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FRIDAY AUGUST 4, 2000

Barnes bests nation's top triathletes

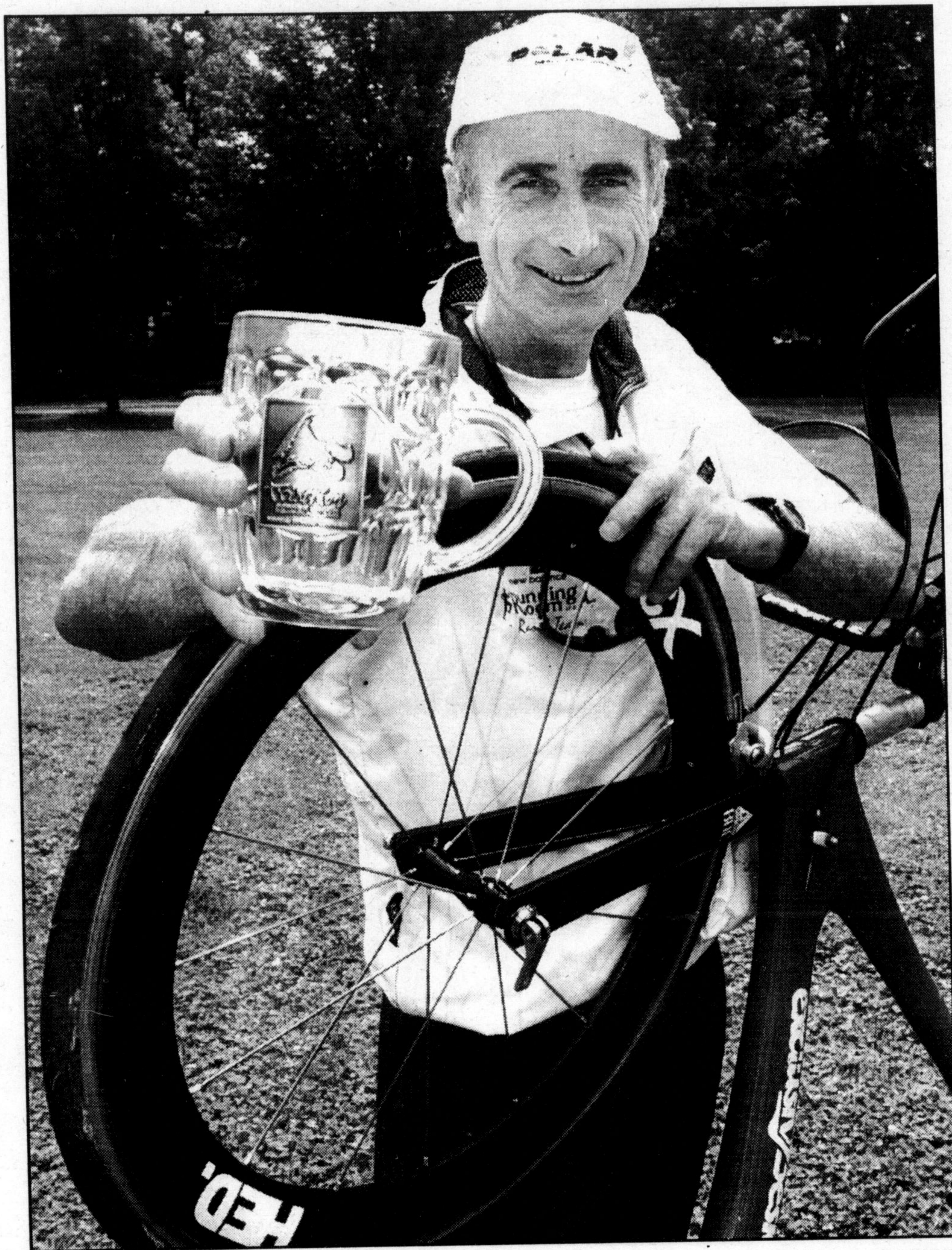


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Campbellville's Harry Barnes shows off the mug he received for winning his age class at the national triathlon championships in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland Sunday.

