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`Ironman' Rhodes does it again

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BRYAN Rhodes from New Zealand did the unthinkable yesterday when he defended the Ironman Langkawi Malaysia Triathlon title in a record time.

Rhodes, the defending champion, set a blistering new mark of 8:10:35s in the 3.8km swim, 180km cycling race and the 42km marathon.

And waiting at the finish line in Dataran Lang was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed to garland the Kiwi who led from start to finish in the grueling race.

Rhodes, who won the race on his birthday last year with a record time of 8:43:54s, sliced an amazing 33 minutes this year. Lothar Leder of Germany, who is among a handful who have dipped below the eight-hour barrier in triathlon, finished third with a time of 8:26:00s.

The surprise package of the day was Australian Jason Shortis who finished second with a time of 8:24:42s.

"I am flabbergasted with the win because it is very difficult to defend an ironman title, what more in humid conditions," said Rhodes.

Modest words from a man who predicted the night before the race that he will better his old mark by 10 minutes at least. But on race day, he slices 33 minutes.

"I didn't kick off very well and during the runs I had problems with cramps and struggled at some parts of the race but I kept going because I was determined to defend my title," said Rhodes who will celebrate his 29th birthday today.

Hot on his pursuit was Jason Shortis of Australia but he could only reach the finish line 14 minutes after the New Zealander.

At the finish line, he paid tribute to a friend back home who trained with him everyday to prepare for the event.

"I dedicate this win to my friend in Australia who helped me prepare for this event, without his help, I could not have done it," said Shortis.

Leder, who toasted his placing with a pint of beer at the finish line, said the fast time will encourage more triathletes to come to Langkawi.

"Triathletes love a fast circuit and now that Rhodes has shown the world that he can do it in eight hours and 10 minutes, I believe more Ironman enthusiasts will come to this beautiful Island next year.

Leder then turned to Rhodes and invited him for the German leg of the triathlon so that he can make an attempt to dip below eight hours. Rhodes hesitated and then said that his next mission is to do well in the New Zealand leg on March 2.

In the women's professional section, Danielle Florens from Canada was the first finisher but her time was a poor 10:29:36 while Beate Kliendienst from Germany was second with 10:49:08.

In the special category, Randy Caddell of the United States pulled out in the swim event itself because he was not feeling well.

Selected Results: Men's Professional category - 1 Bryan Rhodes (NZ) 8:10:35s, 2 Jason Shortis (Aus) 8:24:42s, 3 Lothar Leder (Ger) 8:26:00s, 4 Glen Gore (S Africa) 8:34:53s, 5 Siegi Ferstl (Ger) 8:40:03, 6 Matt Stephens (Aus) 8:42:52s, 7 Hideya Miyazuka (Jpn) 8:45:23s, 8 Garrett MacFadyen (Can) 8:48:50.

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