser triathlete that hadn't done a thing and here I was in the company of all these greats. Surprisingly I won that race and that was my first pro win. But there was nobody there," she said with a smile.

Siri's first Worlds as a pro was Cleveland where she came in 32nd, the same year as her 'first and worst' World Cup race in Bermuda finishing 16th. Next year, 1997, she was 22nd at the Worlds in Perth, and had a 12th place in the World Cup race in Cancun.

With a 7th at the Auckland World Cup and 15th at the Worlds in Lausanne in '98 and three top ten ITU World Cup results in 1999, Lindley was always thereabouts but she needed

something to lift her to the next level in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics.

"I had tons of fourth place finishes which I was thrilled with but I thought what am I missing? Why am I always fourth and knocking on the door? I needed the added fitness and the added confidence. To accomplish great things you have to believe in yourself, not whether other people believed in you. I had a zillion people who believed in me but I really didn't believe in myself."

The Aussie F1 series had done wonderful things for athletes like Lindquist, Harrop and Hackett so Lindley decided to base herself in Cronulla for six months in preparation for the Sydney Games.

"At that time the Olympics was everything to me, a do or die situation. I just wanted it more than anything in the world."

But in what seemed a cruel twist of fate, the Olympic show went on without her, causing a devastated Siri had to make some big decisions.

"Loretta (Harrop) and I were friends during the F1 and she wrote to me and saying how upset she was that I didn't make the team and she offered to let me train with her. She said she was working with an unbelievable group and it would be the hardest training I would do in my life. But she said I would improve so much that I could prove to the USA that I should have been on the Olympic team.

"Initially I thought no way, then three second later I thought, this is happening for a reason. I couldn't let the opportunity slip by me, so I called her back and told her I was coming."

A week later Siri went to Switzerland to join Brett Sutton's squad to train with the likes of Harrop, Andrew Johns and Jan Rehula - something she now considers the best decision of her life.

It was after joining Sutton's squad that Lindley had her biggest breakthrough, getting her first World Cup podium finish in Tiszaujvaros and then cleaning up the field in Lausanne and Cancun.

After a slow start in 2001 with a sixth in Gamagori and a third in Ishigaki, the roller coaster just built momentum. With an amazing winning streak Lindley gathered World Cup titles at Rennes, Toronto, the world title in Duathlon and the Triathlon World Champs, which still leaves her emotional.

"I have goose-bumps all over my body now just thinking about it. I knew I had a 50-second lead, because people were yelling out but I still thought Michellie (Jones) was going to catch me.

"It wasn't until I came around the last turn into the finish that I finally took one look over





Yoko Okuda won the hearts of many as she ran herself into third place at the 2001 Ironman Australian Triathlon at Forster-Tuncurry. The little known Japanese competitor, who bases herself in Sydney with husband Pablo, headed home after Forster to compete in the revamped Japan Ironman and took the line honors. Her success there convinced her to head to Hawaii to challenge the best in the world but the winds and conditions were cruel and Yoko finished in 29th place. Undeterred, she is ready to fight again and will line up in Japan again to defend her title. The little dynamo captured everyone's hearts, and following is a letter from Yoko that we received last month. We wish her all the best.

Dear Australian Triathlete,

Thanks for putting my Forster Ironman finish photo in your magazine. It was a great day for me. I had lots of my training partners racing or cheering for me. At the finish it was very emotional as nobody thought I could have such a good race. I surprised myself.

In my first year as a pro I was very lucky. I think it is hard to just get to the start of each Ironman race. This year I was able to finish three. In Hawaii I kept thinking of my Irish friend Sarah White who twisted her ankle on the morning of Hawaii Ironman last year and couldn't finish. If you get to the start line you have a good chance to finish. In Hawaii it was a hard day. At the Energy Lab I ran out of energy! Still I finished 29th girl overall and a lot of big names pulled out.

Japan Ironman was also a great experience. I was very happy to win but it was sad that Louise Davoren had mechanical problems and had to retire at 30k when she was leading the race. This year Japan Ironman was extremely hot and humid reaching 37 degrees. Next year the race will be two months earlier on May 12 and they said they would take one or two of the hills out of the bike course to make it easier. I plan to defend my title and sadly I can't also race Forster, as they are five weeks apart. I said "sorry" to Ken Baggs. I will race again at Forster one day.

Japan Ironman is held on Goto Island, which is near Nagasaki in the south. It is beautiful and nearly no car traffic. The roads are closed for the race. Nearly all the people on the island are involved in the race. On the run they had an aid or water station every 1km! This year after leading for most of the race Jason Shortis was run down by top Japanese Ironman Yoshinori Tamura. Jason held off Japanese Olympian Takumi Obara to hold 2nd place. The race was televised later nationally across Japan and featured Jason saying in Japanese "mizu - arigato" (water - thank you).

