

Pain is a big part of racing triathlons. We all know that, but no matter how prepared we are for that pain, it seems to come charging in at the most inopportune and random of times on race day, surprising us and catching us off guard. Some days are better than others, and when the pain comes we're sometimes able to ignore it or shut it out. Other days, however, we can be overcome by the pain and it can rule the rest of our race.

Days ruled by pain become very miserable very quickly. I'm sure that every triathlete has had at least one pain-filled race. I've had several, and during those races I hate myself. I curse myself for ever signing up for such a crazy event. I tell myself that I'll never race again, that there are many other sports that hurt a lot less. By the end of the day, of course, those thoughts have dissipated and I'm already thinking of the next race, but for those hours on the course I can really get down on myself. Letting the pain take over like that is apt to ruin your race, and the longer the race, the more time it has to get you down.

Barrelman will be my first half-iron distance race. At the moment, my longest triathlon has come in the olympic distance. I know that, since I'm doubling the distance I'll be racing, I'm doubling the amount of time that the pain has to work its way into my muscles and mind, working to break down both. I've read plenty of psychology articles on endurance racing which talk about different mental tactics to use during races, but I've decided to approach Barrelman with a mindset which is probably too simple to merit an article in *Psychology Today* or *Triathlete* magazines.

When I'm training and racing, I get consumed by my times, as I know many triathletes do. If I'm not going as fast as I would like to, I get very upset with myself. Couple that disappointment with the pain of racing and I see my mental game drop quickly. Rarely do I calm my mind and really think about what I'm doing. If someone had come up to me five years ago and told me that I would one day be swimming two kilometres, biking 90 and running a half marathon, one after the other after the other, I would have just laughed. Now, however, I know I can accomplish this incredible feat and expect myself to do so at Barrelman. As triathletes I find that we are seldom satisfied. Even when I win a race, I find flaws in my performance and areas that need some work. This is a good attitude to have, of course; if we were too easy to satisfy, we would not strive to improve ourselves day in and day out. But this insatiable attitude can be detrimental to performance at times, specifically when you aren't meeting your pre-race expectations.

So my simple approach to Barrelman is this: Instead of berating myself when I get out of the water and see that my swim wasn't quite as fast as I would have liked, or when I'm not moving through as many kilometres per hour as I'd hoped to, or when I'm not hitting whatever run pace I'd planned on, I'm simply going to take a step back and think about what I'm about to accomplish. Five years ago, I would have laughed if anyone had told me to try a triathlon. Now, I'm preparing to race over 70 miles. I'm going to remind myself of that when the pain starts setting in on race day; that five years ago, I couldn't swim, bike or run a fraction of what I can now. Times and placings aside, that is a huge accomplishment. And I'm hoping that appreciating and reminding myself of that accomplishment will be enough to get me out of my funk and help me regain my focus for the race. Like I said, no *Psychology Today*-level techniques from me. Just a homemade ego-boost that I thought I'd try out.

