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Tri★DC

Issue 9 | Summer 2009

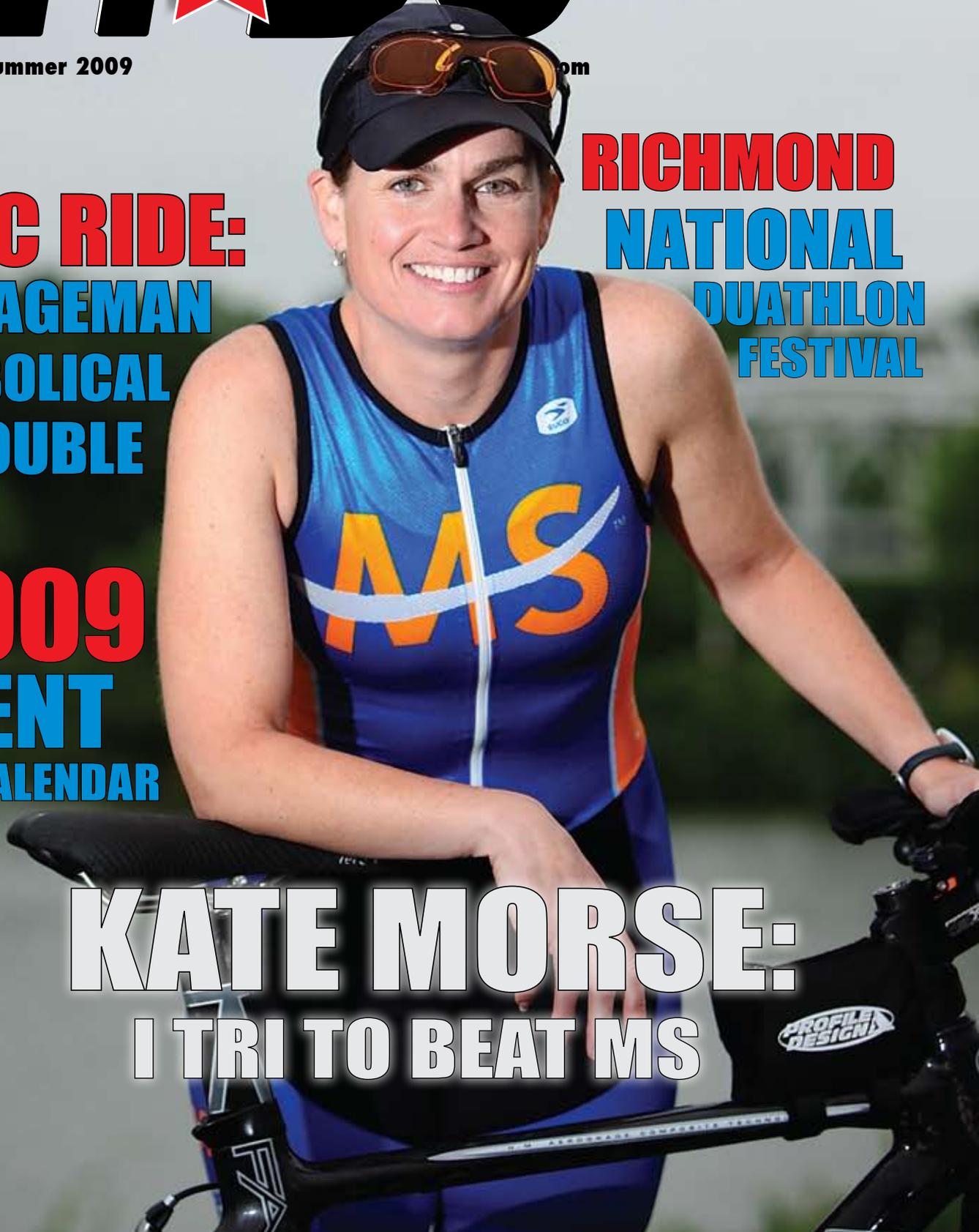
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The Biggest Challenge in Your Race: You!

BY DAVID GLOVER

"You are never really playing an opponent. You are playing yourself."

*- Arthur Ashe,
three-time Grand Slam
tennis champion*

Arthur Ashe summarizes the real challenge we each face when racing or training for endurance sports like triathlon: our own minds.

