



Preparing for the Racing Season: Do the Mental Work First

At this time of year, many of us are talking with patients, clients, colleagues, and friends about beginning the new season of distance racing, whether single sport or multi-sport as they transition from off-season training. As I've mentioned in previous editorials, I'm a multi-sport racer. I live in the Northeast and for me winter training focuses mainly on stretching, weight-lifting, and a 30 to 60 minute session or two of fast-walking/jogging on the weekends. With my first short duathlon scheduled for the end of March in New York City's Central Park, I'll get into my race-training routine early in March (once the weather becomes conducive for it). But in addition to the physical work, I feel that there is some important mental work to be done each spring to help me—and others—properly get ready for the next racing season.

The mental side of distance racing has to do with "keeping your head in the game." This involves addressing such questions as: "Why am I racing?" "What do I expect to get out of it?" "What are the sacrifices I'm making, and are they worth

it?" And, "What is racing doing for me, mentally and physically?" These questions are part of the goal-setting process, the central element of which is to establish goals that are reasonable and achievable for *each individual*. In my experience, this is absolutely essential if they are going to stay in the sport, happily and healthily.

I suggest that when setting this season's goals, last season's experience should serve as the guide. For me, the most important question is, "Did I have fun?" For others, it may be, "Did I go fast enough?" or "Did I win enough times in my age-group?" or "Did I set the personal bests I wanted to?" If the goal or goals were achieved, great. If not, whether in terms of fun or speed or both, careful thought should be given to "why?" Was there something lacking that could be fixed, reasonably and rationally, with changes in training and/or technique? Or was there something wrong with the goals themselves? Over the last couple of years, with aging and

an occasional injury, to achieve my primary goal of simply having fun out there, I've had to slow down even more from my already slow pace. I am also doing shorter races, so *that I can stay in the sport*. I set my goals accordingly.

On the other hand, if increasing speed is important, was it to go faster last season comfortably and without injury? If so, great. The goals should work again and the training program can be designed accordingly. But say it was a tough season, in terms of speed and/or injury. In that case, it might be a good idea to take a closer look at the goals for this season, making sure they're reasonable in light of the difficulties you faced last season. Then design a training and racing schedule to enable you to meet them. Setting goals that are right for the person is the best way to make sure that they stay in the sport, happily and healthily.

Go well,
Dr. Steve Jonas

This column is based in part on an entry that will be appearing on the Falcon Guides blog (<http://www.falcon.com/blog>) of Globe Pequot Press, publisher of Steve's latest book, Duathlon Training and Racing for Ordinary Mortals®: Getting Started and Staying with It.