

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

'Ironman' sister, 71, sets triathlon record

By Jackie Byrn
Catholic News Service

PENTICTON, British Columbia — She is a legend in the energetic community of world triathlon and is known as Sister Madonna Buder to most.

Some call her Sister Mad Bud. Some simply refer to her as Sister M.

Everyone knows the 71-year-old Catholic nun from Spokane, Wash., the current record holder of the ironman event in Hawaii and Canada for her age group.

For a non-professional athlete, it is almost impossible to comprehend the extent of Sister Buder's record-breaking success within the highly competitive field of triathlon. It is also hard to believe the extent of her influence as she touches souls with her vibrant smile, melodious voice and powerful, deeply tanned stature.

This year marked Sister Buder's 12th finish at Subaru Ironman Canada held Aug. 26 in Penticton. She completed the course in 14 hours, 46 minutes, 21 seconds, a record in her age group and 49 minutes better than her 2000 finish.

More than 1,900 participants from 39 different countries took part in the popular event.

The title Ironman is bestowed on all who finish the demanding course, comprised of a 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile run. Cutoff times along the course must be met or participants are disqualified.

In July, Sister Buder was in Edmonton, where she won another championship in her age group.

One of Sister Buder's legion of supporters and fellow athletes is Hurricane Bob Mina, an experienced triathlete and a fellow Catholic from Pennsylvania.

Known for his chatty online columns with *xtri* online magazine, Mina presented Sister Buder with a bright blue cap, a gift from *xtri* editor Rob Docherty in New Zealand.

As with all serious athletes, Sister Buder's triathlon experiences have not been without special challenges and difficult moments.

Last year in Kona, Hawaii, during the Ironman World Championship Event, Sister Buder literally became airborne as her bike was lifted by a forceful wind. She required 20 stitches to her face, and she failed to finish.

A member of the Sisters for Christian Community in Spokane, she completed her first triathlon 20 years ago at age 51 and has devoted her competition in triathlons to God.

"Athletes draw strength from me: I can't understand it," she said in an interview several years ago. "They ask me 'When's Mass?' — like I'm supposed to know the Mass timetables of the local church in every city we visit all over the world.

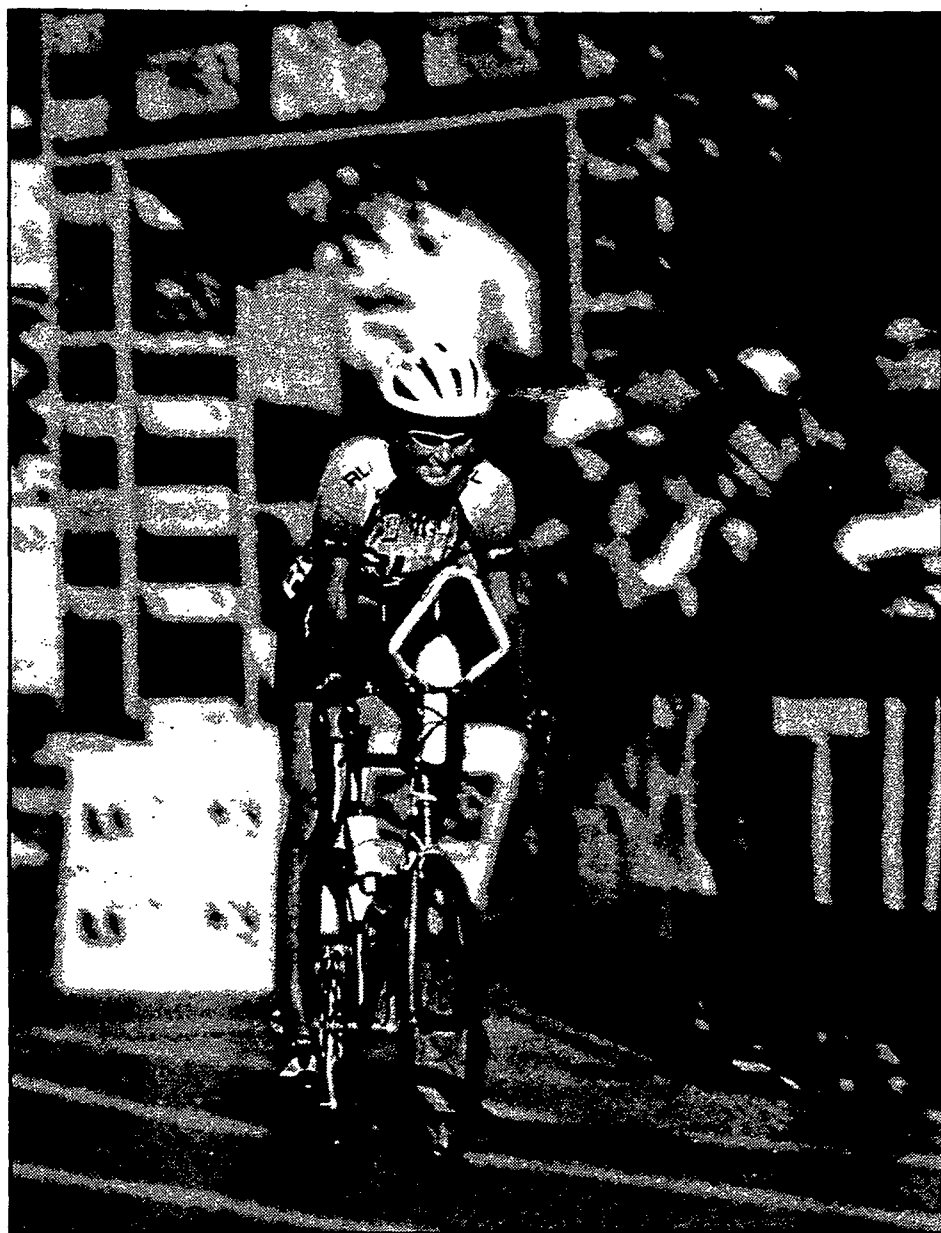
"But I give them spiritual guidance and give help to those who need someone to talk to," she said.

Indeed, she is routinely called upon to give a blessing prior to each race and has been called the event's "spiritual consultant."

Sister Buder has worked as a guardian "ad litem" — an advocate for troubled youth in the courts, although her service now consists mainly of volunteer work. She admits she wonders how much longer she'll have the stamina for triathlons.

"But I keep saying to God, 'You'll let me know when (to stop), won't you?'"

Sister Buder planned to attempt to set her third age-group record Oct. 6 in Kona at the Ironman World Championship Event.



Cam Heryet/CNS

Seventy-one-year-old Sister Madonna Buder races in the Subaru Ironman Canada triathlon Aug. 26 in Penticton, British Columbia. She completed the course in less than 15 hours, setting a record for her age group and beating her previous year's time by 49 minutes.



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