

BEING FIT AND HAVING FUN IS YOUR PAYOFF

I started doing metabolic testing at my gym a couple of years ago. I noticed an interesting (and what should be obvious) trend, and that is those who have the highest VO₂ max readings are also the ones that are doing best in our local races. You see, Daytona is a pretty small town, so I'm able to know most of the runners and what their typical times are. This finding is of no surprise to me, and again, it should be obvious. We know VO₂ is highly genetic, so why would anybody be surprised with the findings? The highest VO₂ I've tested has been 82.6. Let me tell you, that's smoking! We will not see much of that in ANY area. Well, this VO₂ just so happens to belong to a young guy who, in his very first triathlon ever, placed 2nd overall! It would have been first by a mile if you eliminated the swim. This also happens to be a guy who won his first 10K. Easily. I've seen these trends play out over and over. The women who have come in and tested with the highest VO₂s have been the women that are winning the local races, or at least, winning their age groups. So what's the point? Well, this is just a physical yard stick that I can show people which backs up what I've been trying to tell people for years, and that is HOW we do, and just how, depends on our genetic ability and not our training or toughness, willpower or anything of that nature. Sure we can improve. All of us can. And that's the point! Get better! But what puts people on the podium is not anything but a realization of God given potential. Is this a negative? I think if you think so then you're missing the point!

HAVING FUN AND BEING FIT!

Just think how much your training and racing can open up if you realize that you train and race within a zone. Yes a zone. A different zone from your HR training zones. I'm talking about being in a zone of potential. This means you're only going to be so good now matter how hard or how much you train, and you're only going to "stink" so much if you really "slack" on your training. That is if you're measuring your triathlon fitness by your racing. Here is the kicker. You would think that coming from an Exercise Physiologist, I'd be telling you to go get loaded up on technology and really fine tune that training. Maybe I hurt my coaching by telling the truth? If so, so be it. I'd rather be honest than rich any day! But what I did learn in all my training in Exercise Physiology is why we get fit and why we "win". And by this I can take the confident stance that I do.

Let me give you an example. I went up to do the Hudson Valley Triathlon a couple of weeks ago. It takes place in the mountains in New York—where I'm from. I like to go up there and do that race because it's sentimental to me to do a race in the area that I was born. I go up with the attitude of doing my best. That's always my approach to racing. How did I do? I met my goal—I wanted to do a race in my old town! Easy goal to meet. (But maybe not—more on that later). But talking performance, I was pleased. I was 11th overall in the race. (No, it wasn't loaded with pros—obviously). I had the 7th best swim in the race, 9th best bike and 20th best run. Let me explain my point. Why the 7th best swim? Wetsuit and muscle—plain and simple. If and when I do a triathlon in Florida in a lake without a wetsuit on, I'm lucky to have a middle-of-the-pack swim at best. But it was a wetsuit so I took advantage of my genes. You see—I'm muscular. That is my God given body type that I keep up. So with a wetsuit on, I was able to stay buoyant (typically I sink because I am muscular), and so my strong upper body was simply

able to pull me along the water. What does that have to do with my training plan going into it? Nothing. It was all about whether or not it would be cold enough to wear a wetsuit or not. That was the difference between a top swim and an average swim—not training. So it's the wetsuit, not the genes? Nope. We all had suits on, or most of us did. And a wetsuit helps more the person with buoyancy issues than the person that doesn't have as many of those issues. You know what I mean?

Ok—so that's the swim. Let's look at the bike. That part of NY is hilly, my friends. Let's just say I was looking for more bail out gears that were not there. (Note to self—put on better cassette next time!). Again, my genes are to be muscular. Yes I work out, but if I didn't, I would still have 95% of my build. So I'm muscular and I stay lean. So I've always been strong on hills because they require a lot of FAST TWITCH muscle fiber to get up. When you have a muscular build, you have a lot of fast twitch muscle fibers (Phys 101—it's the fast twitch that you see when you see bulk muscle). Well, I have that. So I was able to climb with the best in the race simply because I have big strong quads. I hadn't done any hill work going into this race other than my racing over in Clermont twice this year. But quads are there when you need them. So again, how did I train for those hills? Big quads and good strength-to-weight ratio lead to good climbing on the bike—not how many miles you put in.

