



Iron War: Dave Scott, Mark Allen, & the Greatest Race Ever Run

Matt Fitzgerald , Bob Babbitt

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The 1989 Ironman® World Championship was the greatest race ever. In a spectacular duel that became known as the Iron War, the world's two strongest athletes raced side by side at world-record pace for a grueling 139 miles.

Driven by one of the fiercest rivalries in triathlon, Dave Scott and Mark Allen raced shoulder to shoulder through the Ironman 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike race, and 26.2-mile marathon. After 8 punishing hours, both men would demolish the previous record—and cross the finish line just 58 seconds apart. The race would redefine the limits of human endurance and the role of mental toughness in sports.

In his new book *Iron War*, sports journalist Matt Fitzgerald writes a riveting epic about how Allen and Scott drove themselves and each other through the most awe-inspiring race in sports history. *Iron War* goes beyond the pulse-pounding race story to offer a fascinating exploration of the lives of the world's two toughest men and their unquenchable desire to succeed.

Weaving an examination of mental resolve into a gripping tale of athletic adventure, *Iron War* is a soaring narrative of two champions and the paths that led to their stunning final showdown.

Iron War: Dave Scott, Mark Allen, & the Greatest Race Ever Run Details

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From Reader Review Iron War: Dave Scott, Mark Allen, & the Greatest Race Ever Run for online ebook

Peter Yock says

This was pretty entertaining but after hearing some interviews with Dave Scott and Mark Allen it sounds like it's largely fictional and conjecture on behalf of the author. Still, kinda entertaining, with a little bit of truth splashed in.

I have to say though - this is single-handedly the WORST audio book reading I've ever heard. It's like the whole thing was read by the comic book guy out of the Simpsons. So over dramatised. I had to work hard to not just delete the book on the basis of bad reading.

Marta Stojanova says

Thrilling and inspiring, though at times repetitive, annoying and heavy with mundane trivia and details that take away from the story. The epilogue ends on a down note as well, though made me think. Although I disagree with the author's conclusions, his "erroneous" take-aways made me ponder the lives and events recounted in his book. The author pits the two characters against each other as born vs made competitors. Although simplistic, it helps the narrative. The book feels desktop researched only, without contributions from the main characters. Also, around 100 pages of the book felt superfluous with repetitive data. It didn't get 3 stars because the story itself, no matter how told, was worth the endurance and pain to read it to the end.

Danny Schiff says

Iron War made for an exciting read about a grueling rivalry as the Ironman triathlon developed and gained notoriety in the early 80's. I enjoyed reading about Dave Scott and Mark Allen's different approaches to the training and racing, all leading to the 1989 showdown on the Ironman World Championships on the Big Island. A compelling read for any fan of endurance racing, especially interesting as they were still figuring out optimal nutrition, gear, and clothing at the time.

Jeff says

Excellent book on the historic Ironman race between Mark Allen & Dave Scott in Kona. Unlike most race stories, this one has a pattern of a few chapters about the athletes followed by a chapter on the science of racing and suffering. Both are interesting, but the race story was more compelling for me. Still, it was a unique way to tell the story. This book has generated some controversy but I personally think both Dave Scott & Mark Allen look very good throughout the story.

Steve Van Slyke says

A fascinating story about two endurance athletes with very different backgrounds, personalities, habits, attitudes, and training methods, who nevertheless end up winning the Iron Man competition six times apiece and beating each other in the process.

It's a very human story. The warts and imperfections are neither glossed over nor omitted.

I agree with the author's conclusion: you cannot read a book, study the the training methods of the experts and replicate them and one day expect to find yourself winning or even being professionally competitive in something like the Ironman. In this case, there are just some people who have it, and the rest of us don't.

Jennifer says

Given the subject matter, this could have been an excellent book. Unfortunately, the author's writing style includes so many awkward, cliched phrases and wacky sports metaphors that the story of this epic race is reduced to a confusing tale of two flawed characters. The author indicates that he is a fan of both Dave Scott and Mark Allen in the epilogue and acknowledgments, but here's what they had to say after reading the pre-pub copy:

An Open Letter From Dave Scott and Mark Allen

Mark says

A decent attempt to explain a virtually unbelievable race.

