

Pagosa Duathlon

insights from the top of the podium

by steve ilg
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- Race Report #1



***"To excel in a sport is not
mastery of self-cultivation."
- steve ilg***

photo of coach racing at Pagosa Mountain Duathlon last month, shortly before his high-speed crash. coach went on to win the Overall by a 20-second margin. photo by Tom Steen

The spiritual advantages of being an absolutely mediocre athlete - or yogi - vastly outweigh the same for the naturally gifted. The reason is simple, yet you may need to concentrate on this key. Here it is: We - the middling fitness warriors - quickly reach our spiritually potent "edge" far faster, far more poignantly than do the genetically and karmically resplendent.

Having stated that, ilg understands all too well that when it is you in the driver's seat of an entire life of middling talent and capacity, such spiritual advantages often appear as "frustration" to our ego. Which is why, most average athletes and yogis quit the long and arduous Path of Self Cultivation through Sweat. Sad. If ilg had a more potent voice and platform from which to influence the masses, ilg would speak boldly and confidently and in support of middling warriors like myself.

So, what i will attempt to do in the course of the next DL's is to draw out the spiritual teachings of an unexceptional (me) fitness warrior whose sole focus is on wholeness, not specialization of fitness, and how that can - sometimes - result in an exceptional spiritual and competitive experience filled with absolute and endless divinity. So, if this type of stuff is what lubes your chain, and you don't mind reading and seeing some true Bhagavad-Gita like blood-and-guts warrior spiritual teachings, ilg humbly invites you to take this Pagosa Race Report Series and enjoy it for what it is.

Reaching Our Spiritual Edge - We Must Make It More Available, Not Less

I'm going to repeat the key affirmation from my opening:

We - the average fitness warriors - quickly reach the spiritually potent "edge" far faster, far more poignantly than do the genetically and karmically resplendent.

Growth in a spiritual context cannot come from comfort. A cell must divide. In that intensity of division at the molecular, vibratory level - lies the rajasic quality of our UniVersal nature which is the same yearning toward Enlightenment. Comfort equals stagnation. Genuine growth - and thus, all Healing - must take its origins not from stagnation and comfort, but rather from turbulent intensity. That is, after all, what greets each of us at our Last Gasp, when we eventually exhale and can no longer draw an inhale...our Bardo Entry. Such an Entry is not one of comfort and stagnation to a mind and ego and consciousness long fastened to a physical body which suddenly grows cold and deadens.

Now that i have you grounded in the understanding of the value of intensity over comfort, lets come back to the spiritual advantages of living a life of average capacities and let the hero's shift for themselves.



This spiritual advantages of the mediocre warrior (*which the Buddha heralded as "The Middle Path Warrior"*) holds true across the physiologic spectrum. For instance, in yoga practice, we Middle Path'ers (thankfully) do NOT need to twist and stretch and

compress our tight bodies into koan-like contortions in order to reach a deep place of inner understanding or - for that matter - divinity. i've been practicing asana for over 30 years and i remain Blessed in the sense that even the simplest of postures - a Warrior One or Downward Dog - still rivets my attention by way of reaching a rich 'edge' immediately. Within a few breaths of trying to square off my twisted sister of a smashed pelvis, ilg is seeing, feeling, loving, and sometimes cursing all that is go(o)d within me! For me, yoga is never boring. For me, not doing yoga is not an option. It's my Pathway Higher...and, to me, everything is yoga.

photo this page:

ilg's pre race 'vehicle of the spirit'; Jnana mudra displayed.

**Pagosa Duathlon
- Race Report #2;
Competition As A Wholistically
Relevant Inner Space**

*"Attack
thy weaknesses,
Destroy
avidya,
Pursue the Great Spirit
of Wholeness."
- coach ilg*

Such is the sweat-based sutra of the WF Yogi, for we would rather finish in last place doing a sport in which we suck than to go on winning, winning, winning in something that the Go(o)d Lord gifted to us naturally. To excel in a sport is not mastery of self-cultivation. A lot of people get that mixed up. Winning - if not done from a spiritually matured and wholistically relevant inner space - only serves to fortify that aspect of self which is not the True Self. I am speaking here of what yogis know as 'ahamkara' or the egoic construct. In my second book, *The Winter Athlete*, i coached you that, *"Racing is not about, it's about ourselves."*



Well, that is why New Daddy ilg chose again to find myself toeing yet another Start Line. This particular line - a scribble of chalk across a forlorn forest road tucked within the massive remoteness of the Weminuche Wilderness of southwestern Colorado, was a most precious one. For this line monumented the Start of the Pagosa Mountain Duathlon which covered trails and forest roads upon which, many moons ago, i helped create and trained upon while living in Pagosa Springs, Colorado.

photo this page; Ananda hikes with Dewachen toward Cascade Falls one of the many spectacular sights to see when you come to this race, photo by ilg

...the spontaneous decombustion of self

However, things have changed since becoming a New Daddy.

