



Courtesy Alexandra Metz

## WHEN TO SAY WHEN

BY JORDAN D. METZL, MD

Having written this column for almost four years, I always try to highlight a medical issue or patient that presents an interesting problem or dilemma that can be instructive for you the reader. Over the years, I've tried to write about everyone besides me because someone's hamstring injury can teach one point, an Achilles injury another and hyponatremia yet another. This time, though, I'm contemplating my own injury. And as I sit here, one week out from Ironman Lake Placid, I'm not sure if I can do the race. I'm facing a difficult issue that I hope can help all of you.

First off, the Ironman race is all about preparation. For those of you who have done one, or are in the process of preparing, or even thinking about it, you know what I mean. Yes, there are months of workouts, but more than that, one's life goes into lockdown mode. The joy of race day, and the hard work to get there, is often offset by great sacrifice. Relationships suffer, parties are skipped, countless hamburgers and ice cream sandwiches are left lonely on the shelf, and these are only a fraction of the many sacrifices that are made to get athletes to the starting line. In many ways, the joy of race day is seeing all the participants succeed by completing this crazy (yet amazing) event,

each of whom has overcome his or her own personal hurdle.

My brothers Jamie and Josh are competing in Lake Placid too, our parents are coming, and we even had MetzL Brothers tri jerseys made. For me, as for all of you, this is a big deal. It doesn't seem to matter if it's the first time or the eighth; the journey to get to the starting line is long, arduous and involved.

Herein lies the rub: My stupid left foot, specifically the ridiculous plantar fascia, is telling me to not run. I have written about plantar fasciitis before, and likely will again, but living through this annoying yet almost debilitating heel pain is enough to cause a string of words unsuitable for publication. Of course, I've tried all the treatments, and have several more ideas before race day, but as it presently stands, I simply don't think I can run.

So then I pose this question to you all: When is it time to pull the plug? Is it worth starting, trying or even showing up? The question is simple; the answer, however, is much more complicated. I can also say that it's much easier to be the doctor than the patient, by the way.

Having dealt with these issues with my patients for quite some time, here is the algorithm that seems to make the most sense when considering pulling out of a race. First of all, is there a risk for more serious or severe injury? If so, the answer is simple: Do not race.

If there is little risk of serious injury, what will the race experience be like? Agonizing?

Fun? A mix of the two? Many races involve discomfort, but will the pain be so great that you can't swim, bike or run normally? My general rule of thumb is: If pain limits an athlete's ability to perform a sports activity normally, then it's probably best to stop. By this I mean that if the swim stroke is off because of shoulder pain, the bike stroke is off because of knee pain or the run stride is off because of foot pain, then think long and hard before pushing ahead.

Why? Because injuries from improper form, especially over a daylong event such as Ironman, can take many months to heal and create more frustrating problems than the one you might be dealing with at present.

Finding a sports medicine physician who understands endurance sport will help with the determination, so it's probably a good idea to look for someone like that in your area. Together, you can make the most educated decision.

As for me, by the time this is published I'll have either finished Ironman number eight or made the decision that this plantar fascia is telling me "no." Either way, I plan to follow my rules as I hope for the best. ▽

*Editor's note: Jordan (pictured left) finished Ford Ironman Lake Placid in a time of 11:48:03.*

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