

# BIG TIME OR BUST

Terenzo Bozzone is hardly just another pretty face. He's a fast-tracking triathlon superstar with ambitions of elevating the sport to a whole new level. Given his innate talent, early success, marketing savvy and all-out drive to be the best, he just might be the guy to take us there.



## BIG TIME OR BUST

half-Ironman stuff more seriously, with my eye ultimately on Kona. That's where the legends of the sport are made—in the lava fields." He stamped his commitment to long-course racing with a record-breaking win at the 2008 Ironman World Championship 70.3, and suddenly the 70.3 scene buzzed with talk of "newcomer Bozzone." Since then he's racked up multiple half-Ironman victories, thrice been runner-up at Ironman New Zealand and finished just outside of the top 10 in Kona. And he's only 26.

While Bozzone's talent is undeniable, one can't entirely neglect his rakish good looks, especially given the hordes of women who swoon over him. It would be an easy assumption to classify him a Kiwi Casanova, yet he's the furthest from a player. In fact, he and girlfriend Kelly Lawrence have been going strong for more than six years. The pair share an obvious mutual adoration, and their relationship is a model example of separate but complementary interests. Lawrence is a high-end handbag and jewelry designer whose brand, Zabbona, has a growing following in the fashion

industry. Her business allows her to travel to races with Bozzone where she supports him with the enthusiasm of a high-school cheerleader. Bozzone, in turn, helps promote Lawrence's brand through social media as well as wearing jewelry from her men's line.

"When we first met, Kelly had no clue what triathlon was. She felt a little embarrassed for me having to run around in Lycra," says Bozzone, laughing. "I guess I had a basic sense of fashion—otherwise she never would have gone out with me. Though she did throw away a few items of my clothing. I had these favorite jeans—they were not sparkly exactly but they had a shiny tinge. I thought they were the bee's knees. She obviously didn't agree."

A short-lived reality television career is another part of Bozzone's past that went the way of his disco pants. In 2004 he starred as a contestant on a "Survivor"-esque show, "Celebrity Treasure Island." "I actually lost halfway through to one of the girls," he says. "It was a best-of-three challenge. First we were handcuffed and had to

stick our heads into offal pie to find the key to unlock the cuffs. I won. Then we went through the alphabet, alternately naming countries that started with each letter. I started with Algeria, she says Botswana, and so on. I know plenty of countries, and being into running, who would have thought I would get stuck on the letter K? I had a complete brain freeze. I mean, what about Kenya? I lost that one. The third challenge was throwing knives to pop balloons. I swear the knife they gave me was blunt. She won and booted me."

With his fashion "don'ts" ironed out and his 15 minutes of reality TV fame a fading memory, Bozzone now moves in one crystal-clear direction: full force straight ahead. The rising star makes no bones about wanting to not only match but also surpass the accomplishments of the mentors he admires.

"I want to be the Lance Armstrong or Michael Jordan of our sport. I want to take triathlon to the level of awareness it deserves. That's where I see myself. That's my ultimate goal." **1**

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no fence. In Jo-burg [Johannesburg] that would never happen."

Asked about the worst trouble he caused as a kid, Bozzone admits to a few schoolyard fights. "I'm not proud of that," he says, with a shamed tone. He describes "Tok Tokkie"—the South African version of Ding Dong Ditch—as his most devious childhood prank. "I swam competitively from the age of 7, in the pool 10 times a week. I didn't have time to behave badly!" he says.

Bozzone was involved in martial arts from an even younger age, traveling to Japan for the Junior Karate World Championships. "In karate you learn the principles of honor, self-control, discipline. Even at 5 years old, you say those words daily and eventually you learn what they mean. That definitely helps me in triathlon. You have to be self-motivated to train 40 hours a week. You don't have a coach holding your hand, your parents pushing you—that has to come from within."

Bozzone's discipline paid off. He became a nationally ranked breaststroke swimmer until, at age 13, a perforated eardrum

kept him on dry land. The injury would be a blessing in disguise.

