

The one assumption you need to stop making about larger athletes.



As always, it's a while between proverbial blog 'drinks' these days, however as you know by now, I like to wait for something to come up that I need to write about so desperately I set the computer up in the kitchen and write whilst cooking dinner.

So over here in Australia, the governing bodies of Triathlon are starting to realise the power of the 'newbie', particularly their role in the health and survival of local triathlon clubs and training squads. State and National bodies are kicking in and creating initiatives that allow said newbies to try triathlon and see what they think before they hand over their hearts, minds and wallets to the sport. There are currently some awesome programs in place, allowing local triathlon clubs to offer 6 to 10 week training intakes that culminate in a graduation race, or other membership and affiliation discounts and incentives.

Needless to say, seeing and hearing of all of these newbies flocking to our sport simply warms the shackles of my heart, particularly when many of these are athletes who have previously shown hesitation about the sport based on the perceived threat of judgment over their ability, shape, or size. **HOWEVER**, (and a big however at that), there is one thing that I really feel I need to clarify with all of you folk who are dealing with and working with the newbies to your club and sport: ***please stop assuming that we are showing up because we want to lose weight.***

Triathlon has a reputation as one of *the* most mentally and physically challenging sports. For many decades now it has been perceived as the sport of the ultra-fit and

therefore off-limits to many of us mere mortals. For us to think that it would be a great starting point for us to lose some weight would be close to insanity on our parts. Nor would we rock up for an intake without knowing what a bike was or what a pool looked like. The truth is, many of us who approach the sport live an established athletic lifestyle, and probably have done so for some time. We are usually strong in one or two of the disciplines, and competent in the third, and this sense of self-efficacy is what is usually the catalyst for us contemplating taking this step into the tri-abbyss. ***We are showing up because we want to challenge ourselves, physically and mentally, and we have goals that include training and completing a triathlon.***

Now I get that triathlon is and always has been a sport with an incredible focus on *lean*, particularly in elite and competitive age group and distance realms. Power to weight ratios and the old '1kg = 1minute' theory and all that – I get it. It's ok for *you* to have weight loss as a pre-season goal or whatever – because *it's your body, and your body is not my business*. However on the same token, *my body isn't your business*, so the assumptions that I am showing up because I want to lose some weight needs to halt along with any other preconceptions you may have about me based on my physical presentation.

I cannot stress how important this is on a training group level and a local club level. Because at the end of the day, we want people to come and enjoy our sport, join our clubs and help make them healthy, flourishing communities of like-minded people who love having a go and doing it with mates.

So unless a larger person specifically *tells* you that they are wanting to lose weight, the talk needs to stop. There needs to be no "you'll find that easier when you lose weight", or "I found that so much easier once I lost weight" talk anymore. The only assumptions you should be making about larger folk who wish to entrust some of the most intimidating and potentially confronting moments of their lives in your squad or club is that they have a goal to train for and complete a triathlon. Passion, dreams and determination are not physical concepts. Our showing up to train and prepare for an event is our core 'why' and it transcends physical size, shape, appearance, or ability.

So the next time you're tempted to make the assumption about a newbie's reason for showing up, or tempted to talk about their weight, opt to say nothing. Treat them as a person who has shown up with the same goals to participate and compete as you have. If you personally are of the opinion that they should consider losing weight, please remember: *not your body, not your business*.

The triathlon community is one of the most supportive, positive and non-judgmental sporting communities I know, and I genuinely want it to thrive from all of these new member initiatives. If you find that there are no larger athletes represented in your squad or club, or you don't seem able to retain them, please contact me, I am more than happy to help you work towards making your training and racing environments a place where every person comes together and trains, races, and thrives.