

The Mind Game

Congratulations! You have completed the journey to this year's Ironman Western Australia.



In my opinion, Ultra distance challenges like this one, are not only a sporting achievement but also, a major life achievement. It takes a unique individual to be able to apply themselves to the demands of the training program, all its highs, its inevitable lows and survive the journey. Athletes will learn so much about themselves from the training program for an event of this type. The training is about fortifying yourself to be capable of completing the race, physically and mentally.

Some will be racing it, some will be just aiming to complete it, but all will experience a *mind game* throughout the course of the race.

I have coached hundreds of athletes for Ultra Distance races and I often see an athletes anxiety level rise and a marked drop in their self confidence and belief in their own ability, just prior to their race. All sorts of questions are going through their minds. “have I done enough?” “will I finish?” “will I be able to do it?”. It is important for an athlete to be able to realize that what they are thinking and the resultant thought processes have a huge effect on the outcome of a race. Answer these questions with ‘I am strong, I have done the work, I am ready and I will enjoy this day!’



A mental tug of war is “all part of the fun” of challenges like this one and in my opinion, “once the gun goes, the race is 70% a mental challenge and 30% dependant on nutrition”.

If I was to ask an athlete prior to a race “ have you come here to feel sorry for yourself or give up and walk in the run?” I am sure every athlete would reply with a negative response, but having experienced so many long distance races, I am amazed by how many athletes I see, that have gone to what I call “the dark side” or “have run the white flag up”. They have given up or elected to walk. A few will have legitimate reasons, but most have allowed the mind to be overcome by negative thoughts. It’s easy to give up, it takes much more courage and guts to endure the pain and stay committed to being the best you can and doing your best. So how can these negative thoughts be overcome and how can I get through these dark and grim periods in a long distance challenge? Well everyone will have their own methods but here are some I recommend. Try to keep your focus on things that improve the state you’re in at that time. For example, if you feel like you are tightening up in the upper body and your thighs are getting very tired during the run, think, relax my upper body, focus on efficient breathing, drop my arm carry, shorten my stride length and try to increase my stride rate. See the pattern here? It’s about going from the “dark side” to a thought process that helps you to improve your current situation.

You will experience people who you don’t even know cheering for you, shouting your name, willing you to the finish. For every smile you see, draw energy from it, draw strength from your supporters.

Arrange your loved ones and supporters to see you as often as is possible in the latter stages of the run (especially the last 10km!), they will lift your spirits and get you to the finish line.



You are privileged to have the opportunity to be in this event and I am sure that you all would like to have a great race, well, it's up to you.

Your thought processes will determine how you go. Commit honestly and truly to doing your absolute best. This takes a lot of courage and commitment, but you can do it, if you want to. Stick to your race plan, your pace strategy, your nutrition strategy.

Be strong, positive and you will win the “*mind game*” and as a consequence, you will have a great race.

By Andrew Budge.

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