

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY 102

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Last month, I introduced the importance of setting objective, measurable short-term and long-term goals. This month I will focus on becoming mentally stronger.

KEEP THE EGO IN CHECK

Once the goals are in place, it's time to train. The ol' ego can be a killer to training plan. Don't confuse ego with confidence. They are not the same. Confidence is great. It's simply knowing you can do something. Ego is about showing others you can do it, and it's usually based on insecurity. Your ego can trip up your training when:

- You run other people's repeats on speed days just to keep up.
- You're a triathlete out on a recovery ride and somebody "bumps the pace" so you attack back.
- You're a triathlete working on your swim technique, and they guy in the lane next to you starts passing you, so you say the heck with drills, I'm keeping up.

Why are these things a problem? Easy days are necessary to build a solid base, and without this foundation, the slow-twitch muscle fibers are not fully developed to handle hard mile later. We're all tempted to abandon ship at times and race in our training. But it truly is only an ego trip. I'm guilty of it myself f at times. But I've learned it only hurts me. WE need easy days and form days. The best advice is to let others go when it's not time to hammer. Delay the gratification. Just tell yourself when there's an entry form, they you'll race.

CONTROL PHYSICALY AND MENTAL ANXIETY

Physical anxiety comes out in "nervousness", such as accelerated heart rate, sweaty palms, and jitters. It stems from some sort of mental anxiety such as worry or self-doubt. The problem is that physical anxiety makes your muscle tight and less likely to respond. It also uses energy. Mental anxiety is even worse. Self-doubt and fear lead a runner astray from reaching his or her goal. There have been many studies that have pointed out that the body will go where the mind has already traveled, so if you believe you'll bonk, you probably will. And if you believe you'll finish strong, you will.

To control anxiety:

- Replace a negative thought with a positive, objective counter. For example, if you have the thought "I'll blow up in the marathon," replace it with, "I'm going to finish strong. I've been doing all my training and all my other races have gone great." You don't want to exaggerate your affirmations or you'll be fooling

yourself. So don't replace the negative thought with, "I'm so good I'll be an entire hour better than last year".

- Visualize a positive outcome for your big race. Sit in a quiet place and be as vivid as possible. Think about what your goal is and "walk" yourself through your entire race hitting each goal mile as you go. Imagine yourself finishing strong and how good it feels to reach the goal.
- If physical anxiety hits at the starting line, tell yourself you're ready and you're going to cut it loose, practice tensing and relaxing your muscles. This is called progressive relaxation. Take deep breaths and control our breathing.

KEEP FOCUS

Look at Lance's face as he's climbing the Pyrenees. What do you notice? Focus!! Look at the face of all champions and you'll see focus at its finest. From an All Pro wide receiver catching the ball in the Super Bowl to the winner of the Boston Marathon, winners can't win without focus. Focus is just out right control over what you can control. It is total concentration on the task at hand.

To keep focus in racing:

- Concentrate on your form. What can you control when in a race? Your breathing, your arm swing, your turnover. When you start to hurt, relax the shoulders, take deep belly breaths, and keep your turnover quick.
- Concentrate on positive thoughts. Only let the positive thoughts come into your brain. Focus on how well you're doing and don't give the possibility of failure a first thought.

Ask yourself next time you want to tweak your training schedule if there may be some mental workout needed instead. We're quick to think we might need some more miles or more intensity or something else with our training. And we're not as quick to look inside the ol' noggin. Give your legs a break and start working the mind.