For some insane reason, i figured it would be great to take my family backcountry camping the night before the Race.

I'll spare the details; let's just say that so intense and ongoing was Shiva's Dance upon my camping notion, that Ananda and i have mutually decided to *never, ever* speak of those 24 hours again! ilg rests assured that many outdoor athletes in our Tribe who've suddenly found themselves in the spontaneous decombustion chamber known as New Parenthood, can nod their fatigued heads along with me at memories of their own attempts in the *"not changing my lifestyle just because i am a new parent,"* attitude.

Yah, as if.

If you want to make Shiva Dance? Have a child, and watch the way Nataraj dances so elegantly upon every morsel of who you thought you were!

Pagosa Duathlon Final Report - Dragon Slayin'

Each race contains one or a few of what commentators might call "a TP"...short for "Turning Point." A TP is an emotional or physical crux through which the dynamics in a race change in a categoric shift.

In Ai Imawa philosophy, TP's are known as "Dragon Moments." A Dragon is anything in our lives - or our races - that attempts to move us away from our Center. An experienced warrior senses when anything in our lives - or in a competitive event - is trying to move us away from our Center. Recognizing such Dragons, the warrior then creates an inner space to consciously *"meet, calm, and walk the Dragon."*

At the Pagosa Duathlon, there were two TP's for me. Two m(om)ents of Dragon Slaying...

THE RUN

The Duathlon opened with a 6-mile trail and forest road footrace. I went out hard. My Game Plan was to keep the good runners within 2 minutes of me by the end of the 6-mile run. Then get on my mountain bike and chase those fleet footed runners down on the bike.

Having a Game Plan is important. It's keeps the ego from chirping on and on about how painful is the racing.

The run course is beautiful, starting with a kilometer uphill on a forest road to thin the pack before dodging right into a cobweb of undulating and sense-tickling singletrack along trails i recalled from having lived here. When racing in pain - and truly, there is no pain quite like footracing pain - it helps without condition to force feed oneself this suffering among wildflowers, ponderosa, and aspen forests. Birdsong mixed and mingled with my breath as my feet danced along the sinewy Weminuche game trails.

We "Full Coursers" ran two laps along a 3-mile course. The midsection of the course was an astounding tromp through "The Hills Are Alive With The Sound Of Music" type of terrain. The final mile was the cut-the-fun-stuff-it's-payback time; a mile long gravel road gruntfest befitting of beasts. I loved it. Though my spirit body craves nothing more than trail and preferably mountain peak running, my aging, battered body prefers less technical terrain like this...it invokes my teenage years of 100-mile road running volume, though those years before breaking my spine feels like an entirely different lifetime. It was actually. A human life contains many lifetimes.

I passed the surprisingly large crowd at the Start/Finish area for Lap One, at an 6:30/mile pace. Fast enough to keep everybody behind me accept for five others. Among the five in front, i knew of two that were in the Full Course Solo Division. The others, i figured must be Pairs or Teams racers. I focused on Adam, a triathlete from nearby Bloomfield, New Mexico. I met him out here the day before the Race. He was pre-biking the Run Course. I was not. i was caught up in my New Daddy Hell Realm known as, "Taking The Family Camping For The First Time."

"Keep bearing down,"

i reMinded myself through Lap Two. *"Good things happen when you just persevere through the Pain,"* came my self talk.

Positive Self Talk while suffering is tantamount to succeed in endurance sports. That, and a whole-hearted reliance upon ones Mantra doesn't hurt either. In fact, no sooner had i finished another round of my astral Mala Beads in my head with the Mantra, suddenly, Christmas came early as i saw Adam pulled over to the side of the trail, hands-on-knees, hurling.

