The Butterfly Affect

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The following started out, in my mind, short. Beth told me that I had to write a blog post. I was taking a flight out to San Diego, started writing, and it seems as though all Hell broke loose. I apologize for that. What follows is long but, in my mind, important. And, as lengthy as it is, I'm not much sure how I could have made it any shorter…Given its length I was asked "is anyone going to read it?" Honestly, I have no idea. But, I was going to write it just the same, so whether or not it winds up being read is completely up to you.

In this, you will see that I have included end notes. I don't think that I have written anything that has necessitated end notes for at least 20 years. And while seemingly unnecessary, they are not without reason. I will admit, that some of them are a bit self-indulgent, there as a crack at humor. But, for the most part, my inclusion of them was intended to consider a topic just a little more deeply, or from a slightly different perspective, without necessarily throwing off the flow of an entire paragraph.

In any of this, I don't mean to imply, in any way, that I am an expert in any kind of a psychological field. Far from it. In fact, true experts would likely take issue with some of the things discussed. The extent of my research consisted of finding a single statistic from the NBA, so none of what follows is developed around known hard facts. This has been primarily built around my own experiences, observations, conversations and 'noticings', after 20 some odd years in the world of endurance sports as an athlete and coach. Please do not take this as gospel. I offer it merely as perspective.

And so, here we go…

"The true opponent, the enfolding boundary, is the player himself. Always and only the self out there…to be met, fought, brought to the table to hammer out terms. The competing boy on the…other side: he is not the foe: he is more the partner in the dance. He is the what is the word *excuse* or *occasion* for meeting the self. As you are his occasion."

Excerpted from *Infinite Jest*

- David Foster Wallace

"Every night these silhouettes appear above my head

Little angels of the silences that climb into my bed and whisper…

Little angels hang above my head and read me like an open book

Suck my blood break my nerve offer me their arms…"

Angels of the Silences

- Counting Crows

The Butterfly Affect[1]

Some time ago I wrote a little piece, [Finley Peter Dunne](#), about an essential role that a coach plays in, both, the development and the management[2], of an athlete's skills and/or emotions. The primary basis of the writing was around the notion that it was the coach's job to 'comfort the challenged, and challenge the comfortable'. Confused? Click on the hyperlink above and read it…It will make a lot more sense[3].

The original conception of *this* writing was to serve as a natural extension of the whole idea built around challenges, comforts, and everything that finds itself intertwined therein. During a recent conversation with one of my more naturally self-reflective athletes, as we spoke about different challenges that exist, and the strategies that are needed to comfort them, the athlete referenced a particular quote which I immediately liked. It plays directly into the ethos of any one of us, athletes or not…As humans. I may not have it verbatim, but it is, more or less, that - "The butterflies are never going to go away. You just need to get them to fly in formation." Now, that is quite brilliant! I thought so from the moment that I heard it. But, I have also thought that a lot of things were quite brilliant, upon first hearing them. So, I sat on this one for quite a while, to give it its fair time to lose its luster…No such fade…Still brilliant!

You get it, right? Butterflies are not like birds. They don't fly in a perfect V-pattern. Instead, they are feather-lite, and seem to bounce around in the breeze with no obvious underlying rhyme or reason as to what they are doing or where they are going[4]. Each one seemingly mutually exclusive from each of the others. Are they together? Are they in a group? Who knows! Getting them to fly in formation has to be, for all intents and purposes, an impossible task, much like what I believe the quote to be getting at in the first place, the impossibility of perfectly balancing the rational and irrational[5] parts of our minds.

Though it may not always appear so, we are naturally rational beings. Very, very rational beings. That is to say that we do things with reason, built upon logic. We may not all always apply the same logic to things, as others,

which stems conflict, but we do, typically speaking, act upon a logical line of reasoning. With that, we all have our very own flock/herd/pack[6] of butterflies within us. These are all of the little things that make you, you…and me, me. These little butterflies represent all of the little bits and pieces of our personalities and psyches. What makes us tick, so to speak. Our rationalities, as well as our irrationalities. And while not a perfect metaphorical fit, most of the time, most of our butterflies fly cleanly in an organized, well-established, neat and sensible V-formation, like a flock of birds heading south for the winter.

But, as rational as we are, we sometimes fall victim to our own emotional responses, and act in irrational ways. Whether we like it, or not, each of us possesses our very own little irrationalities. Amongst our collection of butterflies, each of us, has one, two, three, maybe more that are more susceptible than the others to the winds of our emotions, and thus, given the right circumstances, fly erratically amongst the group. Sometimes these wayward butterflies are off in their own little space, with no ill-effect. Other times they are wreaking havoc upon the flock[7], constantly threatening the formation. Unfortunately, our psyches are not afforded the luxury of being composed of the unwavering stability of a flock of birds in flight, their formation seemingly unaffected by the throes of the wind. We are never going to have or get birds. We have butterflies. All of us. We always will. And so, we had better be, or start becoming, okay with this as it is undoubtedly our cross to bear.

For the most part, we are pretty good at getting our butterflies to fly in a relatively clean formation. For the most part. By no means perfect, but pretty decent. But, in the same way that it takes only a single domino to cause a chain reaction, a single butterfly, too, can cause chaos in an otherwise stable formation. Our butterflies are inherently sound and well-balanced. But, given the right circumstances, some of them can tend to go a bit rogue. And when they do, they do. And that's just it…The circumstances, within which our rationalities and irrationalities exist, are very often outside of our control and in constant flux, ever-changing like the breeze within which a flock of feather-lite butterflies must attempt to maintain that perfect formation. And so there we are suddenly, one day minding our own business, and one of our butterflies just randomly[8] goes rogue, and starts believing that we 'haven't trained enough', 'just aren't ready', 'are so far above race weight', and/or

'look at everybody else, they're in so much better shape than me' - when we damned well know that none of these is the case. We are perfectly well-trained and ready enough for what we need to accomplish. While we may not be *at* race weight, nor should we be for where we are in *our* season. Look at everybody else? Since when does that tell us anything *real*? The above may be perfectly rational responses to our concerns, but our concerns are, themselves, coming from one, or some, of the little irrational pieces within ourselves. And while it is extremely difficult for anyone to talk these irrationalities down, we, ourselves, tend to be the least capable.

Okay, so that was a lot of abstract mumbo-jumbo[9]. But, I think…Well, at least I hope, that it serves to make a larger point. That the analogy exists within all of us. And, once we acknowledge it, for us as athletes, we can better understand the measures that a coach can/should/does play in helping to maintain a clean formation.

But, *how*?

I don't know all of the "hows", that will keep the butterflies in formation. I can't imagine that anybody does. I can't imagine that anybody *could*. That is the true nature of science's *Butterfly Effect*[10], and it applies here as well, that like the weather, our circumstances are functions of some infinitely multi-variable equation, the likes of which we can only *think* to have *some* grasp or hold of. But, we don't. So, best to just manage what we can, as we can. I know…I know…I'll just state my point. Sometimes we need help in recognizing what we can and cannot manage. And then, once we know what we can manage, we sometimes need help in managing it. Or, once we know what we cannot manage, we sometimes need help in managing our inability to manage it. And *finally* we come to the whole point of this writing…That that is much the role that a coach can and should play.

