

triathloning for ordinary mortals™

● By Dr. Steve Jonas

Here we are, in the middle of the season. Having a good one? Not-so-good? Looking for some help in keeping on doin' what you are doin'? Or perhaps some help in picking it up a bit, or even a lot? There's lots of advice coming at you, in the triathlon magazines (including ours), in the individual sport magazines, on the web. How do you pick and choose among its various components? Here are some thoughts on how to go about answering that question. If you think that you are having a successful season, have stopped to evaluate it, and are considering adding something new, first think about why you feel that way. Did you set clear goals for yourself at the beginning? Did you design your training program, or pick one from the myriad offered out there, specifically to help you meet those goals? Did you set up your series of races, as to length, difficulty, accessibility, frequency, with achieving your goals in mind? If you are having a successful season it is likely that your answer to all of these questions is "yes."

Notice that I don't specify which goals define "success." I don't talk about going faster, going longer, winning. However, many of the articles on training just assume that those are the goals of every potential reader. If one or more of them were among your goals, and you have achieved them, that's great. But let's say you're like me. As many of you know, I'm not fast. In my region, the New York metropolitan area, I regularly win or place in my age-group only because my age-cohort locally is small and getting smaller. I like to take home plaques, but I know that I get them not because I'm fast but simply because I've been in the sport such a long time. Plaques are the icing on the cake. My primary goal, the cake, is to have fun racing in 8 to 12 triathlons and duathlons each season, as I have for just about every one of my 24 previous ones. Thus, I design my training program, actually pretty much the same one I first published in my book 21 years ago, simply to make sure that I achieve that goal.

But let's say that you are having a not-so-good season. And there are all those articles out there. Do you just jump into the first new program you come across? Like: "build strength and power and here's how;" "work on speed and here's how;" "stay fast



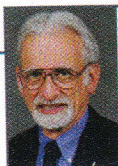
and be competitive;" "use this program, and in 12 weeks you'll achieve a PR" (for whatever distance the article's writer is focusing on). Remembering that one size does not fit all, how do you pick one, or two, or three new programs to follow?

For starters, don't just jump into doing something new in your training without doing some new thinking first. Spend some time figuring out why you feel you are having a not-so-good season. Did you spend any time thinking about goals at the outset? If you did set goals, were they reasonable and realistic, for you? Or did you just plunge in, vaguely thinking about "going faster" or "going longer," then picking one of those February articles that told you (but not you) "here's how to go fast," "everyone should want to go fast," and "use this training program and you will go faster (or longer)"? Folks who are not "having a good one" often make the mistake of training without thinking first. Those folks adopt the "Just Do It" approach (where have I heard that one before?) and for at least some of us that approach just doesn't work.

On the other hand, you may have known that goal-setting is important, and did it. But you may have adopted a set of goals that appeared in one of those "same size fits all" articles without thinking about whether they were realistic for you, in terms of your

skill-set, natural ability, time-availability, what's going on in the rest of your life, and what you would really like to accomplish that is within reason. It may very well be that the reason you are having a "not-so-good" season is that you set goals that are not right for you, or at least not right for you this year. Going fast is great and I am all for it (even though I've never been able to do it). But for you, maybe not this year.

So whether things are going well or not-so-well, if at mid-season you are thinking about adding something or changing something, first think about why and why not. If the answer is "going well," and you are achieving your goals, maybe the answer is to just keep on doin' what you are doin'. But, if you decide to expand your horizon a bit, just make sure that you go through the same rational, sensible, goal-setting process you did back at the start of the season. If things are not going so well, consider not banging your head against a stone wall. Rather, re-adjust your goals, or define a set if you neglected to do so at the outset. In either case, when you set goals first, then you can make some sensible choices among all that advice that is being put out there for you, remembering all the time that one size does not fit all. The correctness of the fit all depends upon what your goals are and how well your goals fit you.



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