

Wisdom running through our heads

[By Bill Shaw](#)

The Facts

Published March 20, 2006

I explored a topic for today's column on Friday morning as I did my weekly "brick": a 17.6-mile bicycle ride followed by a 4.2-mile run. I'm training for a May triathlon. On Saturday, March 11, I finished my 17th triathlon in Athens, Texas, and won second in my 65-69 age group, primarily because I was the only other triathlete in my age bracket. I did finish 401 out of 440, so I was not last.

As I grow older and fall farther toward the back of the pack, I remain thankful and think myself blessed with the strength, health, courage, character and discipline to finish a 5K or a triathlon. I don't mind not finishing at the top of my age bracket; I don't mind finishing 401 out of 440. I finished.

As I sat at the computer to crunch out this column after my "brick," I recalled a T-shirt I saw on a student at Brazosport College.

"Second place is just the first loser," read the lettering on the T-shirt.

Ironically, the student was portly, bordering on obese, and looked as if he never finished as the first loser and never finished much at all but a video game and a double-meat, double-cheese Big Mac with a side order of super-sized fries.

Someone once asked me, "Why do you pay to run and get a cheap T-shirt if you don't expect to win?"

On the other hand, "Racing teaches us to challenge ourselves," said U.S. Olympian Patti Sue Plumer. "It teaches us to push beyond where we thought we could go. It helps us to find out what we are made of."

"How fast, or where you finish, doesn't necessarily count for anything," said Mark Will-Weber in "The Quotable Runner: Great Moments of Wisdom, Inspiration, Wrongheadedness and Humor" (Breakaway Books 1995). "But how you raced against yourself counts for almost all. Inevitably, most runners eventually conclude that the race is against themselves."

"I will win; if I cannot win, I shall be second; if I cannot be second, I shall be third; if I cannot place at all, I shall still do my best," said Ken Doherty, former college coach and director of Penn Relays, in his "Runner's Creed."

"The race is a place where I renew my faith in myself, and in life itself," said the late Dr. George Sheehan, cardiologist and running guru. "French existentialist Albert Camus put it this way: 'We are at home in our games because it is the only place we know just what to do.'"

In a race, we middle- to-back-of-the-pack, aging runners know just what to do after the “Go!” command. Follow the pack and finish without falling or embarrassing or injuring ourselves.

Many runners, however, recreational and gifted, fail to show up and toe the starting line because of fears of finishing out of the limelight, among those the members of the Closet Runners of American World League (CRAWL) and the Women’s Entourage of the Closet Runners of America World League (WECRAWL). (See www.billshawsite.net/CRAWL.htm.)

“The race,” said Sheehan, “is where we keep the faith — our faith in the child and artist and saint inside us all.”

Keep the faith. Let the child and artist and saint within you revel in one of the games of life.

The spring race season starts at 8 a.m. Saturday in West Columbia with the ConocoPhillips/Chevron Phillips Health Awareness 5K Fun Run/Walk “Run for your life.” Packet pickup and race-day registration begin at 7 a.m. at 13th and Jefferson Streets in West Columbia.

I hope to see hosts of children, artists and saints toe the starting line Saturday just for the fun of finishing.

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