And so, with that, what follows is a far from exhaustive list of the tricks of the trade for helping to keep the irrationalities from creeping in, and disrupting the formation. And while far from complete, as best as I can tell, these are some of the more applicable ones, relative to who we are as endurance athletes and, when left to our own devices, where our heads can go in both training and racing.

Managing Appropriate Expectations[11]

The key word in this is *appropriate*. We, as athletes, have an irrational need to think that we must always be in tip-top fitness. Like, if a race were to break out, at any given moment, we need to be immediately ready. A well-designed season will consist of, say, somewhere in the ballpark of 16 to 30 weeks. Throughout that time period, in order to see any real growth, from one season to the next, we need to be in a position where we can actually progress from beginning to end. For example, let's say that you are about to embark upon a 24-week training plan, into some goal race. The very first thing that we need to accept is that we are not going to see, nor should we, 100% fitness until somewhere in the realm of 21 to 24 weeks of training. 100% fitness is something that we want to see just in time to taper from it, such that we can try to hit race day in that perfect balance between fitness and recovery. Once we have wrapped our heads around this concept, we have to accept that we are going to spend our training on a journey towards that 100%, with the very real imperative that our starting point needs to fall somewhere below that 100% fitness, and likely much lower than we would prefer. If our goal race is as few as 16 weeks away, then maybe we need to be as fit as 75%, or so, at the start. But, if it is a full 24 weeks, or even longer, then it is, likely, in our goal race's best interest that we enter into training at, say, 40% or 50% fitness. So, let's say that we enter into a 24-week training stint at 50% fitness. After 12 weeks of consistent training, we will probably be in the ballpark of 85-ish% fitness. Another eight weeks will get us up into the 95% range. Throw a couple of peak weeks in there, and we are pretty much ready to roll.

Ok, so what is the point? The point is that our expectations, if appropriate, will line up with where we fall on our training spectrum. There is no reason to not go and race, at 85% fitness, if we can apply the expectations of 85% fitness to the results. If we are going to go to an event, at 85% fitness, and expect ourselves to perform at a fitness level that is in-line with the expectations of our endgame, then we are going to be sorely disappointed. Our expectations must line up with where we are in our preparations. We're not always the best at realizing, and/or accepting that. A coach can help to

ground us, and steer the conversation more towards where you are in your training, what that should tell you about what can be expected in your racing, and work to appropriately assess your performances against other instances when you raced at similar fitness levels[12].

The rogue butterfly(ies) is/are going to try to convince your 85% self that it should be 100%. There is very likely a piece of you that, no matter how well-grounded and low-key, is *not* comfortable with not being at 100%. This piece, in all of us, is larger for some than for others. But, it always exists. Therefore, we need to be aware of that in ourselves, and work to combat it. Oftentimes, that requires a little bit of help.

Recognizing *Your* 'Controllables'

I'm not making any kind of a groundbreaking statement when I say that there are always going to be things that we can control, and others that we simply cannot. With that, there may be some contexts when/where our controllables, in one situation or another, may *not* be controllable in others, and vice-versa. While this can be equal parts frustrating and head-scratching, the mere fact of it should force us to consider where we fall within, about and around it all. There is an inevitability to not being in control of things including, sometimes, things that we have grown accustomed to being in control of. With and because of this, there may be times when our irrationalities start to creep in, and cause one, or some, of the flock to panic a bit. Or, a lot!

For this reason, it is necessary to, every now and again or when prompted to by certain internal triggers, step back and assess exactly what our controllables are. Likely one of the most important things that will come out of this is a revelation as to what our *un*controllables are. Our ability(ies) to take advantage of the things that we have control over is/are often a function of our ability(ies) to manage those things over which we do not. When out on the bike, we cannot control the direction or the intensity of the wind. We *know* that. But, we can control how we behave within that wind. We can behave in such a way, when it is in our faces, so that we can actually take advantage of its benefits, when it is at our backs. By the same token, the opposite is also true. We can behave in such a way, when the wind is in our faces, so that we are *un*able to take advantage of it, when at our backs.

This is a single simple example, of only God knows how many. But it speaks to a much larger point, just the same. By recognizing, and accepting, the fact that we cannot control the wind, we position ourselves with the rational mindset to exist within it, and not put forth a futile attempt at fighting Mother Nature[13]. It happens all of the time! You have probably fallen victim to it, yourself, on more occasions than you would care to admit. You are out riding into a headwind, with a certain expectation of what your time should

be. And…Like most endurance athletes, these expected times that we create, are often done so while wearing the rosiest of glasses. Because of the wind you are slipping further and further behind that best-case scenario expectation. And what enters into the equation is a prime opportunity for the butterflies to go rogue. If allowed.

As we sit hear thinking about this case, take a moment to consider it from two completely different perspectives. Our rational side is perfectly equipped to handle this. Headwind? Just settle in, drop the effort a bit, and bring the cadence up. Why? Well, most importantly, we have to save *something* for the run! Secondly, and of equal value, if we are riding into a headwind, there is a pretty good chance that, either, we have already benefitted from a corresponding tailwind, or soon will. Our rational side allows an accounting for the wind, the demands that it is going to place upon us and our expectations, and appropriate adjustments. On the flip-side of this, our irrational side doesn't care that the wind is pushing against us. Our irrational side isn't going to allow us the excuse that a headwind is going to slow us down. Our irrational side isn't going to allow for any kind of an adjustment to our expectations and/or our plan(s) for achieving them. In essence, our irrational side, either, doesn't recognize that we have no control over the wind, or worse it doesn't care. In either case, our irrational side is not serving us well, and sets us up for disappointment through an unreasonable expectation to control the uncontrollable. And, so to speak, it becomes a hill that we choose to die upon, because by choosing to try to control that which cannot be controlled, we also forfeit the ability to manage it.

In this particular case, I discussed wind as an uncontrollable factor. But, it could be anything. Heat, humidity, cold, rain, location, time, etc. The list can go on and on, and on. These are the easy ones, really. The ones which exist outside of us. But, what about the uncontrollables which exist within us? We each have our own[14], whatever they may be, and however they may manifest. But, do we take the time necessary to do a proper accounting of them? Do we take the time necessary to determine what they are, and why they exist? If yes, then you are amongst the few who are well-ahead of the game. But, in most cases, we likely do not. We are not particularly good at accurately identifying our own irrationalities. Especially during irrational periods. We may have pristine 20/20 hindsight, when rationally reflecting

upon a past irrational period. And this has tremendous value, because it allows us the opportunity to identify triggers, within ourselves, which can activate our irrational side, putting us in a better position to potentially manage future uncontrollables. But, expecting ourselves to think rationally about our irrationality, during an irrational period…Well, 'that dog simply won't hunt'. We like to think that it will. That we are different, and can transcend our own irrationality, but who are we fooling? Only ourselves.

