

Athletes must have COURAGE

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Ideas come to me at the strangest times and in the strangest places.

The idea for this column came to me a week ago when I was taking a shower after I attempted a run with my sore hamstring. It was probably my shortest run ever, 53 seconds. The pain told me my hamstring was not ready to run. I stopped and came inside and did my situps and weight training.

I didn't have that writer's rush I usually get in a run. The weight workout did stimulate my creative juices; I thought about what kept me going up that last hill on my bicycle in the Jefferson Triathlon on July 16, a hill at an almost 45-degree angle, about what sustained me on the run when the pain in my hamstring begged for me to stop.

"There is a certain blend of courage, integrity, character and principle which has no satisfactory dictionary name but has been called different things at different times in different

countries," said Slovenian-American author and translator Louis Adamic (1899-1951). "Our American name for it is 'guts.'"

"The human body can do so much," said Sohn Kee-chung, winner of the 1936 Olympic Marathon. "Then the heart and spirit must take over."

The body of a mediocre athlete like me can do only so much. I must strengthen my heart and spirit. The difference between a mediocre to average athlete who finishes a 5K, a marathon or a triathlon is heart, spirit and **COURAGE**.

C is for the **Character** to keep going. Maybe character is a genetic gift to those of us who lack the physical gifts of natural athletes. We persist in attempting to do that which we are told is beyond our abilities.

O is for **Overcoming** fears and anxieties. Before the half-mile, open-water swim in Jefferson, I envisioned myself sinking silently below the surface and drowning or panicking and grabbing onto a buoy or a boat, then slinking back to pack up my bike and sneak away in humiliation and failure. Only when we test ourselves can we overcome our fears and

anxieties; we always risk failure.

U is for **Understanding** our limitations and reveling in rather than lamenting those limitations. I shall never finish an Ironman Triathlon. I know I shall most likely be last in my age group in a sprint triathlon. Still, at 67, I revel in being able to finish a triathlon.

R is for **Resolution**. You must resolve to develop a training schedule, to keep to it and to make no excuses.

A is for a positive **Attitude**. Like the "Little Engine that Could," with a positive attitude, realistic goals and sensible training, you can do what you can think you can do if you think you can do it.

G and **E** are for **Guts** and **Extra** effort — the guts to keep going when your body cries "No!" and the extra effort to push yourself to and beyond your physical limits. It's almost miraculous that I finished in Jefferson when I reached down in my gut and exerted the extra effort to go on when I thought I couldn't. I didn't know I had that kind of strength.

COURAGE is probably not genetic, but it can be cultivated and developed. Courage and all it requires are the difference between the average athlete who persists in his training and crosses the finish line and the athlete who gives up and drops out of a race.

Bill Shaw's running column appears every other Monday in *The Facts*.

