

## Health, Fitness and Life Lessons from the Latest Half Ironman

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T, episode number 77.

Welcome to the TD Fitness Podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. Now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey, what's up guys? This is Coach T. Welcome back to the TD Fitness Podcast, episode number 77. I decided to do something a little bit different with this episode. I've actually done this so once or twice before, but I recorded a Facebook live post earlier this week about the half Ironman race that a few of us completed this past weekend. What I decided to do was to take that. There are some pretty good not only race lessons but life lessons, particularly when you think about health and fitness and accomplishing your goals. I wanted to share that with you here, so enjoy.

Hey, hey. What's up guys? Coach T here coming back at you, this time on a Facebook live. What I'd like to do here is talk a little bit about this past weekend because it was a really special weekend. A few of us got to take part in something special, which was a half Ironman, a 70.3 distance swim, bike, and run that took place in Williamsburg, Virginia. Most of you probably know that I try to do one of these races or something like it just about every year, so this one was the one for ... Actually, it was scheduled for 2018 and got canceled or postponed, actually, canceled, due to weather back in October, so we chose another race in May here down in Williamsburg.

But, there a number ... There are always a number of lessons that I learn from participating in events like this. I like to share some of those things because they're related not just to health and fitness, but also just to in life in general. I mean, there are always some pretty good life lessons that I take away from these things.

What I'd like to do here is just take a few minutes to talk about this past weekend. Not so much the technical stuff about how to train, how to fuel for one of these events and things like that, but more general ideas, again, that apply to healthy living. That's kind of the intent here. Sorry the camera's moving around here. I'm just trying to get the angle right and to try to show that that Ironman emblem there because it's important for this episode.

This time we had several folks that, again, were participating in an event like this for the first time. Every year so far, we've had first timers participate in one of these events. I think the takeaway here, or the lesson, is that a bunch of small parts add up to create a whole. What I mean by that is if it's your first time, and even if it's not your first time, sometimes the thought of completing an event that's so long ... I mean, we're talking exercise in six to eight hours. The thought of doing that, swimming 1.2 miles, biking 56 miles, and then running a 13.1 mile half marathon, I mean, that can be daunting. The thought of that can be daunting.

So how do you prepare for that? Well, the answer is you break it up into pieces that are less intimidating. You don't start by swimming 1.2 miles. You start by swimming 50 meters in the pool, and then you gradually add on to that, and you get more and more comfortable, more and more proficient. You kind of just add to ... use the building block approach as you go. The

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same thing applies to the bike, and the same thing applies for the run. Then, you start to piece those things together. And before you know it, you're crossing the finish line and they're putting a medal on your ... around your neck.

Small parts add up to the whole. That is something that applies not just to a half Ironman event, or a long-distance triathlon, or any kind of race. It's not just applicable to that. That applies to life as well, particularly when you think about health and nutrition. Because your goals for fitness and nutrition really comes down to the things that you do day in and day out. Those small things that you do are going to add up to give you the goal that you're looking for or to keep you from reaching that goal that you look for. That's what I want you to remember from that, small parts add up to the whole.

The second takeaway from this weekend is really the concept of smart training. What I mean by that is traditionally, over the years, the way to train, the common belief that the way to train for one of these events, whether it's a marathon, or a long-distance triathlon, or anything like that, was that you had to get in a lot of miles. You had to pound the pavement. You had to spend a lot of time doing what was called long/slow distance training, eventually getting to the point where you were completing the race distance before you even got to the race. I'm glad that we've come a long way in science and learning so that now we know more about how the body works, and how the body responds, and how we can build up cardiovascular capacity without spending hours and hours in the gym swimming, biking, and running, and, oh, by the way, beating up our joints many times doing that.

It doesn't take 14 hours of training per week to complete an Ironman or a half Ironman. In fact, the plan that I created averages just under five hours a week. Those of us who used it for this race ... Again, everybody completed the race. It's not like you have to put in an exorbitant amount of time just to complete one of these events. If you're smart about your rest and recovery, if you're smart about your stretching and your flexibility, if you're smart about your interval training, that can build your cardio capacity so that you don't have to spend a lot of time swimming, biking, and running.

Now, certainly there's benefit to spending some, doing some longer workouts because you have to know what your ... Well, you want to know, what your body's going to feel like and what you need to improve on in order to compete in one of these long-distance events. You want to test things out, like your nutrition plan and things like that. But I'll tell you that it doesn't take as much time as you think to be able to complete one of these events, to be able to train to complete one of these events. Now, I'm talking about completion. I'm not talking about competing, because that's a different way of training. And yes, you may have to put in a lot more time if you intend to place, to be in the top percentage of finishers. But if you just want to complete an event like this, which is always my goal, then you don't have to put in 14 hours of training per week. All right?