"Hmmm." i thought, as i accelerated past him pretending not to be breathing hard

to further dismantle his moment. Usually, i race on "empty." Food in gut steals needed oxygen, nutrition, and *prana* (life force) from working musculature. PowerBar's GelBursts, PowerGels, or perhaps a PowerBar, is usually it for me on Race Mornings. if i do eat, it's gotta be something simple, like oatmeal or pancakes consumed a good 2.5 hours before the Gun goes off. Race Day nutrition is consumed the days (and - let's be honest - the decades) prior to the event. Not the day of.

My spinal injury pain was minimal thanks to ongoing abdominal/thoracic uplift from my conscious breathing. When i use a variation of *Uddiyana Bandha* (a type of stomach vacuum technique in yoga) along with chronic tugging of my tailbone under, i can usually knock down 10ks or so of running before more advanced neural impingement produces deeper debilitating pain.

THE TRANSITION

Felt strong coming into the Run/Bike Transition. Time for *Cleansing Breaths* (strong nasal inhales with mouth exhales) as i use Zen Mind to flow without flaw in the transition from Runner to Cyclist.

Also, a couple of golden rules help in the Transition:

Do the least demanding of motor neural tasks first. In a Transition while breath rate is highest, for example, taking off running shoes, putting on cycling helmet, sunglasses, stuff jersey pockets with PowerGels BEFORE putting on cycling gloves.

As breath rate calms, do more complicated neural tasks; putting on the cycling shoes, and finally taking in fluids/gels before trotting the bike through the Transition Zone, hopping onto him cycle-cross style and, hammering.

Transitions are an art form. They require zen.

THE BIKE

One key to duathlon performance is to put yourself on AutoPilot for 10 minutes after climbing onto your bike from the run. Chances are likely you ain't gonna feel that great. The biomechanic switch from running to cycling is a steep one; time is needed to iron out the physiologic transformation. Leg muscles might feel like dessicated liver and your brain like coconut milk. You'll likely wonder why you paid good money to be doing this as you continue to pedal in squares like a blockhead. That's just the Dance of Duathlon. *"Just bear down and get on with it."*

I had dropped into a Time Trial posture and was blue collaring it through this Ten Minute Auto Pilot phase when a Team guy came zooming past. What happened in the next nanosecond was second nature from road bicycle racing. Without thinking, i accelerated onto his back wheel and held onto the draft. This is a customary ritual of suffering in road cycling. Another Dragon Slayed by pure warrior instinct. Sucking

on his back wheel like a mongrel in heat, he delivered me through the 10 Minute Auto Pilot Zone and onto a dust-and-cow dung covered double track with a series of kneecap cracking headwalls filled with roots and baby heads (fist-sized, loose rocks). With timing that rarely works out, i could feel my 'real cycling' legs come back online just in time to attack this section which i figured might have troubled the two still in front of me.

Churning up a rooster tail of dust behind me, i charged for the steep technical descent section that Race Management was worried about. A sign alerted me i was near it: **"DANGEROUS SECTION...DISMOUNT STRONGLY SUGGESTED!"**

The sign fluttered like a race gate on a Super G Course as i sped past it, brushing it with confident disdain as i plunged - ass over rear wheel - down the headwall. For a brief moment i thought, *"Maybe i shouldn't be so confident,"* then hit the Delete Button on that negative thought, as Grunt's (my MTB) dilapidated front shock took on the first wave of watermelon-sized rocks and struggled to hold a line through the mish-mash maze of cross-ruts down the 21% slope. By Flagstaff's standards, this section is not nearly as anal sphincter stiffening as the sign warranted and within moments another Dragon was left behind me, slain and quivering.

Man, racing is fun.

Sometimes.

THE CRASH

The only other time i've crashed harder on a bicycle was during the Iron Horse Bicycle Race. On that one, i hit the deck with the entire peleton at 41 mph. Yup. Next time you are in your car, open your door at 41 mph. Look down. Pavement is whirring by pretty fast, huh? You can imagine how bad that hurt.

Well, this one was worse in some ways. The crash happened in a split second during a big-chainring descent down Brockover Forest Road. I had caught and passed several riders. I had lost track of where i was in the race. I do recall being passed by some dude that had horrible...i mean HORRIBLE cycling posture and that pissed me off. figuring that he was a Team or Pair guy did not seem to matter to my ego. It was more like, *"There is NO WAY that dude should be passing me!"*

Perhaps it was the karma of that impure thought that inspired Shiva to once again attempt to Teach me something. Perhaps it was the flat light caused by the Ponderosa shadows across the road. Perhaps it was the aging front shock of Grunt. Regardless, at about 35 mph, i hit an erosion wash in the road and went down.