Here is my "Top 5 List" of the areas where triathletes make the most mistakes when racing:

1. Pacing
2. Nutrition and Hydration
3. Mental focus
4. Preparation
5. Common Sense

If you'll notice, all five areas relate to the choices we make and how we respond to the situations we face. The good news is that many mistakes that we might make are preventable. Here are some suggestions for each.

Pacing

The tendency for many athletes is to start out too fast for each event in the race. Don't! During my first Ironman, Ironman Canada in 1997, I hopped off an exhausting bike leg thinking, "I can't wait to start the run." I took off out of T2 and managed to hold my Olympic-distance pace for about 10 km (not surprisingly). I then slowly unraveled during the next 20 miles giving up 100 positions; this mistake cost me a Kona slot. You can avoid pacing errors by training at your expected race pace and then racing at your trained race pace. Use feedback like heart rate, perceived effort, power, and pace to determine how fast you can and should go. If you've trained at differing paces, you'll develop a feel for what your body can sustain during a race. Don't get sucked into racing someone else's race and blow up like I did.

Nutrition and Hydration

Find out what's served on the course and practice, practice, practice. If what's on the course does not work for your stomach or your taste preferences then bring something with you during the race that does. Develop a strategy and stick to it with the caveat that race day anxiety may create unexpected results – so be flexible.

Here's an example of a nutrition and hydration plan that I use during the bike leg of an Ironman race:

- Start eating on the bike once my body settles down from the swim leg of the race (about 20 minutes)
- Plan to consume 1 gel flask (6 servings) during each half of the bike leg
- Drink mostly a sports drink but chase any gels or foods with water to aid absorption
- Pick up bars or bananas if needed
- Consume electrolyte tablets if a warm day expected

Develop your plan, practice your plan, and then race your plan.

Mental Focus

I like to think of triathlon as a metaphor for life: an adventurous journey that takes you on a roller coaster of ups and downs and unexpected situations. Stuff happens – it always does. It is your response to the stuff that makes all the difference. As author and life coach Margie Warrell says, "While you are not always responsible for your experiences in life, you are always responsible for your experiences of life." Take responsibility for your experiences of the race and shrug off the bad stuff. Decide to let the stuff go and move forward. A powerful piece of advice came from a presentation given by Ironman legend David Scott. It was simply, "Be in the moment." In other words, focus on what you can do in the here and now instead of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.

Preparation

Remember the 7 P's: Proper, Prior Planning Prevents Piss Poor Performance.

Read the online race information early. Review the race timeline. Where do you need to be and when? Many larger races require you to check in your bike the day before the race. Be familiar with swim course and transition area(s) and pre-ride or drive the bike and run courses. Make a checklist of what you need to bring with you to the race – and use it! Arrive early on race morning to give yourself enough time to take care of pre-race business (including visiting the port-a-john).

Common Sense

This is the catch-all and can usually be addressed through proper preparation and planning. Don't forget your sunscreen. Take your water

bottles out of the refrigerator. Spend the extra time in transition area drying off and putting on warm clothes after the swim if the air temperature is in the 40's. Carry a spare tube (or tire, if using tubulars) and CO2 cartridges on your bike even if you're only doing a sprint race with a 12-mile bike leg – six miles is still a long hike back to the transition area. Don't wear shoes-just-out-of-the-box on race day. The list goes on and on. Not sure what to do (or not do)? Find an experienced triathlete and ask!

Conclusion

Ultimately, we can all make improvements in our performance simply by our choices. In the wisdom of Will Rogers, "When you find yourself in a hole, stop digging."

Author of Full Time & Sub-Nine: Fitting Iron Distance Training into Everyday Life, David dabbles extensively in endurance sports as an athlete, coach, writer and race director. He has helped hundreds of individuals through coaching, educational seminars and eBooks. As a triathlete, he considers himself either a good age grouper or a bad pro. His accolades include an 8:51 Ironman PR and being the 2007 inductee into the Vineman Hall of Fame. David and partner Krista Schultz recently launched She Does Tri camps (www.shedoestri.com) in 2009 to focus on the specific needs of women when training and racing triathlon. For more information about David: www.davidglover.net and www.enduranceworks.net.

