

# Raphael, Comerford top the podium in Panama City Beach

Smith retires where he first won at Ironman Florida

By McDavid Henderson



Over 2,000 competitors gathered for a race filled with a changing of the guard in the men's race and confirmation of status in the women's event. The men's pro favorites, Spencer Smith and Lothar Leder, returned to challenge their own course records and continue on their comeback trails. For the women, Bella Comerford defended her title and held off strong competitors Hillary Biscay and Heather Fuhr.

It was a cold and windy day to start Ford Ironman Florida at the Boardwalk Beach Resort. The pros were off at 6:50



a.m., and the water was rough and the current strong. Out of the water in about 50 minutes for the men were Jan Raphael followed by Stephen Bayliss and Spencer Smith. Andrea Fisher emerged first for the women, in 53:33, with Carole Sharpless and Hillary Biscay following closely.

Raphael and Fisher held the lead into the bike. Smith moved into second for the men and Comerford was charging to the front of the women's race. Biscay hit a mechanical problem, which dropped her to fourth. Halfway into the 112-mile bike ride, Smith called it a day and not only retired from the race

but from the sport as well. Smith saw his first big victory at Ironman Florida, and it's appropriate that he'd end his career in Panama City Beach.

For the men, it was down to two: Raphael and a persistent Eduardo Sturla. Raphael was five minutes in front of Sturla coming into T2. Christophe Bastie followed 11 minutes behind and Scott Curry was behind him. Fisher led the women into T2. Sharpless and Comerford followed.

Sturla continued his chase of Raphael on the run course, followed by Bastie, Curry, Jim Vance and Sebastian Pedraza. Comerford made her move to the front of the women's pack in the first three miles of the run and never looked back. Sharpless, Fisher, Biscay and Michaela Giger were on the chase. The men's marathon proved to be a fast affair with a 1:22 half-marathon split, which caused Raphael some difficulty near the end. Overcoming cramps and ceding two minutes in the last three miles, Raphael, an Olympic-distance specialist racing his first Ironman, won with a fast finish of 8:22:44, just a minute shy of Smith's course record set in 2001. Sturla, the



2001 Ironman Brazil champ, came in a little over a minute back. Vance—another first timer—rounded out the podium.

For the women, Comerford finally settled into a rhythm and pulled away to over five minutes in front of Sharpless, winning in 9:28:28, a little short of her own course record from 2003. Sharpless took second in 9:40:22 followed closely by Biscay.



## FORD IRONMAN FLORIDA

Panama City Beach, Fla.  
Nov. 4, 2006  
2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, 26.2-mile run

### Women

- |                     |       |         |
|---------------------|-------|---------|
| 1. Bella Comerford  | (SCO) | 9:28:28 |
| 2. Carole Sharpless | (USA) | 9:40:22 |
| 3. Hillary Biscay   | (USA) | 9:40:39 |
| 4. Tamara Kozulina  | (UKR) | 9:41:50 |
| 5. Andrea Fisher    | (USA) | 9:43:40 |

### Men

- |                    |       |         |
|--------------------|-------|---------|
| 1. Jan Raphael     | (GER) | 8:22:44 |
| 2. Eduardo Sturla  | (ARG) | 8:23:49 |
| 3. Jim Vance       | (USA) | 8:37:09 |
| 4. Stephen Bayliss | (AUS) | 8:43:41 |
| 5. Scott Curry     | (CAN) | 8:45:12 |