

This is Not an “Individual Sport” (Continued)

Some more highlights of Nation’s – hearing everyone’s stories afterwards. We had three 1/c run their first tri, one 1/c run her first Olympic, one 3/c run her first tri, and two 4/c run their first tri. Needless to say, everyone had a different race story to share, and everyone had an immense amount of pride. As they should – regardless of your finish time, an Olympic triathlon is a 1,500 yard swim, a 25 mile bike, and a 6.2 mile run...that’s a lot of work. Fact of the matter is, personally, I did drop a good bit of time that race; but my personal satisfaction from Nation’s was insignificant compared to the amount of pride I felt for that team. CGA Tri is a fantastic bunch of people.

The team factor came heavily into play as well three weeks later at our race in Montauk, New York – the NECTC championship race, our biggest of the season. It was the same setup as Nation’s in many ways. 17 of us traveled, rented a house on Long Island, and spent the weekend resting, and bonding, and prepping for the race Sunday morning. But on race day itself, triathlon-tragedy struck...

A word about NECTC Championships first – this is the race that has the most bearing on how many athlete slots we get for Collegiate Nationals in the spring. As a rough overview, your team gets points based on how high individual athletes rank at certain races, and Montauk rankings are worth more points than comparable rankings at other races. The more points your teams gets that season, the more Nationals slots you get. So, needless to say, Montauk is a big deal.

And the morning of Montauk, it was raining, and the roads were very, very slippery...

I was out on the bike course, and I thought I was doing reasonably well, given the weather. And admittedly, I was focusing mostly on my own race – I was scanning each turnaround and out-and-back looking for someone in particular as a “gauge.” Erin, our best female racer by far, is usually well ahead of me on the bike course – I can tell how well I’m doing by how far behind Erin I am, so at Montauk I was looking...and looking...and looking...and I couldn’t find her. “Wow,” I kept thinking, “either Erin’s having a *really* good race, or I’m not doing so hot, if she’s *that* far ahead.” Until I spotted Erin...behind me...all bandaged up.

Erin had hit a slippery patch and wrecked her bike, an unfortunate accident that left her pretty badly scraped up. Tough athlete that she is, she got back on her bike...but she’d probably been set back about 15 minutes.

After the initial shock of “oh my God, is she ok?” something else occurred to me: all along, I’d been subconsciously counting on Erin to earn us a substantial portion of our Nationals slots, because she consistently ranks so high. But with this setback, now *I* was the CGA female currently leading the team in our highest-weighted race of the season. Now it was *my* job to earn those slots that I’d foolishly written off as Erin’s job. Talk about pressure...

Despite the weather, I dropped six minutes off my time in that race - enough to move me high enough in the rankings to earn some spots at National's

My point here is not my success, or Erin's accident, or rakings, or the glory of winning, but how a sense of companionship within a team can enable individuals beyond what they normally achieve. While obviously no one wants a team member (our strongest athlete) and friend to wreck, in triathlon everyone knows that it will happen to all of us at some point; and so, given that this was my teammate's unlucky day, I'm glad for the multi-way awareness we all share on the course; that sense of companionship, the almost-panicky adrenaline surge you get from seeing your teammate down, enables you to do things you otherwise could not. It allows you to "kick it into overdrive" in a way that you couldn't just for yourself. It allows you to drop six minutes off your time when you thought you were already at your physical limit. Because you know, in the future, when you have *your* unlucky day, your teammates will pull through for you in the same way, and the team will continue to thrive.

Maybe I can't speak for triathlon in general, but CGA Triathlon...no way is this an individual sport.