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# 3 Things My First Triathlon Taught Me



Well, I did it. Finished my first triathlon - a sprint-distance tri: 500yd swim, 14.2mi bike, 3.1mi (5K) run. Felt pretty good throughout. My results (i.e., my Personal Best):

8th (of 9) in age group

Overall 48th (of 63)

Swim: 4th in age group Time - 10:07

Transition 1 - 3:37

Bike: 7th in age group Time - 53:07

Transition 2 - 1:33

Run: 9th in age group Time - 35:28

Here's a few things I learned from the experience. Hope they help you with your first triathlon or next triathlon or anything else you might be able to apply them to!

## **(1) It's better to be tapped on the foot**

The triathlon I did had the swim leg in a pool. The course snaked back and forth from one end of the pool to the other, and each swimmer started about 5 seconds apart. I positioned myself at the back of the line to the pool, thinking that I might be slower and I didn't want to be holding anyone up.

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I shouldn't have underestimated myself. Many people in triathlons apparently do not do much, if any swim training. I'd kept my training fairly balanced, and done well swimming. So, by underestimating myself, I did what another competitor told me: "I'd rather be tapped on the foot than kicked in the head."

**Lesson I learned:** Be it swimming or other aspects of your life, **don't undersell yourself**. If you've worked hard and you know that you are in a certain class, don't let self-doubt get to you. Take your rightful place in line and let others tap you on the foot and politely pass by if they must. You don't deserve to get kicked in the face.

### (2) Pacing works

As I was about 1/3 of the way through the 14-mile bike leg of the triathlon, somebody passed me. It's not a big deal because most competitors are really competing against the clock, and I passed people, myself; that's just the way it works. But something about this person's style bothered me.

In cycling, [cadence is the name of the game](#) (read my article about it [here](#)). Pedaling at 90-100RPM (i.e., the number of times your pedals make a revolution during a minute - that might be self-evident, sorry) does so much for you in terms of efficiency and endurance. I've worked hard to build myself up to keep a cadence in that range and was doing very well with it during the race. This person who passed me, though, was clearly chunking along using more pure force than cadence to move ahead. They were pushing their pedals much more slowly and because of basic brute strength, they pulled past me and away.

But I thought "I'll see him later!" And sure enough, about another 1/3 of the way through the course, there he was. Tired out, still pushing those pedals, and beaten down by the brutal headwinds we faced that day.

**Lesson I learned:** **Slow and steady really does win the race**. Not only have I experienced this in athletic performance, but I've also lost more than 70 lbs in the last 10 months on Weight Watchers and it came off at about 1-2lbs per week. No radical diets or shortcuts, just persistence and dedication. It's truly so hard to keep going when you see others burst past you by taking a shortcut, exploiting some apparent advantage or bullsh\*tting their way through life. But take solace in the fact that if you've done your research and listen to those who know the truth, you'll be the one with the reserve power and extra gears under your feet when it's time to make your move.

### (3) Know where the finish line is

The last leg of the triathlon was the 5K run - my weakest link. Running isn't my favorite thing to do, and while I've improved as I've trained more and lost the weight, I haven't conquered it. Yet.

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So, aside from the fact that I didn't take my heavy, wet biking jacket off, I slogged my way through the run. (*Bonus lesson learned: I didn't take the biking jacket off b/c my race number was on it and I didn't want to take the time to repin it. Next time, I'm definitely going to have [a race belt like this one](#) so I can easily move my number around without having to worry about pins.*)

The course was half cross country (grass) and half rough road, so the softness of the surface was very different from my road training. Still, even after I got my legs to adjust from the cycling, I lightly bounced along the path at a very slow pace. Sure, I was tired from the other events, but I acted almost like I was saving energy up for something.

But saving for what?! I was only a few miles from the finish line of a very long race and after that, I would be done! Even if I took it easy for a mile or so, I could have recovered a little and engaged my legs to finish a little stronger. I might have felt some burn, but as long as I didn't go to the point of knowingly injuring myself, I might have found enough reserve energy to keep up a steady and strong pace.

**Lesson I learned: When you know where the finish line is, don't waste that knowledge and just go for it.** I knew that I was in the home stretch and still ran very conservatively. Knowing the distance, direction and steps to get to the finish line is such a powerful bit of information - again whether it's an actual finish line of a race or a deadline or goal in your life or work - and you are killing yourself for no good reason by squandering that knowledge. Finish strong. You'll have time to take a well deserved and well-earned rest after.

Those are three things I learned among many other great things I took away from my first triathlon experience (including: triathlon competitors are really friendly, nice people who are happy to share information and encouragement at every turn - even during the 'race'). I'm planning on doing more tris, and on challenging myself in other ways to have fun and keep progressing in fitness and health (next event: [Warrior Dash, March 31](#)). Next time, I'll be setting myself up for success in swimming, staying the course on the bike and keeping in mind that while the running comes after the other events, it's just that last thing between me and the finish line.

Hope this was useful for you if you're running, swimming, cycling, doing all three, or just looking to get ahead in your career or your life. Let me know what you think!

Thanks for listening!