

Keeping the fun, joy in running

By Bill Shaw

The Facts

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Happy Memorial Day!

In junior high school, my gym coach accused my friend Jack and me of misbehaving. We were, of course, not guilty. The coach made us run five laps around the football field. When I was a “scrub” B-team football player, the coach made our team and individuals run laps around the track if we made crucial mistakes or goofed off.

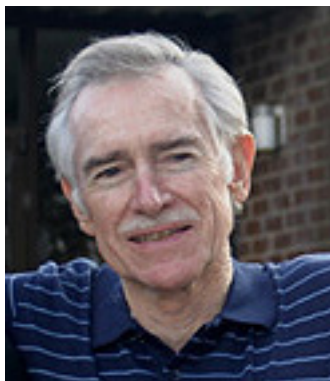
Some coaches and school administrators perceive running as punishment. No wonder many youngsters come out of public schools with a strong dislike, sometimes a hatred of running. No wonder many think “fun run” is an oxymoron, like jumbo shrimp and military intelligence.

As pre-schoolers and pre-teens, we loved to run. Things seem to conspire to take away the joy of running. It seems only as we grow older and realize our mortality — men in their 40s, women in their 30s — are we able to take a stride onto the street or track and rediscover the joy of running.

Only as we mature and chase away those specters of running as punishment can we become “born-again” runners. Only when we learn not to be discouraged wherever we might be in the pack, when we accept our limita-

tions, when we lower our expectations, can we find joy in running.

In transition, growing older, we must especially accept our limitations and lower our expectations. In the Silverlake Sprint Triathlon on May 17 in Pearland, I finished 458 out of 464 triathletes in the 400-meter swim, the 10-mile cycle route and the 3-mile



run. I was the last triathlete across the finish line in Saturday's COMBAT Triathlon in Texas City, but I finished the 300-yard swim, the 15-mile bike route and the 3-mile

I am a runner and triathlete in transition; on Friday, I shall be “three score and 10,” 70 years old. On a 5.3-miler Wednesday, I thought about keeping the fun and joy in running. With 290 races logged, including 10 marathons and 30 triathlons, I no longer have to prove myself or validate my credentials as an athlete, a mediocre athlete, but an athlete. From this point in my life, I hope to enjoy my longevity and be thankful for every run done and race finished, particularly since with my cancer diagnosis in December, I feared I might not live far beyond 70.

I shall not make exercise work or attempt to push my limitations to the point that a road race or a triathlon is not fun. I might be the last runner or triathlete to finish, but I revel in the heroic victory over limited abilities and age.

“A race is a place for self-discovery,” running guru and cardiologist Dr. George Sheehan

said in “Personal Best” (Rodale Press 1989). “The race is the place where I renew my faith in myself and life itself The race ... is where we keep the faith ... in the child and artist and saint inside each of us.”

Run joyfully.

Carpe diem.

RUNNING FOOT-

NOTES: Get ready for the mother of all Brazosport fun runs, the Firecracker 4, on July 4, a kids run at 7:15 a.m. and a simultaneous 4-mile run/2-mile walk at 7:30 a.m. Registration forms will be available at local fitness and recreation centers soon. Online registration is available at www.active.com; printable registration forms are available at www.barrahome.net.

It's also time to organize your team for the Sept. 12, Brazosport Relay Triathlon — a 1,000-meter swim, two 5K relay legs, and a 15-mile cycle route. Information is available at www.brazosportrelaytriathlon.org, and online registration is available at www.active.com.

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