Another takeaway, man, the importance of nutrition. I always learn little lessons here. I'm not going to go into too much detail and bore you with kind of race specifics, but I'll tell you that most of us learn lessons about nutrition, about the importance of hydration, about the importance of maintaining an electrolyte balance, about the importance of proper nutrition prior to the event. Nutrition is important, whether you're talking about a race or you're talking about everyday life. That's the takeaway there.

Also, the importance of rest and not over training. One of the things that I stress to individuals who I provide these training plans for is that if you have a minor muscular imbalance or a small weakness, you can bet that it's going to be ... It's going to manifest itself as you spend hours and hours over the months training. It's important to get the appropriate

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amount of rest and to spend your time training effectively and training smartly, kind of like I mentioned earlier. You don't want to just wing it. You want to have a plan in place. You want to make sure that plan incorporates adequate rest and relaxation, and, for me, massage on a periodic basis, and not over training. That's all important in reaching your goal. It's not just the things you do actively toward your goal, it's also the white space, that time in between, the rest, for example, and the recovery. Those things are important just like they are in everyday life.

Speaking of training and your commitment, one of the things that is always impressive to me is that you don't have to be perfect in order to be successful. We talk about this a lot. I talk about it. My friends over at Better Nutrition talk about it. The common mantra is to just be better. Don't try to be perfect. Try to improve on where you are right now. Don't try to be perfect. What I'll say about this particular instance is that I laid out a number of workouts that I wanted to complete in preparation for this event. But guess what? Life happens. I've been traveling quite a bit over the past few months, haven't been able to get in the training that I wanted to, but it's okay because I still finished. All right?

However, I will say that the amount of focused and appropriate effort that you put in does determine how successful you will be. If I had trained more, or trained better, or train smarter, then yes, I think I could've done better from a finishing time standpoint. But if the goal is completion, then, again, I didn't have to complete every workout in order to complete this race. The takeaway there, just try to be better. Don't try to be perfect.

Another lesson, and this one I'm always reminded of when on the race course, and that is that it's not always sunshine and roses. I'll tell you that that statement it was quite literal over this past weekend. I'll explain what I mean about that in a minute. But, they're going to be ups and downs in a race that's this long, just like there are ups and downs in life. But when things get tough, then sometimes you have to just push through. I mean, you have to persevere.

I mentioned sunshine and roses. I'll tell you that when we were on the bike course during the race for those ... For me it was, I don't know, three, three plus hours, I guess. There was a lot of rain. I never ride in the rain. In fact, most people try to avoid riding in the rain. That was something that all of us had to contend with, and it was raining pretty hard. Some of us were battling injuries. Some of us were cramping up. I mean, all of these things, all of these types of adversity that you have to just kind of push through in order to get to the goal line. I had a flat tire on my bike. Again, that's something that's not planned, but it's something you just have to push through, again, to make it to the finish line.

It's not always rosy, but you got to take the lows with the highs. The important thing to remember, though, is that even when you're in those down points, even in those low points when things aren't necessarily going your way, whether it's in a race or in life, you want to just be able to push through that because there is a bright light on the other side of it.

Now, one of the questions ... I find this funny. One of the questions that we get sometimes is, "Why would you put yourself through this? Why would you put yourself through," and I'm quoting people here, "through seven hours of agony just to say you completed a race? Why would you pay to do that?" Well, the way I answer that question is a couple of ways.

Number one, you guys have heard me refer to or talk about Seth Godin from time to time. I read a lot of his work. He writes from time to time about a phrase that says, "People like us do things like this." That could be taken a couple of different ways, but the way that he means it, and the way that I interpret it, is this: triathlon ... All of us belong to different groups, different subcultures. We self-identify with different groups in different phases and

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aspects of our lives. I consider myself a believer, a faithful man. My faith is something that is strong to me. That's one group that I identify with. I am in the military. That's another group that I identify with. I am a family man. I'm a husband. I'm a father. I can identify with all groups of husbands and fathers. We share a lot of the similar ... a lot of similar interests and a lot of similar pain points as well.

But, I'm also a triathlete. And oh, by the way, if you compete or if you do triathlons, then you're a triathlete. You don't have to be on TV to be a triathlete. Within this community of triathletes, there are certain things that are expected and certain things that we know everyone else has kind of gone through. One is we all have that sense of accomplishment from dedicating ourselves to training over a certain amount of time to showing up on race day and to completing the event. That's something that all of us share.

Many of us, all of us, I'd venture to say, have overcome obstacles. We've gone through the excuses. We've dealt with them. We've used them sometimes. We power through the scheduling conflicts and gone through that adversity that I talked about a couple of minutes ago. Identifying yourself with a group like this ... And oh, by the way, one of the great things about the triathlon community, from my observation, is that everyone is so supportive of one another. That is something that's very appealing.