So, we need help. We need someone who can help us to identify our internal and external controllables and uncontrollables. This is a role that the coach can play, by objectively assessing the physical, mental, and emotional minefields that may exist in doing the things that we do, as they relate to *us* and who *we* are. While this is in no way a fail-safe, it allows us the opportunity to foresee when, where and how our rationalities may go rogue. This, in and of itself, is much the battle in keeping our butterflies in a tight formation.

True Goal Setting

Simply put, there are just too many inappropriate goals being bandied about out there. They are everywhere! "I want to finish in the top-3 of my age group", "I want to qualify for Kona", or "I need to finish in the money to feel successful". These are all well and good, but I am fairly certain that everybody else wants one or more of these, as well! Further, those aren't really goals. They are outcomes[15]. Desired outcomes, but outcomes just the same.

Desired outcomes are very, very different from goals, because you have a very limited amount of control over how you will stack up, against that desired outcome. In these same races or events, there are any number of others who share your same desired outcome(s). So, now we have an inherent conflict. We have any number of combinations of your desired outcome, versus their desired outcomes. Regardless of what happens, how you control your 'controllables', and manage the 'uncontrollables', there remains a very small window for success, as defined by your desired outcome. When we use our desired outcomes to define our goals, it is no longer '*mano a mano*', so to speak. It is not a 'you vs. him/her' scenario. It becomes 'you vs. *them*'. You are creating an internal dynamic where you can only be successful, if and when, you beat *everybody*. As a result, for your 'goal' to be met, essentially *everyone* else's must remain unmet. While I understand that this is the nature of racing, this particular mental/emotional approach seems ripe for demotivation, as the simple mathematics behind our desired outcomes won't allow for them to be met at a rate that we would be even remotely comfortable with[16]. Placing ourselves into positions where our sense of success is, in part[17], defined by what others do, is essentially setting ourselves up for failure.

So, what *should* goals look like? I pretty much alluded to it above, but proper goal-setting takes the form of controlling your controllables, and managing your 'uncontrollables[18]'. Essentially, when we think of goal-setting, we are often fooled into thinking about two very distracting

aspirations, mainly outcomes and targets. Outcomes, we discussed earlier, and I would submit to you are a far cry from what a proper goal should be and look like. Why? Because while they are somewhat dependent upon you, they are heavily dependent upon others, as well. Targets, on the other hand, look a lot like goals. Targets are things that fall along the lines of "I will maintain 250w for the bike", "I will swim 34 to 35 minutes for 1.2 miles", or "I will hold 8-minute miles during the run". These are all seemingly innocuous, and fall right in line with different conversations that we have all had about, and around, our upcoming events. The issue with these targets is that, while they remain independent of others, they are still extremely dependent upon the day's or course's conditions. They are also heavily dependent upon our bodies[19].

The best goal-setting is built around our defined controllables, and our ability(ies) to manage our uncontrollables. True goal setting looks and sounds a lot like "I will drop my wattage just a bit, and increase my cadence, when riding into a headwind", "I will take advantage of any tailwind by going into a larger gear and increasing my wattage", "I will control my pacing early into the run, to try and avoid overheating", etc…You get the point. Each of these has significantly more to do with the athlete, and only the athlete. They have nothing to do with other athletes, or even this athlete's own metrics. There is no mention of placement, nor specific wattage[20]. Even the final example, about controlling early pacing, in order to try to avoid overheating…This goal's execution is assessed against the control of the early-pacing and not whether, or not, there was overheating. If the athlete did an effective job of early-pacing, and yet still overheated, then this is an indication that there was something wrong with the magnitude of the pacing, relative to the conditions, and not necessarily its execution.

I recognize that this is a lot, and may flip, upside-down, your traditional notion of goal setting. Because we are in competition with others, it is very, very easy to fall into the trap of assessing ourselves against how we place amongst our competition. By the same token, we spend so much time, energy, and effort fully-immersed in training data and metrics, that it can be equally as easy to fall into the trap of assessing ourselves against our own data. And while this may be more appropriate than assessing ourselves against others, it is fraught with potential pitfalls, and seeming failures, which fall outside of the scope of our own abilities. And so, the only real metric

which is left, against which we can appropriately assess ourselves, is really *ourselves*. Not our competition. Not our data. But, ourselves…How we behave against our controllables, and manage our uncontrollables[21].

None of this is easy. We have a tendency towards being overly critical against ourselves, and/or setting our expectations *too* high. Don't get me wrong, I appreciate high expectations, but there is a significant difference, in affect, between expectations set by the rational and irrational parts of our brains. Very often this is just an area that we should, perhaps, consider steering clear of. And so it should fall to the coach to remain objective, helping us to define our controllables, develop a management plan for our known uncontrollables, and coping strategies for our unknown uncontrollables. Armed with these, our formation of butterflies is much more able to withstand the instabilities of race day, absorbing what comes, as it comes.

Maintaining A Larger View

Over the course of many years, now, I have observed an innumerable number of athletes fall into the trap of allowing a singular race result to cloud the success of their overall training process. Myself included. If and when our race result does not meet our expectation(s), we can tend towards immediately placing the blame on our preparations. And while the possibility exists, that this may be a worthy direction in which to point the proverbial finger, if we have executed our training well and enter into the race healthy, it is quite unlikely.

But, it is in our nature to need, and look for, an answer as to *why* something went awry. And while this is a perfectly rational approach, we often fall into the the the *post hoc* fallacy. "Post hoc ergo propter hoc[22]", which essentially translates to 'After, therefore because of'. Oftentimes this is true. But, most of the time, it is not, which is why it is considered a logical fallacy. But, as illogical as it may be, we are so very good at capitulating to it! Especially when we are looking for something to blame. Oftentimes, when we get tricked by the *post hoc* fallacy, it is because we fail to consider all of the variables, before we start pointing fingers.

Just a few weeks ago I had a discussion with one of our [Mission Plan][23] athletes who had had a disappointing marathon result[24]. Very early into the race they had started to experience unexplained muscle cramping in their quads. Their early pacing had been spot on. More importantly, the cramping was occurring so early into the race that it would have been near impossible for pacing to have been the issue, anyways. That is, unless they had opened up the race in a full-on sprint, which they had not. Despite the cramping, rather than adjust the pace, according to how they were feeling, this athlete forged onward, attempting to fight through the cramping[25]. A good strategy at mile 22, but not so much at mile 2. Prior to our discussion, the athlete had begun to assign the blame for the disappointing result to their training, and that they weren't doing the right kinds of things. This required a proverbial slap upside the head, as we dove into the '*whys*' and '*hows*' of what went

wrong. Was it reasonable to believe that months and months of training sacrifice, having executed upon some unmentionable number of workouts - and while not always perfect, having been pretty damned good - that a race could be so easily derailed, because of poor preparations? Of course not! That simply didn't pass the sniff test. The very notion of it was dead, in my mind, before it had even fully left the athlete's mouth. And so we talked through a few different things, one being hydration status entering the race[26].