Leslie Doll says

I started reading this book without being aware of the letter Dave Scott and Mark Allen wrote, protesting the book. I read it anyway; I generally don't allow peer pressure to sway my decision as to whether or not to read a book. Isn't reading a study in critical thinking? Anyway, I digress. I enjoyed some parts of the book more than others; especially for its insights on mental toughness and training. But I had mixed feelings, especially regarding the author and his comments about the Hoyt racing team (father/son, son has cerebral palsy) that colored my overall view of the book.

I've read many of Matt Fitzgerald's other books, including *Racing Weight*, as well as his articles in *Triathlete* magazine and other venues. I think he generally writes very well, so I wasn't prepared for the disjointedness of this book. There are so many threads, large and small. One about the race itself; one on the analysis of Dave and Mark; one on mental toughness training; and a bunch of smaller ones. At times it was hard to follow Matt's train of thought. And then there's the letter from Dave Scott and Mark Allen regarding their feelings about the book. I've read the letter, and my impressions were that a) they do have a legitimate

complaint, however b) they were cut out of the financial picture and c) they were being a little thin-skinned (unless there's something going on between the two of them and Matt that no one knows about. If one Googles the so-called lawsuit they filed against Matt - nothing comes up). In any case, the book didn't take away from my admiration for these two incredible athletes. If anything, it made me respect them all the more.

The description of the race, even knowing the outcome, is absolutely fascinating. It shows true grit, competition, fierceness, determination and creates the sensation of hot lava creating heat waves around you. This is where Matt's writing and hard work pays off and is the most exciting part of the book. You really feel like you were there along with them.

Matt does a decent job of describing where Mark and Dave came from and the factors that made them the great athletes they are. The more Matt delved into their characters, however, the more I could see why they were bothered by the book and why they didn't collaborate with him. He made many sweeping judgments based on his own flaws and interpretation. The amateur psychoanalysis got on my nerves. First, Matt implies - based on 4 (count them, 4) great male athletes - that if one has a lousy father, he'll be a great athlete because he has something to prove. 4 out of how many dozens of excellent male athletes? Seriously? This smacked of reaching for drama. The fact is, Mark's father came to Kona and watched him win. They appear to have formed a close relationship. Reading some of the reference material shows that the analysis is totally subjective.

Implying that one has to be born with a work ethic and a gene for suffering to be a good triathlete is not only a disservice to Dave's environment and lifetime influences, and various factors in Mark's life, but also to many other triathletes who have learned to work for what they want, and teach themselves mental toughness. Implying Dave and Mark are excellent triathletes are because they are "psychologically imbalanced" is an absolute discredit. Triathletes are crazy - sure - but to state they're psychologically imbalanced is crossing a line. Thin- or thick-skinned, I see how this can be seen as a slam. Matt contradicts himself on this front in so many places that it became difficult to consider him credible. He also contradicts himself by idealizing triathlon as a means to live a life less mediocre. So be psychologically imbalanced, or be mediocre. Take your pick! Matt references many interviews and conversations; in fact, there are 27 pages of references. It comes off as a tad defensive.

There was an interesting thread on mental toughness and the science behind it. While it was a fascinating read - the discussion about motivational intensity and tolerance for suffering was well-done - Timothy Noakes' work was more or less left out of the conversation. He was a pioneer and his work should have been included; given how much Matt has drawn on Noakes' research in his other books, I'm surprised it wasn't. Noakes (of Lore of Running fame) put forth the theory many years ago that the brain is the limiter of performance, not the muscles and body. It is good to see that studies are continuing with new insights all the time. There are many sound bites that imply that to succeed in triathlon, you just have to be mentally tough. Or have a lousy father. No, that is not all of it. A person who wants to succeed in triathlon must put in the physical training, and a lot of it. Mark and Dave spent decades of physical AND mental training for Kona. It isn't just about being mentally tough; it's about knowing where your limits are and how to move them, figuring out how badly you want it, and how willing you are to suffer. And it's also about support from family, friends, and teammates.