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

A midst nightmarish race conditions, a dream performance was forged by Campbellville's Harry Barnes.

And in the process, a second straight national age class championship was captured by the local triathlete — whose highly impressive title defense was staged in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland Sunday morning.

The 53-year-old's five-minute margin of victory last year was certainly convincing, but the manner in which he reclaimed gold was downright dominating.

Despite a constant battle with both rain and bone-chilling temperatures, the rural racer took an early lead and steadily widened it throughout the 1.5 kilometre swim, 40 kilometre bike, 10 kilometre run triathlon to finish an amazing 14 minutes ahead of runner-up Rudy Hollywood of Nepean.

Tamed tricky course

Barnes' 2:30.17 showing — on one of the most technically challenging courses in the country — not only translated into men's 50-54 year age class gold, but also placed him among the top quarter of all athletes in Cornerbrook.

He was less than 21 minutes behind overall winner Murray McCutcheon of Vancouver.

"I was so prepared for this race it was scary," said Barnes, who after many years of taking second place finally won the nationals last summer in Edmonton. "It was the easiest race of my life. It felt like a walk in the park."

That had a lot to do with a down-sized training schedule, which seemed to leave him more energized for actual competitions this summer.

And don't discount the benefits of a particularly rainy spring and summer — that no doubt helped the national champion become better at dealing with less than ideal race conditions, which in the past would have wreaked havoc with his especially lean body mass.

"It was cold and wet the whole race. At

times it would let up but then at others the rain was so heavy it was scary on the bike," recalled Barnes.

"But it just didn't matter, nothing was going to stand in my way this time. I'd never been more focused for a race before."

That confident and positive tone was a marked contrast to his demeanor the day before nationals — when an airplane delay, plus inclement weather in the Maritimes, left him extremely tired and moody.

"It's amazing how I went from feeling so terrible one day to being so ready the next."

Sensational swim

Barnes delivered one of his best swims — in 23.33 minutes — before overcast skies let loose a downpour just as the top riders were getting on their bikes.

That's where the local triathlete, who'd been preparing for this specific race for nearly a year, left the pack behind — even on a treacherous cycling course that often required a great deal of caution.

Explained Barnes, "I almost wiped out on the first loop so I had to take it easy around certain turns. But I still managed to gain about 10 minutes (on Hollywood) on the bike."

From there, it was simply a matter of maintaining his steady form over a hilly run en route to another gold medal effort.

"It feels great to finally be winning (at the nationals)," he said. "Always coming in second was really starting to get on my nerves."

Now that Barnes has repeated as national champion, he'll look to reclaim a top-10 world placing — during next summer's international showcase in Edmonton.

Last year in Montreal, he took seventh spot in his age class.

And while the accomplished triathlete isn't much on setting specific goals — for fear of jinxing them — he believes improving on that world placing is within his grasp.

"I think finishing top five is possible," he said.

"I'll take a little time off at the end of the summer and then start training again in October."

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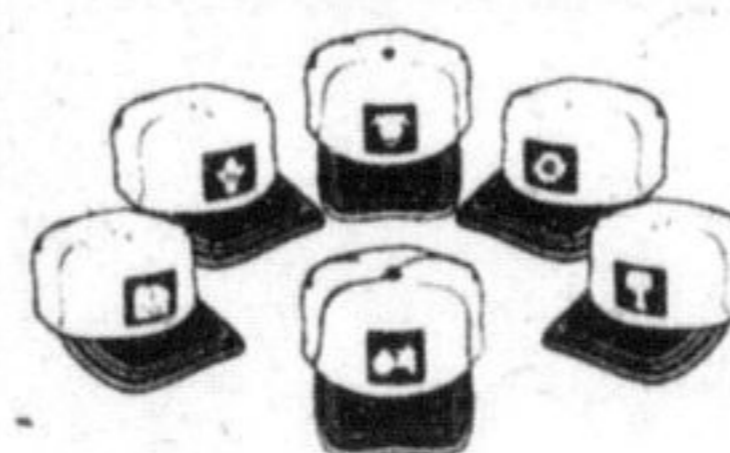
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