

October Runover Triathlon Program, October 9, 1994

Triathlon for the Athletically Challenged  
Confessions of a Confirmed Klutz  
by Steve Hamlin

If passing gas was a sport, I would have been an Olympian. But, for better or for worse, flatulation has never been sanctioned. To say that I was no athlete as a kid is the ultimate understatement. After winning a blue ribbon in broad jumping in the sixth grade (mostly owing to the fact that in broad jumping one has only to make sure to fall FORWARD), my best performance in scholastic sports was in picking my seat. But, I digress. This is supposed to be about triathlon.

When triathlon is mentioned, many people immediately think of the "Konaheads" from TV. You know: Speedo-clad, goggle-eyed human ocelots emerging from a six mile open-sea swim and jumping on space-age bicycles to ride 110 miles, only to finish with a 26 mile run. Any one of these feats is beyond the reach of most of the people I know. But, triathlon doesn't have to be a superhuman effort. Short course triathlons, and especially canoe triathlons, are not only athletically accessible to the average person, but, if done as a team, are a heck of a lot of fun. No matter where you place, there are few feelings to compare with the post-race glow.

One does have to prepare though. Training is crucial to having fun in a race. Without at least a token amount of training, the shortest race is an exercise in frustration. Besides, training is at least half the fun of racing. You can burn off much of the frustration of daily life in the name of training. Had a tough day at work? Pound the pavement for a few miles. Fight with the spouse? Kids making you crazy? A good, hard paddle (on the lake) can be very therapeutic. You'll be healthier, sleep better and have a more positive outlook on life if you train regularly. And, any time spent in training will pay big dividends on race day.

Almost as important as the training is the choosing of a team. Nothing can take the shine off a great performance like the frustration of watching the lead you worked so hard to get, being squandered by teammates who are ill-prepared. Equally disheartening is the feeling of being the anchor weighing the team down.

It's okay to just have a lark in a race, as long as it's a team lark. On choosing your teammates or being chosen by someone else, you should make it clear that you are just in it for a good time, or that you are driven by a personal need to succeed. By knowing what you're capable of, and by setting realistic goals with your teammates, you can hopefully head off a frustrating experience.

Remember, though, that your ultimate goal is to have a good time. Everybody has the occasional bad day: bikes flat, canoes flip and runners get hangnails. So don't expect your teammates to share your vision exactly. Triathlon is like life - you aim for Utopia, but settle for Des Moines. Anyway, there's always the next race.

So, train hard, have good fortune, but, above all, enjoy the race!