

Race and Training Plans by Coach Daren

Have a plan on race day. Have a plan for every training session. Heart rate, nutrition, hydration, pace, clothing, and equipment are all parts of a typical plan. Put your ideas on paper, or at least think things through and have the ideas in your head.

And then, in the middle of that long run or halfway through the bike leg of a race - expect the plan to not work. Say what? But it was a good plan. "I've used it before, and it worked fine", you tell your training partner as she sits with you in front of the convenience store in the shade waiting for your stomach to calm down so you can finish the ride and get home.

Plans are only as good as the assumed conditions upon which they were based. Examples might be: the weather will be low humidity and in the mid-80's, or the aid stations on the half marathon course will not run out of water. These conditions weigh heavily in the equipment, nutrition, and clothing choices for your plan. They also play an important part in your pacing or heart rate plan. Change the conditions...and your plan falls apart.

Racing and training are about overcoming obstacles. The object is to keep moving forward. When facing an obstacle you need to go over, through, under, or around. Just keep moving forward. Stuff changes, and you need to adapt on the go. By all means stick with your plan. You worked it out with many resources at hand and with a clear head. But, and this is the tricky part, have the wisdom to recognize when the conditions have clearly changed, and thus the plan is partly or completely useless.

Be prepared to adapt on the fly. When I am out on a long ride or a long run I will quiz myself with "what if" scenarios such as, "It is mile 3 on the White Lake Half Iron run course and my stomach is rejecting the gel and water I've been sipping for the last 25 minutes. It was supposed to be 82 degrees and it is already 94 and very humid. I feel sick. What should I do?" Hopefully this won't ever happen, but if it does, at least I'll have a backup plan filed away. More importantly I will have developed some experience in rebuilding a plan to meet changed conditions.

As a coach I refuse to write race or training plans for my athletes. Instead, I ask them to write their own plans, and I will, if they ask me to do so, review the plan and offer comments. The idea here is that to be able to rebuild the plan under stressful conditions you really need to know how it was originally put together. Trying to rebuild a plan authored by someone else, even if it was the best coach in the world who wrote the plan, is very difficult even in a calm setting. On the race course when you are in a partial melt-down mode it is nearly impossible.

So, if you are not currently doing so, consider having a plan for every training session and race. And, equally as important as having a plan, practice rebuilding a failing plan.

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Triathlon