

October Runover Triathlon Program, October 9, 1994

Doing the Splits  
by Steve Hamlin

If you've hung around races, you've undoubtedly heard talk about splits. Maybe you've wondered, as I did on first hearing this term, what the fascination was with this particular gymnastic position. Maybe it has something to do with the odd-looking stretching exercises that runners do before a race?

The truth is much less colorful than that, though. In fact, splits are a very useful tool to a runner or a multi-sport athlete. To a runner, splits are a way to pace yourself and to predict your overall time. In a mass start running race, for example, a split would be the time from the start of the race to a given point on the course. Typically, volunteers would be stationed at pre-specified mile marks (i.e.: the one mile, three mile and five mile) and would call out elapsed time as individuals ran by. Alternatively, times may be called out constantly (for example: 6:45, 6:46, 6:47...) if the race is a large one and there's a steady stream going by.

In a triathlon, though, splits more frequently are the elapsed time for each individual leg as recorded on the final results. Split times and places enable each participant to see how he/she fared against the rest of his/her particular field. For example, your team's overall place might be 300th out of a field of 375, but you, having run the final leg, may have had the 50th fastest time of the same 375. Or, as an individual doing a triathlon, splits enable one to determine his or her strengths and weaknesses. Having learned this, splits make it possible to chart one's progress in overcoming any weaknesses.

Splits add a lot to the enjoyment of a race. As a cyclist, neophyte runner and occasional paddler, I've found splits useful in many different ways. I use the splits from one triathlon that I've done many times as a cyclist in a four-person team to set goals for my performance. In running races, splits are invaluable to prevent going off too fast and burning out before the end of the race. And, more than once, I've used splits for a race that I was disappointed with to salvage some satisfaction. For example, in my first biathlon I ran horribly, especially in the second run. Splits enabled me to find some rewards in the bike leg that I had.

So, when you go to the races, do the splits. You'll get more out of the experience.