



Paul Phillips/Competitive Edge

Triathlon Cheers

By Steve Jonas

I was doing my second race of the season, the Carl Hart Mother's Day Duathlon in Heckscher State Park on Long Island, N.Y. (Why was I racing on Mother's Day, you ask? My wife was out of town, so I got to race.) I was moving at my usual slow pace — actually even slower than usual for me that early in the season. But I was comfortable and having a good time. Having loops on both the run and the bike is good for spectators, and there were an ample number of them cheering us on.

Most triathletes and duathletes enjoy having spectators at the races. Spectators expand the sport beyond the participants into the community in which the race is being held. The cheering, the encouragement, the good will of the local folks is much appreciated, and from time to time can help you up the pace or simply hang on. One thing that strikes me, however, is how limited the list of available cheers for multisport athletes is. You may have noticed that "good going," "looking good," "way to go," "hang in there," "keep it going," and "good job" seem to comprise the total vocabulary for the spectators' cheers. And we racers seem to use the same set when encouraging fellow competitors.

Of course, if you think about it a bit, there's not much else to say, is there? "Defense, (clap, clap)," "hold that line" or "ump, are you blind?" just don't seem to be applicable. So we are left with our set of cheers. And most of them make us feel good, make us indeed "hang in there" or even pick it up a bit.

However, I must admit there is one of them that rubs me the wrong way. It is "good job." I know that when a spectator says "good job" to me as I pass by, he or she thinks that what's said is both complimentary and encouraging. It's certainly said with the best of intentions. To many spectators, it happens, what we are doing is work. To them triathlon and duathlon are hard, and unless they also race, most of them cannot imagine that it is fun.

I go slow enough in the races that I actually smile from time to time. "Look, there's one who is actually smiling," I have heard one spectator say. "How could they do all that and smile," is the implication. Since many people don't enjoy their jobs, find them hard, and seldom have a reason to smile while at work, and since not too many multisport racers smile while racing, then what we are doing must be a job, is

the logical conclusion. But except for the pros, multisport racing isn't a job. We are engaging in a sport. It's a voluntary activity. It is, or should be, fun. (If you think about this endeavor as work or a job, I suggest that you find some other way to spend your leisure time. If multisport racing becomes work to you, there's likely a physical and/or mental injury waiting for you somewhere down the road.)

Moreover, there's no product from our activity, in either goods or services. The only products are, or should be, fun, fulfillment, self-satisfaction, getting in shape and staying fit. So maybe we could have a little campaign for our spectators. Our slogan could be: "Tell me I'm great, but don't tell me I'm working."

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