As it turns out, over the years we have seen a few of these instances, when an athlete is cramping at a point in the day when cramping makes absolutely no sense. When this occurs, it is oftentimes the result of having become low on magnesium. In this particular instance, the athlete had likely flushed the magnesium out of their body, by drinking so much pure water in the day before the race. This very quickly turned the discussion away from the complexity of whether, or not, the training was 'broken', to the simplicity of just being a bit more careful with pre-race hydration methods. And while we cannot conclude, with absolute certainty, that the cramping occurred due to an electrolyte imbalance, the evidence most definitely points more in that direction than anything else, most especially the athlete's overall training approach.

And so, what does this all mean? I can see how it could be very, very easy to become frustrated, after putting such a tremendous amount of effort into training and preparing for something, only to walk away with a disappointing result and a feeling that you are 'doing it all wrong'. I can see how this could leave an athlete feeling quite discouraged and demotivated. All of that effort. All of that sacrifice. Time away from family. Soccer games missed. Time not spent with friends. For what? An unsatisfying result?

The marathoner, above, could have very easily felt this way. And, quite frankly did, in the hours following the finish. But, once we had the opportunity to break things down, take a step back, and look at the larger perspective, it was very clear that those feelings were not in tandem with the athlete's actuality. This conversation left me with the realization that there is a very clear distinction between disappointment and discouragement[27], and that we really need to take care to apply them appropriately. It would make sense that a disappointing result could act as a bit of turbulence to an otherwise clean formation of our butterflies, but it should not throw them into

complete disarray. It is the coach whose job it is to maintain that larger perspective, and to help to weather that turbulent storm, in order to maintain the formation.

It is not always an easy task, nor is it necessarily always applicable, but the coach must serve as the gatekeeper between disappointment and discouragement, helping the athlete to apply whichever is most appropriate, given the circumstances[28]. Why? Because we so often prove incapable of doing so ourselves. But, don't beat yourself up over that. We are not supposed to be good at it. We are in the middle of it. In the 'fog of the war'[29], so to speak. Focus on executing your assigned training, and the daily recovery that allows for the most effective training to take place day after day, after day. Let your coach worry about the rest.

Visualizing Coping Mechanisms[30]

The idea of visualization has been around for quite some time now, such that it is, in many ways, an assumed[31] part of the fabric of our preparations and performances. In essence, visualization is the act of forming a mental image of something, whereby we rehearse, in our minds, how we will go about performing some task. The somewhat cliched notion of visualization often falls within the context of the basketball player, who makes a key free throw in the big game, or the golfer who makes a birdie putt late in the final round. It is said that they make this shot, or that putt, because they have rehearsed it a thousand times before, in their own minds.

While visualization is a tremendously powerful tool, and very likely *a* legitimate reason as to why the player makes the key free throw or the golfer makes the winning putt, it being in the process of becoming 'baked into' the culture of athletics threatens to disguise the fact that it is a skill, which must often be learned. I have come to be completely surprised by the realization that not everyone visualizes! I had no idea! While this is somewhat unfortunate, I think that it does reveal an opportunity to learn how to do it most effectively[32].

First, and foremost, visualization is a *habit of mind*. It is something that must be practiced over and over, again, day in and day out. Initially, when first going down the path of regular visualization, you typically have to remind yourself to do it. You will be midway through a run, and remember "Oh yeah, I'm supposed to be imagining myself in the race, feeling strong, passing people". And, so, you start to visualize yourself out there on the race course, feeling strong, passing people. It may feel a bit silly at first. But, quite frankly, you're running…What else do you have to do? In time, though, if practiced often enough, it has the potential to become something that you can't not do.

While visualizing yourself out on the race course, feeling strong and passing people is all well and good, it is only a part of the true value of taking the time to develop the skill. Effective visualization can play a key role in how we deal with imperfect situations during the course of a race or event. In

this way, effective visualization can keep an imperfect situation from completely derailing your day.

This is where the visualization in endurance sports, in a sense, parts ways with the visualization of the free throw shooter or the golfer[33]. The cliched use of visualization, that I speak of above, exists only in the positive. The free throw shooter rehearses success over and over, and over again. The golfer, too. This, in theory, translates into the success of making the free throw…sinking the putt. But, what if visualization were used to rehearse our ways out of negative situations? Perhaps the free throw shooter, for example, does this as well. I don't know. Let's play it out. Rather than envisioning him or herself shooting the free throws in front of a home crowd, or in an empty arena, perhaps the free throw shooter, imagines him or herself making the shots, despite a hostile crowd all screaming profanities about his or her mother, and doing that twinkley-fingers thing that hometown crowds do, in order to jinx the opponent. In this way, the free throw shooter is utilizing visualization techniques in order to overcome, or cope with, adversity.

To me, this kind of coping visualization is the true power of the visualization concept, as applied to endurance sports. Because there is just something about the positive visualization model that doesn't ring true to me, as pertains to endurance sports. Namely, the perfection of it all. The endurance athlete is subjected to an entirely different set of circumstances than the free throw shooter, or the golfer. And that is in the continuity of endurance sports. The free throw shooter's positive visualization model can exist in an infinite set of *mutually exclusive* events. Each time that the free throw shooter steps to the line, the affirmative rehearsal that he or she has played out over and over again, can be applied to the circumstance[34]. And the end result is making the shot. There is a beginning - stepping to the free throw line. There is an end - making the shot. And then the process repeats itself with each new free throw. It is an atmosphere where there is a perfectible success, which is relatively easy to achieve[35].

The endurance athlete who utilizes only the positive visualization model, mentally rehearsing perfection, runs the risk of becoming hamstrung[36] by the inevitability of imperfect days. This rings more and more true, the longer the event. After more than 20 years in triathlon, I would consider myself quite well-versed in the world of endurance sports. I have had, and

seen, what I would consider to be hugely successful days, days that have gone horribly wrong, and just about everything in between. And nowhere in those 20 some odd years, and hundreds of endurance events, have I had, or seen, anything that even remotely resembled a perfect day. But, perfection is exactly what the positive visualization model trains us to expect, from the day and from ourselves. Most simply put, this is just not an appropriate expectation.