If anyone want more information about Japan Ironman please check the web site or e-mail Pablo or me: okudayoyo@hotmail.com.

After Hawaii I had a holiday in Tokyo with my sister Miwa. I realized how hard it would be to train for triathlon in Tokyo. Australia is a good place to live. Back in Manly a lot of people are training for Ironman. At Balmoral Tri club Thursday night running sessions at Mosman with coaches' Bruce Thomas and Mick Ferris are getting 40 people or more. I am planning a slow buildup. Around Christmas Warringah tri club host the Toga Run. A swim-run-drink beer-swim-run-drink beer event from Narrabeen to Manly. It's a lot of fun. I will go to Running Week in Thredbo from January 12-19.

Though I still work part-time this year I was very lucky to pick up some sponsorship from PB Sports Nutrition which I have used for a couple of years and from the Japanese distributor of Rival swimwear. At Forster and the Manly National Series race I will work as correspondent for Triathlon Japan. Hopefully the Japanese Olympian Kiyomi Niwata who trains with Col Stewart will come to the Manly race. At these races I will try and be a journalist and not a competitor. My advise to any pro athletes is to smile when they see Delly Carr as his photos are popular in Japan.

Although Hawaii was hard I learned a lot. On Geoff Thorsen's (4th 55-59) advice I arrived a couple of weeks early to do a bike tour on the course and the two-mile Captain Cook swim. Geoff is so crazy about Ironman that he has an annual booking on the top floor of the Kona Seaside hotel with a view straight down the swim course. The hard conditions were good for Geoff.

In Hawaii I met Natascha Badmann as we both were massaged by Gary Shields, a Kona local and ex Ultraman champion. He is very nice and positive. He said I had similar body condition compared to Natascha. In the race she was much faster than me. I have a lot to improve.

Thanks again,
Yoko Okuda 🍌

my shoulder, which I never do. I wanted to find out whether I could at least have a little bit of fun. I looked and I couldn't see Michelle. I crossed the line and broke into tears because I was so overwhelmed by the emotion. I couldn't believe it, it was so amazing, the greatest moment of my whole life.

"I never expected to win a World Championship at 32. From when I was a little kid I have always been a sports fanatic, always wanted to be an Olympian or a World Champion. It was a kid's fantasy that has lasted my whole life but I would never have believed that I could actually do it.

"The excitement of the win wasn't about the title, the money or the exposure, it was about so much more. It is about what is inside. I did allow myself time to celebrate but I also realized how important it is not to change anything about the way I think about myself. I am not a better person, not a better athlete. I won that race and that is great, but tomorrow is a new day. The next race is another race and anything can happen," she said philosophically.

With her confidence soaring it was more World Cup wins in Cornerbrook, Tiszaujvaros and Lausanne that capped off an amazing year. Lindley gives full credit to coach Brett Sutton.

"I believe Brett is the greatest coach in the world. He is brilliant in his methods and the way he assesses athletes. He has figured out what makes me tick. All in all, he has made me a better athlete and a better person and I will be forever thankful."

Lindley describes herself as an eight-year overnight sensation. Yet, despite everything she has achieved this year, you would think that a medal at the Olympic Games would be her biggest goal. But with the wisdom of hindsight she puts the Olympics into proper perspective.

"I learned from the last time that making the Olympics is not such a huge thing, it is not what it's about. It is just another race. Each next race is the most important race for me and I think I would much prefer to tackle it that way and just find myself at the start line of the Olympics in Athens. Then say, it is just another race. It is an important race...because it is my race today. There is so little pressure when you handle it this way.

"My attitude today is that I don't go in expecting to win; all you can do is do the best you can. Whatever happens, if I finish the race knowing I did the best that I could, then I am happy."

You can be confident that Siri Lindley will be exactly the same person with an Olympic Gold medal or without one...and maybe, she has found the formula for success. 🍌

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TIP OF THE MONTH: As you may know, I have a constant goal in ridding saddle soreness, so here's a tip... Every person (a least most) have a pelvis with one side a greater angle than the other. In guys, it is easy to tell because one of your **sensor** will hang lower than the other (on warmer days.) This is a result of pelvis angle. If your left **sensor** hangs lower than your right, angle your seat 5° to the right - this makes a difference. Girls - its trial and error. Try it, it works.

Well I dont have much more intelligent things to say so I had better think up some specials. Plus its a really nice day, so I'm going to go for a ride/run - maybe you should too? By the way, how many guys out there have checked their **sensor** since reading this??

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