



LESSONS FOR NEXT SEASON

Talking Triathlon with Steve Jonas

For most of us, the 2010 season is just about over. How has it been for you? Did you set some specific goals for this one, and did you achieve them? Did you do better than you thought you would? Worse? In what terms did you set your goals? Speed, distance, number of races, all around feeling good? Let's have a quick review.

First of all, did you set goals at all? If you have read my columns before, you know that this is a central focus of mine. In goal setting, you should be thinking about what you want to do, why you want to do it, what are the sacrifices and are you really willing to make them, all within the realm of what is realistic and rational for you to contemplate. If you didn't set goals for this season, think about doing it for next. In my experience, it will be very helpful for helping you to stay in the sport while continuing to have fun and find both mental and physical rewards in doing so.

Now, let's say that you did set goals. This would be a good time to review them and take a look at your race experience in terms of these goals. Since I have never been fast and am getting slower (even in transition) as I get older, for me the No. 1 goal is having fun. For me, fun in triathlon has been defined since I began racing back in 1983 by simply finishing, happy and healthy. I must say that every once in a while I stray from that goal and think about beating so-and-so or placing at such-and-such a level. If I don't make it, even though overall I may have had a good race, I don't feel so good. I have found that if I focus on the race experience, go out and have a good one, and then happen to finish ahead of a particular person and/or get to the podium, so much the better. Of course, if you define fun as winning or placing high, and you have not done it or have not done it enough, then these words do not apply to you. As I have said many times, if you are fast, go for it!

In either case, you can think about your goals for next season in these terms: if you are not planning to try to get faster, but don't have fun when you aren't, think about a goal readjustment to make what you are doing now fun. If you need to go faster to stay in the sport, that tells you that you will have to make some changes in your training program for next season.

Let's look at number of races. For me, it's not quantity, but quality that counts. I know people who do as little as 1-2 races per year

and have just a great time doing so. (I usually do 8-12 triathlons and duathlons.) There are other folks who race just about every weekend. Some of them do great with such a schedule year after year. But folks, there is burn out – even in recreation. If you are slowing down, if getting up early nearly every Sunday in the summer is getting to be a drag, if you have more muscle aches and/or minor injuries than usual, think carefully about what you are doing and why. Very often, the old cliché is true: less is more.

And then, what about distance and type, to which the old cliché can apply as well? For many of us there is a bell-shaped curve over the course of our multisport racing careers. I started out doing an Olympic-distance-plus triathlon. Within two years, I had finished my first Ironman. But I was a lot younger in 1983. I did my last Ironman in 1996, and there will be no more of those. Since then, I have done a number of Olympics as well as sprints and duathlons. I also have doubled on an occasion.

But now, at age 73, I find the Olympic distance is becoming more of a challenge, especially the swim. As I get older, I have a tendency to get a bit seasick in anything but very calm waters and have to swim a very slow but remarkably strenuous side-stroke with my head out of the water in order to make it through. And so I think, "what are my goals?" The most important one is to stay in the sport, to continue to finish happy and healthy, to continue to have fun. I can do that at any distance and any type, I find. And so for next season, there will be more sprints, more duathlons and maybe one Olympic, instead of three or four.

And so, for speed, distance, number of races, all around feeling good, think about doing some goal setting for next year, while making sure the goals you set are rational, reasonable and achievable for you. In my experience, it does make the whole experience with multisport racing much more fun.

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