The heart of the issue is that when we visualize perfection, and thus create that expectation, we initiate a pathway to almost certain failure. For example, let's say that you are training for an IRONMAN and you do a great job of utilizing a positive visualization model, across all of the disciplines. When you are swimming, you see yourself, on race day, as smooth, efficient, on top of the water. When riding you imagine yourself on the race course aerodynamically tucked, fluid, powerful. And when running, you picture a strong, light, effortless athlete out on the roads of the marathon. Day in and day out, you practice this, such that it becomes automatic. It may even come to a point where you are doing it, not just in training, but while sitting at your desk, driving to work, or cooking dinner. With enough frequency of practice it can become a very, very powerful tool, which has the ability to occupy the subconscious, without your even being fully aware of it. Just there, in the recesses of your mind, to seemingly define what your race and your day will look like, what it will be. But like any powerful tool, it has the capacity for good or for bad. So there you are, on race day, executing on exactly what you had visualized your day to be. Your swim and bike go well, pretty much exactly to plan. As you head out onto the run, your stride feels light, effortless, and strong. A flawless day. Exactly as rehearsed, and as you came to expect it to be. But, something happens at, say, mile eight. Your stride feels a little less light, not quite as effortless, and you're not running as strongly as you once were. This isn't what you envisioned. But you forge onward for another few miles, hoping that things will fall back in line with the day's script, but now with just a little less physical and mental gusto than you had had, when leaving T2. And then you hit the danger zone[37], starting *around* mile 13, and your stride has moved from feeling a little less light, to kind of heavy, it is anything but effortless, and rather than feeling strong you are starting to feel a bit wary. Anyone who has ever raced this distance, has experienced this very same *physical* affect. At some point, the effort gets

hard. Even on the best of days, it gets difficult. Very, very difficult. And while, physically, you are far from crumbling, mentally, you are unsure of how to navigate this. This wasn't in the script that you had rehearsed over and over, and over again. It isn't lining up with your expectation for the day. And so you end up beginning the process of walking the mental tightrope, all the way to the finish. The issue is that the tightrope is several miles long, is going to become more and more uncertain, and more and more difficult to balance upon, because the effort is not going to get any easier. This only serves to exacerbate the difference between what you *expected* to feel, and the actuality of what you *are* feeling. As our expected and actual feelings diverge, further and further apart, it creates a void - a perfect environment for our irrationalities to sneak in, notice our paces slipping or to see that competitor starting to put a little bit of time into us. These small little irrationalities build upon one another, and it doesn't require much for their weight to become too burdensome to bear. This has the potential to kickstart the process of mentally shutting us down, until we effectively surrender to them.

It all seems pretty grim, huh? Well, it doesn't have to be! Remember, what I described above is based upon the initial premise that we had put all of our efforts into a purely positive visualization model. There is another option. What would, or could, this look like if we invested a good portion of our efforts into supplementing the positive visualization model with a model of visualization based around coping with the inevitable imperfections of the day? There is a great deal of power in being aware that the effort is going to become, or may become, difficult. What if, above, we had planned and rehearsed for the very real possibility that we could start to feel affected by the day's effort at some point when the novelty of the day started to wane a bit, and that by mile 13 we were going to have to start digging pretty deep in order to meet the demands of the day? While this awareness wouldn't change what we were feeling, it may very well put us into a position to perceive it differently. To better align the *expectations* of what we might plan to feel with what we may *actually* feel.

So, what does this look like?

Just for a moment, let's revisit our free throw shooter. I know that we discussed the benefits of the purely positive visualization model and how,

unlike our endurance athlete, the free throw shooter seems to be best served by it. But, consider if the free throw shooter spent *some* of his or her time imagining what he or she might do, if the shot is missed. Would it serve the shooter, and the team, well to consider how he or she might react to a missed shot that falls to the left? Or, to the right? I recognize that this may seemingly fly in the face of the positive visualization model's effectiveness. But, it is at least within reason to believe that it might be beneficial to employ a line of thinking, which entailed "If I miss, and the ball goes over *there*, I am going to stay right *here*, or cut directly to the basket, or fall back onto defense", etc.. Historically speaking, the National Basketball Association's average free throw percentage falls at about 75%[38], meaning that 25% of the free throws taken are missed. This leaves one in every four free throws doing something other than what the shooter is expecting, when using the positive visualization model of always making the shot. While it can be argued that, over the long-term, this is a pretty good basis from which to assume that even more use of the positive visualization model is necessary, in the meantime, what is being done about the missed shots?

Because I consider myself to be much more well-versed in the world of endurance sports than professional basketball, let's get back to our IRONMAN athlete…Could this athlete have benefitted from coping visualization models, such as imagining what it may feel like when the effort initially starts to become more taxing? Or imagining just a few miles later when the effort becomes more taxing, still? I have to believe that any efforts made, which minimize the magnitude of the difference between what our actualities *are* and what our expectations *were*, will go a long way in helping to frustrate the abilities of our irrationalities from seeping in, taking hold and disrupting our butterflies' formation.

How many athletes do you know who, despite their best efforts and tremendous sacrifices, have seen races go completely haywire due to something as simple as a flat tire, missing an aid station, or an unjust[39] penalty? If you don't know any, then we either run in very different circles or you need to get out more! Either way, these are just *some* examples of the inevitable eventualities which can play a role in a day's imperfection. But, they will tend not to represent a justifiable reason to see an athlete's race become completely derailed. Yet, still it happens. Not the imperfections (yes, they happen too), but the overreactions and mismanagements.

There is an old adage among National Football League coaches, when a player scores a touchdown and then celebrates just a bit too excessively, to "act like you've been there before." This same idea applies to the concept of visualization as a whole, and most especially when utilizing a coping model. When you are cruising down the road, hitting your numbers, and you feel your front wheel start to go soft…You have already rehearsed coming to a stop, taking the wheel off, accessing your repair kit, and changing the tube. When you pass through an aid station too quickly and fail to restock…You have already played out, in your mind, taking inventory of what you have on-board, accounting for what you missed, planning what you will take at the next aid station, and slowing down through that aid station to make sure that you actually get it. When the referee singles *you* out of the crowd, gives *you* a penalty, and let's the *other* guys go[40]…You have already imagined yourself getting angry, calming yourself down, serving your penalty, and then leaving that negativity behind and getting back into the race in an unimpassioned way. And while you were probably spared by not having too many opportunities to *actually* practice many, if any, of the potential scenarios under the pressure(s) of 'the moment', using these as part of an overall coping visualization model, allows you to 'act like you've been there before' just that little bit more. And this gets you that much closer to a solution when you need it.

This is where a coach can help you to compile as many different potential coping scenarios as you can imagine, and then work with you to develop strategies to overcome the challenges. While this is an imperfect art and an even messier science, the skills gained by doing so can be the distinguishing factor(s) between calmly changing a flat and riding away, or changing it only to have pinched the tube. Essentially, much of the difference between managing the near certain imperfections of a day, and letting them manage you.

While we are typically rational beings, each one of us possesses our very own set of potential irrationalities. When left to their own devices these irrationalities are in a constant state of threat to our formations. I have to believe that this is something that we are *all* cursed and blessed[41] with. Every single one of us. Think that you are not subject to your own sets of

rationalities and irrationalities? Think again. I'd say that you're masking it. Or worse, that you're unaware of it. Or, that perhaps those are just the butterflies talking.

