



Sweaty She Monday (9/21/09): Too Much Technology

By Susan Farago

Weekly Sweaty She postings can be found on the NEW "Sweaty She" FAN PAGE on Facebook.com or at www.susanfarago.com.

Since the dawn of time there has been this ongoing debate on the use of technology to measure training and fitness. Back in the day, I'm sure there were cave people who timed their runs simply by looking at the position of the sun in the sky (they were the purists). And then there were those cave people who strapped little sun dials or sand filled hour glasses on their wrists to tell them how long they had been running (they were the technology geeks of the day). Funny how not much has changed since then.

There are those athletes who are so laden down with gadgets and gizmos that they can't possibly imagine going for a workout without their heart rate monitors, GPS devices, foot pods, ipods, watt meters, cadence sensors, altimeters, weather maps, route maps, and cell phones. I am guilty of pulling out my cell phone on long trail runs and pushing the "Where am I" navigation button when I unexpectedly pop out into someone's back yard. And while some of these devices do come in handy from a navigation or safety standpoint, what happens when the technology is too good?

(Names are abbreviated below to protect the "innocent" from...well...embarrassment :-)

My friend "B" went on a cruise and thought she would get in a run using the ship's quarter mile track. She set up her watch to track pace and off she went. She ran the first quarter mile as a warm-up but was shocked at her pace – a 4 minute mile?! She ran the next quarter mile at an even slower pace but her watch displayed a 3 minute mile pace! She was dumbfounded. Then it dawned on her that not only was she moving, but the SHIP WAS MOVING TOO! The GPS on her watch was indeed doing its job.

A similar event just happened to my friend "M" a few days ago. He got the new Garmin 310XT watch (GPS and waterproof) and was excited to map out the distance of a swim route he estimated was 500 meters but he was never sure. He set his watch and off he swam. He finished the first lap and anxiously popped his head out of the water to look at his watch. Huh?! 1600 meters? He tried it again and got the same result! It turns out the watch was on his wrist and it actually clocked the distance of EVERY ARM STROKE and not just the distance from point A to B.

Technology can also cause significant blows to our egos too. My friend "F" calls his bike watt meter his "suck-o-meter" because when it displays the amount of wattage he is generating while riding hard efforts, he compares it to what they guys crank out in the Tour de France and the numbers are nowhere close. He forgets that the pro cyclists ride their bikes for a living and they better be good at it.

And then there is the ongoing battle with heart rate monitors. My friend “D” was playing around with a new heart rate monitor and during one run workout, she couldn’t figure out why her heart rate was so high even while she was running at base effort. “What’s WRONG with me!” she said after finishing a half mile run loop. Turns out she was dehydrated which caused her elevated heart rate. But she immediately assumed she was being a wimp. Not true at all.

My personal nemesis is the “virtual partner” in my watch. Many sports watches have a virtual partner and you can program a certain pace or time in and then this virtual partner will “help” you keep on pace. Some watches even show two little stick figures running next to one another – one is the virtual partner and one is you. I thought this was a great concept until I tried it. Turns out my virtual partner is this little, antagonistic “dude” that says stuff like, “Hey, you’re going too slow” or “Ha-ha I’m totally kicking your butt right now!!” Of course this is all in my head but by the end of that run, I had yelled obscenities at my virtual partner numerous times and promptly shut him off for good. “TAKE THAT!” I said. And that was the beginning AND the end of our relationship. But like a genie in a bottle, I know he’s in my watch...lurking around, just waiting to jump out at me and tell me how sucky or slow I’m running.

Technology is a wonderful thing but sometimes it can get the best of us. And while it can protect us and give us useful and interesting information, sometimes we are better off leaving it at home.

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