So why put yourself through this? Well, I don't look at it that way at all. I look at it as why would I associate myself with a group of people like this? I can tell you that there are so many positive character traits, positive examples, examples of role models, examples of what to do and how to continue and persevere. I think that that's something important. That's why I like to compete in triathlon events and be a part of the triathlon community.

One of the other things I'll tell you about all races and about competing or participating in these events is that for me, and for most people, I'd say, it's not about the time. It's about completing. I'll tell you that of the seven, I guess seven of us that participated in this past event this weekend, my time was the slowest of all of those. Again, it's about being better, not perfect. What I try to do is improve upon my time from the last race that I did. I was not successful in that this time around. But, hey, that's a good reason to try again, right? But, it's not about the time because it's about all that's gone into the training and all that's gone into race day itself. Those are the important things, and those are kind of the bonds I feel like we all share.

Now, another takeaway is that it's important to have ... Those of you who've gone through the FitLife program or tuned into the TD Fitness Podcast for any length of time understand that it's important to have a reason behind what you do, a sense of purpose, if you will. For me, this all started with to commemorate my father. My father passed in 2007. I started doing triathlons around 2009, 2010. For me, that was a way to kind of step out of my comfort zone. I was not comfortable swimming at all. I'd never biked more than a couple of miles, and certainly never run any double digits on my feet. I just didn't do that. But, this was a way to kind of step out of my comfort zone and really to do something to commemorate him and his memory.

Every year around the September timeframe, his birthday was September 11th, I would try to compete in an event, to do a race. Now that's become a commemoration for both my father and my mother, who passed in 2017. I just try to do something like this every year if I can. For me, that's kind of my driving force. I think about that every time I compete in one of these things.

But, another thing I'll say is the reason that I do this is to inspire others to try it as well. Because sometimes all it takes is someone you know, just witnessing them doing something that you thought was pretty much impossible. And that, I think that's really cool because it's kind of contagious when success is contagious or being able to do something that you set out to do, that now gives you a belief that you can do it when you see somebody close to you or somebody that's like you able to accomplish that. I think those are all things that I kind of think about when it comes to racing, when it comes to competing in these events. Again, a lot of parallels to life in general and to healthy living.

Now, I have to say, though, that when I think specifically about this weekend, there are a couple of things that really made it special. Again, draw another parallel to your own personal fitness goals and how you accomplish those. It's a lot easier when you have a support system, when you have some folks in your corner. This weekend, we had just a host of folks, family, friends, and, again, athletes supporting one another, and folks we didn't even know just kind of cheering us on. I mean that was just a great vibe, a great feeling. But, I can't say enough about the family members and friends who showed up to support us because it's not easy when you try to do something like this alone, but it's a whole lot easier when you have that support system in your corner.

I think back to, I think it was like mile eight or nine on the run, and I was walking. I was pretty tired. I was getting close to the end. I had about four miles to go. Just wanted to really get there. I was doing the run/walk thing, or the jog, walk a lot, jog a little bit, walk a lot. That's how I roll. But, a lady came up beside me. She'd come from behind, from behind me, and said, "Hey, do you want to run with me?" She picked out a point out in front, and I was like, "Sure. Let's run together for a little bit." But it's those kinds of things where you're not competing with one another, but you're just there to kind of cheer each other on. It's those types of things, that community environment, that family support system that I mentioned, and the good community and fellowship that really made the weekend something special. That's why I had a great time. My wife was there with me, too. She participated in the race as well, so it was just awesome all around.

Another thing, though, that I'll say when it comes to kind of the parallels with healthy living, and this is something that I don't talk about a whole lot because it's hard to convey at the level that I mean to convey it, but I'm going to attempt it again here. It's really the culmination. I'll call it the combination of just facing our fears.

Here's how I'll describe it. Every time that I participate in one of these events, there's always a certain level of fear and apprehension that comes along with it. There's a lot of that because I feel in some ways responsible for those who have been kind enough to take me up on the offer to complete that long-distance triathlon for the first time. I say kind enough. Maybe I should say crazy enough. I don't know. But since I started convincing friends and coworkers to do this, I want to say 14 or 15 people have completed a long-distance triathlon. That's a 70.3 or a full Ironman, 140.6 distance since 2015. That was the first race we did at those distances. And every single one of them has completed it on their first attempt.

I think that that's really something special because it says a lot about the individuals and the lengths they're willing to go to, the commitment they're willing to put forth to attempt or to accomplish that feat and that goal. But, the apprehension and the anxiety kind of comes in because all I really want at the beginning of each event, all I want is for everyone to be safe and to finish, but first to be safe. Like I said, in some ways I feel a little bit responsible for them. But at the end of the day, I mean, everyone has completed so far, so I am absolutely happy about that.