Steering a rational butterfly towards irrationality requires a mere nudge, while bringing that same butterfly back requires a full-on conversion. The strategies discussed above represent just a few of the tools that a good coach can help an athlete to attain, in order to meet the demands of the inevitable adversities which will occur throughout the course of just about any endurance event. Because it is in the noise of these imperfect and challenging times when our butterflies are the most erratic, our irrationalities the strongest, and our 'Angels of the Silences' the loudest.

1.   I recognize the seeming misuse of *affect*, versus effect. But, if you stick with this, I hope that you will soon see that with where we end up going, affect is the more appropriate choice.

2.   My use of the word "management", as it applies to emotions, is not meant in any kind of a condescending way. It is just an acknowledgement of the role that the coach can/should/does play in helping an athlete to organize his or her thoughts and emotions. Because let's face it…Athletes are not always the best guardians of their own gates. None of us are. And when not, the coach can step in to help fill, or find filler for, any existing gaps.

3.   A bit of an update on something that doesn't really require an update. But, this is my writing, and I'll do what I want with it. You may recall that the original idea of "Finley Peter Dunne" came to me while listening to an interview, with an author who had written a book that, at the time of my writing, I felt was well-beyond me. Well I wasn't necessarily right, nor was I necessarily wrong. I have begun to read that book. I don't know if I will finish it. I don't know if I follow it, completely. But, I'm not not following it. So, there is progress. I am challenging my natural inclination to read only things that I am fully comfortable with. We'll see how it goes…

4.   I fully recognize that some butterflies migrate. But, most do not. Only the monarch butterfly makes a two-way migration. For the purposes of this particular metaphor, the migrational behaviors of butterflies are meaningless, and can be disregarded.

5.   Prior to having ever heard the butterfly quote, the general concept had been floating around in my mind. It was something that came after reading a comment by Adam Duritz, lead singer of the Counting Crows, about a song that he had written, called '*Angels of the Silences*'. His description of the song reads "…the sort of issue is faith – having faith, keeping faith. And this song in particular is about the difficulty in having faith in things, and finding things to have faith in, in yourself, in God, in like he said, a woman. Faith is a weird thing, it in a sense it is all about waiting. It's not actually about getting anything, you know, faith is about the wait, because once you get something there is no need anymore. So a lot about faith is just the willingness to sort of throw yourself on a fence and hang there for a while. That's a very difficult and bitter thing, you know. In this song, I keep saying the main character, *I*, I said, "All my sins, I would pay for them if I could come back to you." It's not just about finding things to believe in, it's about wanting to be able to believe in anything too. And it's about all the voices that get inside your head and whisper for you to do it or not to do it as well…" At the time that I had read this, it had started me down the path of considering the whispering voices in our heads, and thinking about them in terms of where our securities and insecurities live, in training, racing, etc. And so then, when I heard the butterfly quote, it came to me as a natural connection, that there must be some kind of a profound linkage between the whispering voices, our various rational (or irrational) states, and faith/belief - in ourselves. As athletes, our "faith" is regularly tested. Faith in our own abilities, in our preparations, in our coaches, in our equipment, in our mindsets, and so on. And while these tests of faith stem from something as positive as having the opportunities to challenge our abilities, our preparations, our coaches, our equipment, our mindsets, etc., they leave plenty of occasions for the angels of our *own* silences to whisper negativities, to be irrational, to get our butterflies to fly out of formation.

6.   I have no idea what you call a grouping of butterflies, all of which exist as a singular unit.

7.   See #5. I have no idea whether, or not, it is correct, but I ended up just going with "flock".

8.   Random…Or, so it seems…

9.   Nearly 1,000 words on butterflies? Really??

10.   This is not that, though the concept most definitely applies. Then again, where does it not?

11.   For simplicity's sake I want to refer to things, such as real time fitness levels, on a percentage basis. For example, when referencing an athlete as being at '70% fitness', I mean to imply that they are in pretty good shape - early in the season, but far from being in tip-top race shape (100%). They should expect themselves to be better than not, but there is still plenty of room for growth.

12.   Performances at 70% fitness should be assessed against *other* 70% fitness performances. Performances at 85% fitness should be assessed against *other* 85% fitness performances. Performances at 100% fitness should be assessed against *other* 100% fitness performances. Assessing your 85% fitness, against your 100% expectations is, quite frankly, completely unfair to yourself and serves only as a short-cut to disappointment. A coach can help you to avoid this mental pitfall, which we are all susceptible to.

13.   That bitch wins every single time.

14.   This is why I italicized "*Your*" in this section's title.

15.   For the purposes of this writing, I will use *outcomes* as being something that we define by measuring ourselves against someone else. For example, age group placement.

16.   To this day, baseball remains the only sport, that I know of, where 70% failure is considered Hall of Fame-level success. There may be more, but they do not easily come to mind. Perhaps 3-point shooting in the NBA, as well.

17.   A *big* part!

18.   To the point in which the 'uncontrollables' can be controlled. *What*? We cannot control the weather. But, we can control our approach to the weather. What we wear. How we perceive it. How we behave within it.

19.   Don't let me lose you here. I am not going off of the deep-end. Yes, to this point you have read nearly 4,000 words centered around a physical activity. Shouldn't our goals incorporate that physicality? Yes…And, no. Targets are more appropriate expectations for ourselves than outcomes. But, sometimes the body just doesn't 'show up' in the way that it is supposed to. When that happens, our targets need to become adjustable, in such a way that they fit into our context, whatever that may be.

20.   I am sometimes okay with using metrics within an athlete's goals. When doing so, I will shy away from too much specificity. For example, I am not okay with the idea

of "I want you to ride 250w." Depending upon the athlete, I may be okay with something along the lines of "let's try to hold somewhere in the 230-260w range. Get a sense of what kind of wattage you are settling into, both heart rate and perceived exertion-wise, and then let that be your primary baseline gauge". Two very, very different approaches. One has a singular point of success, while the other has a wide window of success. Some can work with this window very reasonably. Others see 229w and consider themselves complete and utter failures. They don't get metrics…While both of these are targets, the latter is goal-like in that it allows for some on-the-fly adjustment, based upon the circumstances of the moment.