I went along towards the end of the book thinking, besides the faux psychoanalysis and a few other things, it wasn't so bad as a complete package. Then I see a comment that has me seeing red. Absolutely red. In a paragraph glossing over the Dick and Rick Hoyt's triathlon achievements, he notes that Rick's (who has Cerebral Palsy) athletic efforts as "piteous." More than Matt's self-pitying descriptions of himself in the last chapter (where he says he'll never achieve anything on the scale of Mark or Dave), this incensed me and

made me want to call him up and give him the what-for. There's nothing piteous about Rick's competing in triathlons with his father. Absolutely NOTHING. (Did I mention I'm seeing red?) What would Matt rather Rick do? Sit in a wheelchair in his room by himself for the rest of his life? It was RICK who told his dad he wanted to race with him. I am so happy that the Hoyt team went out to show the world what they CAN do (versus what they cannot), and so happy they have inspired so many people. I have such pure disdain for Matt based on that comment; he is of the same ilk as those who told my parents there was nothing they could do for me, but put me in an institution and go on with their lives. I thought we were talking about a triathlon community here - where people are a little crazy, go out on a limb, and go do things they'd never dream of doing (like Chrissie Wellington, hello?!)

If you are crazy about triathlon, and are looking for lore to pass on to future generations, Iron War fits the bill with the description of the race. If you are looking for more research on mental toughness and the science behind it, it's there. Use these parts as inspiration to surpass your own pre-conceived limits. Whether you agree with Matt's perspective - just look past the faux psychoanalysis and his crappy attitude towards those with disabilities (I call them different abilities), this book does belong to the sport.

Cat says

Horrible. I loved Secret Race (about doping in the cycling world) and I hoped this book would be fascinating too. It was horrible. It was filled with fluffy, repetitive text. He really didn't need 336 pages. 10 would do. I couldn't finish it. To make things worse, I listened to this book on Audible. The narrator sounded like a really bad jr high actor --- forced, over-acted, and unnatural.

Avoid this book. Read Secret Race instead.

Joey says

Their will to win is undeniable, their feats are commendable, and yet, I just couldn't identify with either of them or get emotionally invested in what they were trying to accomplish. I think that, in order to compete in Ironman at their level, you have to be selfish, asking others to make your goals theirs and to give you all the credit and them none. This resounded throughout the book and I just couldn't get past it. They are amazing athletes, physically and even more so mentally, but this just isn't my thing.

Mary says

Thrillingly inspirational! You can almost hear their breaths and feel their pain. Matt Fitzgerald has tried to capture the solution to the question of why human beings are willing to suffer. Does enduring inhuman pain create a sense of achievement? What makes triathletes tick? What makes the best of them hang on when their bodies are on the verge of collapse? To anyone interested in endurance sports, this is an excellent motivational read.

Algirdas Purkenas says

The greatest triathlon battle of all times - this book has a nice lead up to it and serves really well with the description of the actual race.

Also some nice scientific insights into endurance athlete research, touches upon perseverance, anatomy, studies and other interesting topics.

However, one should not forget that this is a book about the actual race that actually happened. I do not understand how the author thought it would be a good idea to simply come up with things like what Mark or Dave thought on this or that moment? Even they themselves probably can't remember what was going on as they were pushing it to extreme limits.

Also some side stories about Madam Pele, disabled kid and his dad and others seemed just randomly plugged in completely messing up with the consistency of the plot.

Overall, still a must read for any triathlete, yet I find it difficult to see how a non-triathlete would enjoy this book.

Jeff Goodfellow says

Very disappointing. Was expecting an epic story on the "world's greatest race" and it fell well short. Was hoping to read a great sports story and it got way off course. Chapter 7 brings the flow of the story to a complete halt. The race is over two thirds of the way through the book. I'm a runner and the author got a number of things wrong with regards to running, so I can only guess he got other things wrong for the other two disciplines.

Because I'm such a big sports fan, I gave the book 2 stars instead of 1 star because of the topic.

Amar Pai says

This WAS a pretty epic race! Well told. Interesting digressions on how you can scientifically measure who can run through suffering the most. Average person quits when their mind says "you're exhausted." Iron-persons run way past that till their muscles are literally incapable of continuing. You can tell the difference by measuring "control entropy" which is how spastic their gait is. If truly spent w muscles giving out, gait becomes counter intuitively MORE regular (think when you get a cramp and have to limp-- you have less degrees of freedom, are forced to run in a particular way to compensate) Anyway, these guys are masters of suffering and after a 2.4 mile open water swim and 113 mile bike ride are able to run a marathon at a 6 min/mile pace. Just. Nuts.

Tony Arreola says

Great book with a lot of endurance insight.

The book details an amazing race with two of the greatest athletes in our generation. The book drags a bit, but the information is quite powerful.

A must read for any endurance athlete, and all triatheletes.
