

Do you self destruct?

Not on purpose of course. But do you as an athlete make decisions that negatively impact your performance? Over the years I have seen athletes make all sorts of strange decisions regarding training and racing, ultimately compromising performance. Why do they make these decisions that hurt performance? That is a subject of another article, but my feeling in observing athletes is that these decisions are a result of fear: fear of failing, fear of succeeding or a combination of the two.

Below I have summarized decisions I have seen athletes make that hurt performance. Some are worse than others, but none of the decisions below will help you go faster. *In essence, each one of these decisions is a built in excuse for not doing your best.* "This is just a C Race." I didn't taper for this race." I just decided to do the race at the last minute." "I am doing this race just as a workout." "I did a marathon last weekend and my legs aren't that fresh." Do you recognize any decisions on this list?

Planning

- 1) **Not picking an A race.** By not choosing an A race, you will never train or peak properly. You will never reach your potential. Many athletes just race all the time, but never put it all on the line peaking for one race. Believe me; I know how scary it is to train for a year putting it all on the line for one race. I have experienced great races and I have fallen flat on my face as well. However, the only way to test yourself is to put it all on the line.
- 2) **Picking too many "A" races.** This is the opposite problem, trying to peak for way too many races. As such, you may have some good races, but you will never hit your potential or find out how good you can be.
- 3) **Not specializing in an event.** I have seen athletes pick "A" races, but they pick them in non complementary events. For example, I have had athletes want to peak for the St. Louis Go marathon in April and Memphis in May Olympic Triathlon about 5 weeks after that. It is simply not possible to train effectively for both events because the requirements are so different. The only way to find out how good you can be in an event is to pick an event and stick with it for a few years.

Training

- 1) **Not following your training plan.** Even though you have laid out a training plan (or you bought a plan or work with a coach), you don't follow it. A training plan is like a cooking recipe; if you change all the ingredients how do you know what works or does not work for you?
- 2) **Changing your plan based on the latest Triathlete magazine training article.** Same "recipe" problem as above.

- 3) **Doing your buddy's workout instead of your own.** Typically, an athlete will work out with a friend at a much faster pace than they should. This will cause fatigue and drastically increase the chance for injury.
- 4) **Moving all of your workouts around.**
- 5) **Skipping your rest day.** This is a biggie to me. By keeping yourself slightly tired (or really tired) you prevent yourself from adapting and really pushing yourself on your hard days.
- 6) **Going too hard on your easy day.** Same as previous.
- 7) **Going too hard during your recovery week.** Same as previous.
- 8) **Loading up mega workouts on the weekends.** Athletes often times are not able to get their workouts in during the week so they really load up on the weekend. This is a good way to get injured.

Racing

- 1) **Adding unscheduled races before your "A" race.** I recently had an athlete add 2 non complementary races (without telling me) in the weeks preceding his "A" race for the season. Why on earth would an athlete do this?
- 2) **Squeezing in extra hard work outs during the week leading up to the race.**
- 3) **Not having a race plan**
- 4) **Changing your race plan during the race.** I read a race report by a good athlete/coach describing his recent Ironman race. He felt great on the swim and started off really strong on the early part of the bike. His race plan called for attempting to hold 250 watts for the whole bike leg. However, he felt so good, that he cranked up his power to 300 watts. He said he wanted to "really go for it." Well, as you can imagine, he began to fade late in the bike and followed that up with a subpar run. Instead of a 9:30 IM, he did not break 11:00 but his excuse was "he went for it." It takes more guts to develop a race plan and stick to it than it does to just "go for it."
- 5) **Negative talk at the starting line.** We all know this person. They talk to anybody who will listen how they did not get in all their training, their coach told them to just treat this race like a workout, they have been busy at work all week, their big toe hurts.....blah, blah, blah. Shut up and race.
- 6) **Trying something for the first time during a race.** While we all know you should stick with what has been tested during training for a race, on race day athletes try out the flying mount in transition for the first time, break out brand new racing flats, take supplements, use a new watch, eat food never eaten in training, try a new aero position, try a new way to take off a wetsuit and the list goes on and on.