21.   If you are having trouble pulling your mind away from the idea of goals having nothing to do with placements and/or whether, or not, your targets are hit, try the following on for size. Let's say that you have set the goal to come in the top-3 in your age group, and to do so you believe that you will need to average 220w on the bike, and 7.5 minute miles on the run. You know that that wattage and pace will be a little bit of a stretch for you, so you need to really maintain focus, when the going gets tough out there. **Case 1:** During the race you remain tough, strong and determined, nailing the 220w and 7.5 minute miles, but come in 4th, against a stacked field, by mere seconds. **Case 2:** During the race you completely fold when the effort gets hard, missing your 220w and 7.5 minute mile targets, but win your age group, against a very weak field. **Case 3:** During the race you remain tough, strong and determined. You are a little further back in your age group than you would like, and the 220w and 7.5 minute mile targets that you set feel unsustainable. So, you adjust them on the fly, ending up clawing your way back into 8th, just a minute out of 3rd, against a stacked field. Now assess these cases? Where was there success? Where was there failure? The specifics are

always going to be different, for each one of us, but we all do this. We set ourselves up against Outcomes, Targets, and Goals. But, when looking at this objectively, only one is a fair assessment of race performance - Goals. Could a reasonable athlete be disappointed with the performance in Case 1? If considering the performance, rationally, no way! But, it isn't always the rational mind that is assessing the performance. What about Case 2? Could the rational mind be satisfied with how that panned out? Not *this* rational mind! The irrational mind would look at the outcome, be satisfied, and rationalize away the failure to control the controllables. In my mind, Case 3 is much the same as Case 1, and perhaps even more successful. The assumed targets made the effort feel unsustainable, but the athlete remained rational (the irrational part of the athlete's mind would have thrown their hands in the air and said "I guess I'm just not good enough"), adjusted target expectations, and held tough, strong and determined against those new targets. *That* is smart racing!

22.　I watched a lot of *The West Wing*, and there was an entire episode (S1:E2) themed around the *post hoc* fallacy. Basically, because some event, Y, followed after some other event, X, then the *post hoc* fallacy states that event Y must have been caused by event X. It is seemingly valid logic, but for the fact that it is almost always incorrect.

23.　Shameless plug…But, QT2 Systems now offers these with an upgrade to include fully 'Smart' Trainer/ZWIFT-compatible bike workouts! Want to try it out, but are afraid to fully commit? Contact beth@qt2systems.com. I'm sure that she can work with you to try out a free trial of the service.

24.　In this particular case, the athlete was running the

Boston Marathon in preparation for a later season IRONMAN.

25.   Why would this athlete do that? Why force a pace onto your body, so early into a race, when the body is clearly not accepting it? Upon post-race discussion it was clear that the athlete had assigned a *Target* as a *Goal*. This athlete had decided that "success" was going to be measured as a 2:55 marathon. Now, that 2:55 marathon was a perfectly reasonable expectation, if all of the cylinders were clicking. But, they weren't. And, instead of adjusting the target/expectation, the athlete hunkered down, and tried to force through the required pacing for a 2:55. This proved painful, and successful through mile 16. But, at mile 16 the muscle cramping won out. In post-race discussion, the athlete and I speculated that a readjustment of the expectations, once having started to experience the cramping, probably could have translated into a 3:01-range marathon. Not what the original target was, but still quite respectable. Instead, not adjusting the expectation translated into a 3:12. Still respectable, but a clear indication of the power of being able to remain flexible and adjust expectations on the fly.
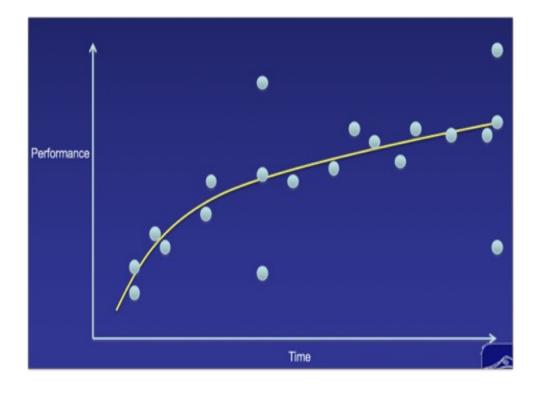
26.   I knew where this was going. The athlete did not. 'How was hydration the day before the race?' 'I think it was good…But, I *did* have one Bud Light with dinner the night before.' 'That wasn't it. That didn't affect you. How was the rest of your intake?' 'Great! We went to the Red Sox game, the day before. I had about four or five bottles of water.' Bingo!

27.   To me, the primary distinction between disappointment and discouragement, in this particular context, is the length of the associated term. For example,

our marathoner fumbled their electrolyte balance, due to an error in 'hydrational' approach. 'I need to make sure that I am good and hydrated for tomorrow, let's make sure that I drink plenty of water.' 95% of the time this works out fine. But, this instance fell within that 5% of the time when it doesn't. So, in my mind and in this context, disappointment is a 'one-off'. You screw up *X*, or *Y*, or *X* and *Y*, and have a result that in no way meets your expectation. But for that, things probably would have gone quite well. While that sucks, it should be relatively easy to get back onto the horse, so to speak, and forge onward. On the other hand, discouragement is a much deeper experience, which really gets to the core of what we are doing and why. Discouragement occurs when we realize that our best efforts and sacrifices are inadequate, relative to our desired expectations.

The below graphic (*Figure 1*) is from a presentation that I used to give, which covered some of the different aspects of keeping things in perspective, during times when we may tend towards slipping into 'the crazies' with regards to our training and racing. The primary purpose of the graphic is to demonstrate that we are not defined by singular 'data points'. We often fall into the trap of allowing a singular race or event to define *us*, as athletes. This can be kind of fun when those races go really well. By the same respect, it can be downright depressing when they don't. So, the point is that our race results do not necessarily define *us* (*I trust that it is well-understood that when I use terms like "define" and "us", it is only within the realm of this world of endurance sports, and only in so much as a measure of our fitness levels, having nothing to do with the us-ness of we, as people…Clearly, I digressed.*).

Figure 1

So, let's take it to the graphic. The horizontal axis represents time, say, over the course of a season, and the vertical axis, performance level(s). For the sake of discussion, let's assume that the left-most end of the horizontal axis is, say, January, and it spans right, through to a goal race in, say, July. Over the course of those several months, we collect a number of data points. Some of us do this occasionally, Others of us do this daily. The point being that the data points start to define a relationship between the preparations/training that we are doing, and our performance levels, as shown by the yellow curve. Essentially, the relationship is pretty much what we all know it to be - As you train, over time, you will see improvement. This is no great mystery. Like any collection of data, that forms a correlational relationship, most of it clusters to define the curve, but some of it can tend to seem off the mark. I apologize if this seems long, and well-overstated, but I want to make sure that my point is clear. While our singular performance data points may fall in line with our data clusters, some may, at times, fall well-below the defined

curve. When this occurs with a race performance, or a really 'important' workout, it can become our tendency (or, should I say the tendency of our irrationalities) to completely disregard the clusters of data, in favor of the singular disappointing data point. And so I can finally make my point…Who/What/Where we are, as athletes, is not a function of any singular race, or training performance. Who/What/Where we are, as athletes, is defined by all of the performances surrounding a singular race or event. Simply put, we are the curve. The curve is a function of *all* of our performances, and *cannot* be defined by any singular point on, or around, it. With this particular slide I used to include a line from Rudyard Kipling's *If, - "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same"*, and in my mind it does a great job to describe the essence of what I am getting at, here. In this context, our performances/fitness/athleticism is/are not defined by our highs or our lows, but by our highs *and* our lows, as well as everything in between.