Finally, the run. Well, it was my “worst” split of the day compared to other people. Why? Well, here I can talk a little bit about my unique physiology again. Due to having large quads that again are mostly fast twitch, they fatigue to a greater degree than if I had inherited more slow twitch muscle (which don't fatigue). Yes, it's a fact that fast twitch fatigue more than slow twitch, and when you see the muscles, it's the fast twitch that “bulk up”. So the more you see, the more that person is going to fatigue. So as I said, I hit the hills hard and my quads were fatigued by the time the run came around. Of course these are not the ONLY issues. Maybe if I pushed myself harder, my run split would have been a little better. Maybe if I'd run more miles, I'd be slightly leaner going into the race, which means I could run the hills better. Sure, all this is true. But no training would have changed what my best, middle, and worst splits of the day would have been that day—you get it?

DID TRAINING COUNT?

Yes. Why? Because I train. Period. That's the most important thing to take from this. Now, if I didn't swim at all, I would not have been able to let my genetics come through with my wetsuit on because maybe I could have drowned! If you don't swim at all, can you complete a swim? If so, maybe you spend the entire time using different strokes just to get through it. And what if you don't bike? I have a feeling that if you don't bike at all, you may not have made it through that 18 mile sprint course, which was 2 laps of 9 miles through hills that took all you had to get up. If you don't run on a regular basis, I have a feeling you would have had to walk that run course. So—that's the point. I do all of these things, so I was able to do the race. And because I train on a regular basis with swimming, biking, and running, I'm able to do triathlons, and performance on the course really depends on just how well I can do that day. Is it suited to my strengths? But, because we're all out there, we're really all the same. If I were to lay off from specific triathlon training all year and go back next year, I really don't know if I could do the course. And having said that, if I were to train like a mad man logging tons of miles and doing

all my structured intervals, I can confidently say that I would not win it! Nope. It would be hard pressed for me to really place much higher than I did no matter how hard/long I trained. That's the point. I guess as a coach, I'm not doing much for business. My point is that as long as you train on a regular basis, you're really maximizing your potential. Isn't that enough? It's great to have a training plan—especially early on. Like any sport, you need to learn how to swim, bike, and run, and learn what works best for you. You should approach your training with the attitude of learning what is the right amount of overload for you in which you'll see results and not overtraining. The point is, your training plan is geared towards making you better and should not be thought of as the difference between where you are now and whether or not you're a pro.

WE ARE AMONG A MINORITY

America has never been fatter. Obesity is at epidemic levels. You don't need to see the stats. Just go to the mall. Yet, when I'm up there doing that race, or doing triathlons in Florida, I'm doing my part to not feed into that lifestyle. And you are too. Why has triathlon gone so high tech? I mean, do we really need to spend time on the computer uploading our HR zones into our computer or downloading our GPS routes? Maybe take that time and go for a bike ride! If you learn anything from this article, learn that an Exercise Physiologist is telling you not to overthink your training, and just stay active and enjoy the ride. And be proud of the ride! Did your parents do triathlon? Think of it that way. You're starting a healthy family legacy.

I guess if you're not getting hurt and you seem to be staying motivated to train, then it's okay to think it's your training that is not getting you to the podium. And for a few percent out there, it is. If you're among the elite, then your training will separate you from 2nd overall to 1st overall, or at least play a factor. But if you're among the rest of us 99%, it's not. And again, if you're staying un-injured, it's okay to dream and pound the miles! You too will be the next Floyd Landis! But for most people, that false thinking comes with a price. And the price is *they stop training*. If your motivation is based on this external locus of control, you very likely may get hurt. And if you get hurt, you can't train. And if you can't train, maybe you'll gain weight and you'll no longer be in that fit and healthy crowd! Or maybe your obsession to be the best causes you to burn out. Boy have I seen that. Triathletes/runners just can't accept that they can't win the race, so they quit. I don't get that, but I see it far too often. Well, if that's the case, we lose another one right? To me it's about keeping people going in our sport because we need it. We need the active lifestyle to help ward off obesity. So just maybe if people get that what they're doing, as long as they're doing regular training, is enough and it's about the BEST they can do anyway, then maybe they'll stick with it for the entire duration!

You know how I'm training for my next triathlon? Get this: I'm swimming, biking and running!