

To Each His Own

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As the athletes I coach get closer to their goal races I always tell them the same thing: “Don’t do anything stupid.”

Two to three weeks before a big event is a really hazardous time. Once an athlete starts to taper down in the final weeks he can get restless. With shorter taper workouts come more time to do yard work, play pick-up basketball games or take part in a “low-key” softball game.

As a coach I know better. As an athlete I’m a complete idiot. That’s why, four weeks before my biggest race of the year I’m walking around with a cast on my arm.

While putting on a clinic in Salt Lake City recently, I found myself entirely too close to a skateboard “half-pipe” for my own good. I rationalized that it was four weeks before Nationals, not just two or three, and even more dangerous, I convinced myself that I knew exactly what I was doing (heck, I used to be pretty good on a skateboard 25 years ago....)

I guess I suffer from the same hubris that a lot of us do. We’re runners and walkers, we’re athletes, so we figure we can do anything. We sometimes get so caught up preparing for and participating in our own sport that we begin to think that other sports aren’t as “real.”

Sure, professional wrestling is kind of a joke, but in their own way, those guys are definitely athletes. I couldn’t slam a 125-pound guy to the ground let alone a 325-pound guy, so I have to grudgingly respect the guys who can. And I’ve always gotten a chuckle out of watching pudgy, bored-looking baseball players scratching themselves in the outfield. But I’ve never had to stare down the barrel of a 95mph fastball. Even NASCAR drivers, I’ve come to realize, are endowed with a certain amount of athleticism. The combination of high in-car temperatures, intense concentration, mental stress and high g-forces can cause drivers to sustain heart rates in the anaerobic range throughout a 4-hour race. Even without all those factors, I’m a bad enough driver at 70mph to appreciate what it must take to keep a car on the road at 170.

And yet sometimes there are lapses. Like my recent crash in Salt Lake City. After watching so many ecstasy-addled 15-year-old kids on national television in the X-Games I started to think this must be easy. So there I was goofing around on this thing like I did when I was 12. I actually even got going pretty good there for a while. A short while... But what goes up must come down. And down I came, right on my wrist. (Well, at least it wasn’t my ankle...) So now, typing around a “buckle-fractured” hamate carpal bone, I’ve developed a sudden renewed respect for those knucklehead kids.

Just because you’re in great shape to run or walk fast that doesn’t mean you’ll be proficient at any other endeavor. (By the way, how’s your golf game?)

Aerobic strength is a valuable asset, but so are hand-eye coordination, flexibility, sprint speed, explosive strength, and “nerves of steel.” Golfers, bowlers, synchronized swimmers, skeet shooters, badminton players, and yes, skateboarders may not share the same kinds of skills as us endurance athletes, but they are athletes and they deserve our respect.

Apparently not all Mobilians—and not even all Pacers—feel that way. The Press Register “Sound Off” column is filled on a daily basis with attacks on just about any sport or team the paper covers. Recent posts on the Pacer Forum have gotten out of hand as well, bashing slower runners, racewalkers, and people who cross-

train, among other things. It got so bad that the Forum had to be shut down for several weeks.

The enlightened among us realize that other sports may be different from our own, but they're just as valid. You don't have to participate, or even watch them, but the least you should do is respect the athletes who participate in these other sports the way you respect stars in your own. But, please, if you do choose to participate, wear a helmet and some wrist guards!

[*Back to homepage](#)
