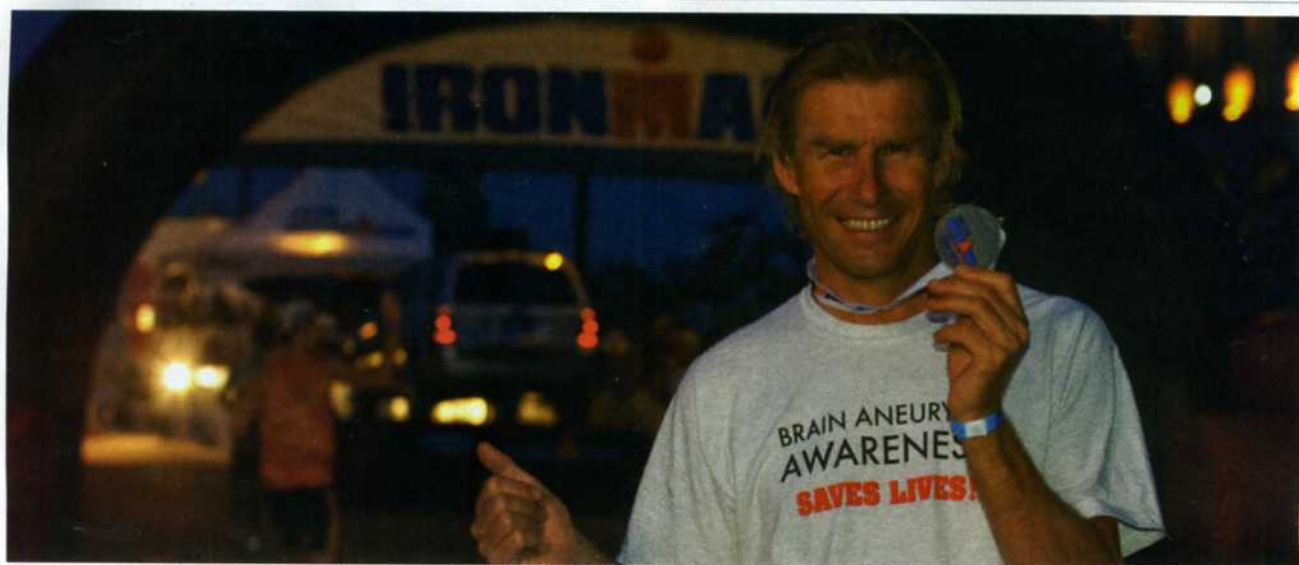


# Frank Eeckman

By Susan Grant

**D**r. Frank Eeckman of Berkeley, Calif., didn't get involved in endurance sports until his mid-30s, but he's been making major headwind ever since. Now 53, he's run 10 marathons (including two Boston marathons), and just finished his 10th Ironman in Lake Placid, N.Y., as part of TeamCindy, a foundation that raises money for the Brain Aneurysm Foundation. We sat down with Eeckman, who received his medical degree in his home country of Belgium and his doctorate in neurophysiology from UC Berkeley, to find out about how he balances his training schedule with his demanding career, and how he got involved with TeamCindy.



**You started your triathlon career relatively late in life. What made you finally take the leap?** I rode a bike as a kid in Belgium, but as soon as I was old enough I got a moped and dropped the bike. It was really my supervisor at work who got me into exercise. I wasn't really doing anything but he pretty much twisted my hand. He told me I was going to die of a heart attack if I never did anything. Finally, he offered to go for a ride with me and he let me use his new racing bike. I jumped at the opportunity and the rest—as they say—is history. I did my first triathlon in 2002 at age 46.

**You have to juggle a very demanding work schedule with your endurance training. How do you make it work and what does a typical training/work day look like for you?** I am fortunate to have a very flexible work schedule (time-wise). I usually start working early in the morning and train around midday, sometime between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Then I work late. I train about 12 hours a week, but this gets up to 20 hours in my highest training weeks, which are about three weeks before a race. I try to stay in shape year-round; that way I can get by with one to two hours a day of activity. If I had to ramp up from scratch, it would be much more difficult. I find that once you reach a fitness plateau, you can stay there by just working out one to two hours a day. If you let it slip you have to build it back up and that is very demanding. I don't think I could do it now. You need a lot of sleep and recovery, which is hard to do with a full-time job.

**TeamCindy raises money for the Brain Aneurysm Foundation (BAF) in honor of Cynthia Lynn Sherwin, who died of an aneurysm while training for Ironman Lake Placid in 2007. How did you get involved?** I met the executive director of the Brain Aneurysm Foundation, Christine Buckley, at a Neurotechnology Industry Organization tour in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 2008.

I started talking to her about brain aneurysms, which I had some experience working on. I was already competing in Ironmans and I knew that Ironman had an active fundraising and charity program so I told Christine about it. I was enrolled in Ironman Arizona and when she found out she said, "Why not run that one for BAF?" I said to her, "Me? Would you not want someone younger and faster?" But I thought about it and it made sense so I agreed to do it.

**You are also a certified USA Cycling Coach—how has sharing your love of endurance sports, especially with your son, strengthened your own training focus?** It is great to coach someone, you learn a lot and you discover new things all the time. It is also wonderful to work with kids because they are motivated and enthusiastic and they are eager to learn. My son (now 14) started doing triathlons when he was 9 because that is what I did, and we all went to the races every weekend together. He eventually discovered that he likes bike racing better. Everyone is different and I think kids are more into direct competition. Racing against the clock is harder for kids; they like to beat their friends. But in every race, your greatest competitor is yourself.

**What makes you a competitor?** I want to get better. I want to improve and so far I have been quite successful which is encouraging. Never mind the people who say you can't improve when you are over 50. Just this year I set a new PR for the marathon (a 3:22:21 in Boston), and I ran my fastest Ironman in Arizona last November (11:04:55). It is not easy and you have to work hard to get there—perhaps even more so when you are older—but there is always room for improvement, and there are always new challenges to live for. ■

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