"I remember quite clearly, before I popped my eardrum, sitting up one night on the foot of my bed thinking, 'I just don't know if I can do this swimming thing any-

more,'" says Bozzone.

"Even though I thought I could go to the Olympics, I was over it. I had no life. I take my hat off to swimmers—they're in the water 30 hours each week, fighting for one-tenth of a second. The break was a great

opportunity to try something different. I saw a local duathlon and thought I would give it a go. I finished eighth, but I really enjoyed it, except for falling over my bike. You know when you dismount and you have jelly legs? No one told me about that! But it was fun. The people, the attitude—everyone's a lot more laidback than in swimming."

A slew of Junior world titles quickly followed. Bozzone won the Junior Duathlon

World Championship in 2001, and in 2002 he doubled his take, with wins at both triathlon and duathlon Junior Worlds. In 2003 he again proved victorious at the Junior Triathlon World Championship. Transitioning to predominantly overseas racing, Bozzone

followed the ITU circuit and in 2005 attempted his first international half-iron-distance race at Wildflower, finishing third. The following year he shattered the course record.

Bozzone's focus remained on shorter dis-

tances, though, with his heart set on representing New Zealand in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. On the heels of an injury, Bozzone lacked enough ITU points for automatic qualification, and controversial politics seem to have prevented his wild-card appointment to the team. "It was a massive blow," says Bozzone. "But then I thought, 'I want to go somewhere and truly make my mark.' That's when I decided to take the

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**T**wenty-six-year-old professional triathlete Terenzo Bozzone pushes his shopping cart down the aisle at a supermarket in his native New Zealand. He's here stocking up for an upcoming training camp. Reaching the cereal aisle, he loads his cart with boxes and boxes of Kellogg's Nutri-Grain cereal. If he's feeling a bit self-conscious, it's not for all the calories—it's because his face is on the front of every box.

As the cover guy for Nutri-Grain throughout New Zealand, Bozzone's recent cereal-box celebrity is a significant step toward realizing his broader vision. "The campaign has been incredible for me and hopefully it will do great things for their brand as well. It's important to move triathlon into new markets," he says, with obvious appreciation. "Though it can be a bit embarrassing to see my ugly mug staring back at me in the grocery aisle. I usually wear a hat and glasses into the store now."

As one of the youngest members on triathlon's A-list, marketing strategies and social media sit prominently among Bozzone's priorities. Just look at the former Junior world champion and 2008 70.3 world champion's Twitter or Facebook page and you'll see a new sponsor-related contest crop up almost weekly, engaging his flock of eager followers. "It's like any relationship in life," he says. "Any avenue you go down has to work both ways. You can't take money from sponsors and not give anything back—you work together to raise awareness. It's a two-way relationship with your fans as well. They support you by giving their time and effort cheering you on and sending you messages. You have to in turn give something back to them and back to the sport."

While Bozzone clearly grasps the give-and-take importance of growing relationships and is staunchly committed to giving his all both on and off the course, the full Ironman victory he longs for eludes him still. But he has no intention of giving up his quest for Kona's crown or his aspirations to transcend the sport.

"I can't work it out yet. I can race four 70.3s week after week and recover fine, but as soon as I double the distance I struggle a bit more," he says. "My coach and I are working closely to figure out what's holding me back—is it a mental component, is it physical, is it nutrition? But it's like that with Ironman. Look at how many times Macca tried in Kona before he got it right. Mark Allen was in the same boat—he tried for years before he took the title. Hopefully it's not going to take me that long!"

A rock-solid family life laid a firm foundation from which the young Bozzone would launch his crusade for greatness. Born in South Africa, Bozzone moved to New Zealand at age 10, his parents hoping to provide better opportunities for Terenzo and younger brother Dino. "They wanted to create the best possible life for us," says Bozzone. "In New Zealand you leave your door unlocked. Kids leave their bikes in the middle of the yard with