The second reason, the second piece of that, that fear if you will, is the pre-race jitter is that I have myself, because I am competing in the event, too. I mean, the water is still somewhat daunting. I mean, you're hopping into an open water swim, usually a river, a lake, maybe even an ocean, and there are a bunch of people around you. There are people kicking you. There are people inadvertently punching you. Sometimes you get people swim over you. I mean, those things can happen, and sometimes they do. On the bike, I've seen accidents happen. You can get hurt on the bike at those speeds. And although seldom, I mean, I've heard of some pretty tragic things happening in these races. Then, there's all also the chance, not so minimal I'll say, that you might not even finish. That's a fear in itself, too.

But, the special thing, again, about kind of facing those fears is that everyone overcame them. I know that there were those who thought about signing up and didn't, but some people did, so they overcame a fear. There were those who started the training plan months ago and they didn't finish it. Some of them did, though, and that's another fear that they overcame. There were those who actually started the race this past weekend and they did not finish because they were scared to attempt to try. The bike, for example, was difficult, and then they felt threatened by the run. These weren't individuals in our group, but we saw this happen. That is, man, I feel like that's one of the biggest tragedies to come so close to ... To come so close and then to let fear hold you back, I mean, that is ... I hate to see that happen.

But you know, there are also those who entertained the thought when I brought it up, brought up this idea of racing almost a year ago. And like I said, some actually registered. Some actually transferred their registration when our race in October got canceled. Then, some of them continued with the training, and they showed up in Williamsburg. And guess what? Everyone completed the event. That's important. All of them showed up, and all of them completed. But showing up sometimes is the hardest part, so I commend everyone for that.

I guess a quote comes to mind when I think about fear itself. It says something like, "Courage isn't the absence of fear, but courage is pushing through despite the fear." I'll tell you that it took an extreme amount of courage to get to the point where you're standing at the start line about to jump into the water with 2,000 of your closest friends. It takes even more courage to go at it for six or seven hours, but everyone did it, and I'm so proud of everyone that competed this weekend.

Not to run too long here. I'll try to cut it short. I just want to leave you with a couple of reasons why I love doing what I do with TD Fitness. Triathlon's cool. I mean, I get that, but that's not the reason that I do things like this. The reason I rope people into races. Yes, it's cool to get a medal. Yeah, it's cool to get the Ironman swag and the t-shirts. Yes, I'm wearing one right now. Also, I have this big Ironman logo on my coffee mug. Yes, it's kind of obnoxious. I know.

But really, it's more about recognizing and wanting to be healthier. It's about wanting to be a part of a community that values health, that values pushing yourself when times get hard, that values supporting one another. It's about being an example and a role model for others. And for me, it's about supporting others in their quest for better health. I mean, that's it. That's the foundation of everything that I do here with TD Fitness. Hopefully that's no surprise to you. Mean, I love talking to people about triathlon. That's why I wear these shirts. That's why I had this huge sticker on my coffee mug because that starts the conversation. Maybe it's the first time that they or you consider that it's something that is in the realm of the possible for you.

The second reason that I love doing these types of things with TD Fitness is that one of the greatest feelings I get is for you to be surprised by your own ability. There are so many of us who don't think and don't believe in our own capacity. I mean, at one point, all of us who have completed an event like this have thought, "Man, there's no way I could ever do that." Well, guess what? Now it's done. Now we've done it, now you've done it, and that is truly special. Great change usually comes when you attempt the absurd.

I'll leave it at that. I'll leave you with those thoughts. Kind of random, but just wanted to kind of get some things off my mind and share with you some of the lessons, again, from this past weekend, from racing in general, competing in these events in general. That's it. I appreciate you guys tuning in. One final shout-out, and thanks to all of the 2019 Williamsburg 70.3, the half Ironman crew. You guys know who you are, the athletes, the supporters, the encouragers. None of this is possible on our own. But as a team, we can accomplish just about anything. I had a great time racing with you guys this weekend. Looking forward to doing it again soon. That's all I have. Coach T signing out. Have a blessed one.

All right. There you have it, guys. I hope you enjoyed that Facebook live turned podcast. If you're interested in other episodes like this one, I'll link to episode number 23 in the show notes. That's Things to Consider for the Long-Distance Triathlon Newbie. I also have a couple of other links there to posts that include what I call life lessons from triathlon. I'll link to those in the show notes as well. The show notes for this episode can be found at [tdfitness.net/077](http://tdfitness.net/077). As always, thank you all so much for tuning in. Have a blessed one. Coach T out.