

Trizophrenia: Inside the Minds of a Triathlete

BY JEF MALLETT

For some people the best way to learn how to do something is to take a crack at it and keep taking cracks until it takes. This is the Failure Breeds Success Method. The rare breed occasionally comes along who does it right the first time and doesn't need to learn from failed attempts. The former need a good teacher/coach while the latter need nothing but the occasional comeuppance.

If you're a teacher/coach, one way to get a point across is to soak it overnight in humor. This is the approach to teaching about getting into triathloning successfully that Jef Mallett uses. Being a cartoonist (he does the syndicated cartoon strip *Frazz*), Jef sets off his lessons with cartoons—most of whose characters are heavily laden with a whiff of failure.

But he also uses a device you too seldom see applied to humor: The Footnote. Yes, indeed, that dreaded device most of we elderly scholars blanched before back in the days when we had to type our papers on a typewriter and our professors strictly measured from the bottom to make sure the last line of each page ended one inch from the bottom—that ending usually involving a footnote. If it wasn't an exact inch, we had to start typing the page afresh from the top on down.

The Footnote is usually used to either cite a source or provide additional information that will further justify the use of the statement in the body of the text. Jef Mallett uses it as an invitation to explicate, elucidate, or entertain. Some of it is pretty juvenile, but hey, we like juvenile, especially if it manages to be sophomoric at the same time.

Here's an example¹: He is writing about the abundance of good, healthy food at most supermarkets these days, in spite of the season of the year; no more depending on Mother Nature to provide what is in season. In the accompanying footnote he gives us this: "Waiter! What's this triathlete doing in my gazpacho?" "Freestyle, sir. Triathletes can't backstroke." You must get it because even I get it, and I usually don't get jokes that are disguised as footnotes.

Some of the funniness is right there plain and simple in the body copy. Page 84 is the lead-off page of the section on the Economics of triathloning relative to other things in life. Jef gives us a progressive list from most expensive to cheapest (and accompanies it with a cartoon illustrating same): Golfers, Triathletes,

Bicycle racers, Mountain bike racers, Runners, Swimmers, Ascetic monks, My dad—said parent accompanied by a footnote, naturally.

The book does an excellent job of covering virtually every aspect of triathloning, dispensing good, reliable advice, if with a humorous slant. Never having been a triathlete simply because I don't swim well and would therefore likely not make it to the second leg in a race, some of the material I had to work at by actually reading the text and stopping to think about it—something veteran triathletes would not necessarily have to do because the joke is coming to them--they are not having to go out after the joke by researching the subject.

If there is one complaint, it involves the cartooning. It is all very competent and clearly rendered, but I think it would benefit from being a touch more *avant garde* and open-ended—sort of like Calvin and Hobbes meet triathloning. But of course the point is that is not Jeff Mallett's style.

While this is probably not a book for the serious triathlete in your life, because he or she probably finds very little of triathloning funny, it is an excellent book for a triathlete who is trying to win a friend or family member over to appreciating the discipline and the art of the trifecta sport to buy for them. It might just win you some respect and understanding—and they'll be laughing with you and not at you².

¹Page 158.

²Of course, there's no guarantee; there's something inherently funny about an adult human being standing around dressed in tight-fitting rubber³ while wearing a shower cap.

³Unless you have just snagged the lead role for the next Batman movie.