While I recognize that this endnote has gone on and on, and on, I must take the opportunity to consider how all of this pertains to the idea(s) around disappointment and discouragement. To that end, I submit that any of the data points, alone, can represent a disappointing performance. For example, I can see that any of the data points which fall below our curve could, in some way, feel like some varying level of disappointment. We entered into an event with the expectation of a performance which lands on, or perhaps we *hope* just above, the curve. When/If the performance falls below the curve, our level of disappointment corresponds with just how far below the curve the performance falls. This makes sense to me, because our expectations are defined by the curve. In this case, the disappointment is healthy, and perfectly rational. Much less rational, in my mind, is when we are hoping for a performance *above* the curve, and are then disappointed with a performance which falls *on* the curve. At some point, or another, we all end up being guilty

of this. But, being aware of this tendency in ourselves can go a long way in helping to ensure that our satisfaction levels fall in line with our fair and true expectations. That is *disappointment.*

Discouragement, on the other hand, is a wholly rational sensation, when applied at the right time, and in the right place(s). Unlike disappointment, discouragement is associated with the whole of something. And so, our first line of defense comes in avoiding the inclination to apply a sense of discouragement to any singular data point, performance, event, or race. As discussed above, that is disappointment's job! Discouragement is what we feel when we come to the realization that, despite our best efforts and hard work, our curve is simply inadequate to meet the demands of whatever it is that we are preparing for. For example, if we are talking about our goal IRONMAN race in July, for which the *target* is to break 14 hours, because we have tried so many times before, and missed. And while we have put in all of the training and made all of the sacrifices, two weeks out from the race our curve simply doesn't line up with breaking 14 hours…It would make sense that we might feel a sense of discouragement from that. And, unless we make an adjustment to our target or, more appropriately, focus on a more goal-oriented approach (as discussed above), we are going to struggle to shake the sense of discouragement associated with this unfortunate realization.

28.   The implication is quite clear…That, yes, there are times when the coach must work with an athlete to identify and experience discouragement. It is the coach who must work with the athlete in identifying when the athlete's expectations may exceed their ability(ies) to meet them. When this occurs, hopefully the athlete and coach can work with one another to adjust expectations. But, in the rare instances when the athlete's expectations cannot, or will not adjust, it falls upon the coach to serve as counsel through,

and around, the reality of near certain discouragement.

29.   There is a very clear reason as to why those Civil War generals always seemed to set up shop on some remote hilltop. From there they could oversee the whole of the battle, and maintain a bird's eye view in order to call the shots, without the distracting worry of incoming cannon fodder. Without drawing too much of a comparison between endurance sports and war (because it would seem inappropriate to do so), as athletes we are, in a sense, blinded to the true realities of our own mental battlefields, because of the near constant cannon fodder flying over our own heads.

30.   This section is about a concept which makes a lot of sense to me, but is also very much inspired, in my mind, by THIS particular scene in the movie *Rocky Balboa*, which is the sixth Rocky movie, please do *not* refer to it as Rocky VI…(Anyone who knows me knows that Rocky movies, no matter how cheesy, are like poetry to my ears.) In this particular scene, the two lines which most jump out at me are "The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows" and "It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward. How much you can take and keep moving forward. That's how winning is done." I kind of get the sense that the writers intended for these two lines to be the most dramatic, and if so, well done. But, together, these two lines essentially speak to what this section is intended to be about, namely recognizing that as endurance athletes we will be faced with certain inevitable adversities, and if we take the time to forecast them and rehearse our way(s) through them, then we have an opportunity to, despite how many adversities we may face, or their magnitude, keep moving forward.

31.   So much so that upon first writing this, I didn't even think to explain what visualization is. It wasn't until a

second read through that I realized that I was just assuming that you knew what I was talking about. You probably do. But, the fact that I assume that you do only reinforces the issue associated with assuming that everybody does it. As a result, we don't talk about doing it, because we don't think that we *need* to talk about doing it. Except that we actually probably *do* need to talk about doing it, and how.

32.   As defined by me…

33.   I fully recognize that the free throw shooter and the golfer may, very well, visualize in ways that more resemble coping than, say, making the shot or putt. But, having never been in the context, personally, I don't *know* that they do. Therefore, for the sake of discussion, I feel most comfortable assuming that they do not, because I do not *know* that the idea of coping visualization is as beneficial a tool as I know/believe it to be in endurance sports.

34.   The basketball player is capable of having rehearsed any number of potential negative circumstances, all with the end result being a made shot. For example, the player can have rehearsed making the free throw despite the pressures of a game seven situation, or being exhausted after almost four full quarters of basketball, or having taken a hard foul, etc., etc., etc.. You get the point. Regardless of how many negative scenarios can be completed, the positive visualization model sets the user up for success.

35.   I don't mean to imply that shooting free throws is an easy task. But, each made free throw is, in my mind, a perfect success.

36. Pun intended.

37. Perhaps this exists. Perhaps it doesn't. But, I theorize that there is something about the third quarter of anything that we do, where there is often a slight mental lapse that occurs. Something happens between the 50% and 75% zone of completion that is beyond the physiological, which causes us to slow. For example, when running a mile on a 400 meter track, often the third lap will be the slowest. Not because there is any real physiological affect, but because our focus briefly suffers. Why do I think that it is not physiological, and place so much blame on the mental component? Because while we slip up on that third lap of the mile, we are pretty regularly somehow able to bring ourselves back for the fourth. In my experience, typically speaking, once we are truly affected by the physiological, it is very, very difficult to come back from. Therefore, the third quarter slip ends up representing that moment when we first start to wonder about the sustainability of the *hard-ness* of the effort, and back off as a protective measure, in order to ensure that we will be able to complete the distance. As we move beyond 75% completion, we start to recognize the fact that we are going to make it, shedding this mode of self-preservation, and ramping the intensity back upwards, though not necessarily always at the level of our previous speed/pace.

38. https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_stats_per_game.html

39. Tongue in cheek…The penalty tents make me think of that scene in *The Shawshank Redemption*, where upon first meeting Andy DuFresne, 'Red' (Morgan Freeman) asks him why he killed his wife. Andy proclaims his innocence, and 'Red' tells him that he is going to fit right

in, because "everyone in here's innocent", and then promptly asks another inmate why he's at Shawshank, to which he says "Didn't do it. Lawyer fucked me."

[40.](#) "Oh you'll fit right in here. Everyone in here's innocent, didn't ya' know?"

[41.](#) I say "blessed" because at the end of the day, endurance sports are actually a lifestyle, and we should be getting something positive out of our involvement in them. If we are not, then we need to take a serious step back and reassess. I like to think that we take part in them for fun, because we find them enjoyable. But, somewhere along the way we can sometimes get a little crazy with them, and allow them to take on a much greater role than originally intended. If we can maintain a proper perspective, despite occasional inevitable bumps in the road, endurance sports can remain, or return to, ultimately positive experiences.