I hit the road surface with an awful sounding *thud-crunch-smack*.

i recall two things happening;

1) there were two racers near me when i went down and one of them screamed, "*Oh Shit! Dude...are...(voice trailing away as he sped onward)..you..o...kay?*" What, like he was going to stop or something? Oh yeah, i'm just FINE! i LOVE crashing at 35 MPH!

2) it wasn't even a thought...it was an image of my baby daughter's face.

Things change when you are a New Daddy.

i cursed when i hit. A lot. Not from thinking i lost the race or of the pain ahead of me or shattering my bike...i cursed because i knew crashing and taking myself out of commission was a really, really stupid thing for a New Daddy. *Ilg was supposed to be Grown Up now.*

In the Bardo of Crashing you have a choice: get up or stay in the daze. Staying in the daze is much more satisfying to the ego. Bouncing up like a cat, remounting, and getting on with what must be done is less enticing. By training, i did the latter. From experience i knew that if no bones were broken, i could take advantage of two things to keep a high place in this race; shock and adrenalin. Both are worth about, say, 10 minutes each. That gave me 20 minutes of blood-and-guts racing before the shock and adrenalin hands the baton over to a crash-weakened body and mind.

So, back on a slightly taco'd front wheel Grunt, and bleeding impressively from my right elbow and right hip, i chanted the Paiute saying, "*Just keep a'goin, Just keep a'goin.*" Arriving at the final technical section, i felt the hand of Vishnu aiding my bike skills and tore through the singletrack like an enraged bull. My style was not finesse; it was fierce. Pissed. Angry. And loving the fact that my Witnessing Self was still spiritually stable and high enough to acknowledge this mental drama and just enjoy this Warriorism.

Sometimes, nothing feels better than to bleed on a battlefield.

THE FINISH

Tearing up the final uphill forest road toward the Start/Finish, i could see - about 300 meters behind me - a racer bent low over his handlebars pedaling furiously to catch me. Game on, baby! I dropped lower than he, recalling the yoga posture; Upward Facing Dog to help my thoracic spine breathe more freely while staying super aerodynamic on the bike...i put a Dog Tilt (*posterior pelvic rotation*) into my hips to let my pedal cadence soar.

Head down, breathing, breathing. 10 seconds, keep pedaling...20 seconds..okay, look back...see where he's at...

i had gapped him just a bit...and now shifted focus to the Start/Finish Line now less than a quarter mile away...up and out my saddle for a burst, then back in...then back out...then back in...just like in Practice...and then,



the Finish Line!

I had won the Overall by 20 seconds!

In the spiritual journey there is a saying, "After Enlightenment, the laundry." In this race, it was more like, "After the podium, the Medic's tent."

I actually won this race in the Transition Zone and in the manner i bounced up after the Crash. The multi-disciplined approach of Wholistic Fitness® is a priceless gem for days like these; Strength Training graced my bone and connective tissue the strength not to break or tear during the crash and gifted me the deeper fiber fitness toward the Finish to manage my gap. Yoga produced the cat-like reaction to the crash and allowed my body to absorb the impact. Meditation kept my mind poised through the race as well as the emotional ups and downs of family and crashing. Cardio Training that allowed me the podium, and Nutrition kept all aspects of my performance on High.

I figured my days of Overall Championships were over.

Guess not.

Not in this Path!



another fantastic reason to do this race; hang out in the world-famous and stunningly healing and beautiful Hot Springs in downtown Pagosa Springs! photo by ilg

INTERVIEW WITH RACE DIRECTOR CARMEN

Next year, i want you to consider coming out to beautiful Pagosa Springs, Colorado and sharing the Start Line with me. After the Race, i spoke with Carmen Hubbs, Race Director of the Pagosa Duathlon:

●) tell me a bit about the creation of this race...did it arise from the memories of the once great Pagosa Peak Duathlon back in the early nineties?

The race actually came from the Pagosa Lakes Triathlon. The 11 year event just became too big for the facilities and the course, thus the Triathlon race director asked if we would like to take it over or at least start another similar event. We wanted to keep it a triathlon but the surrounding lakes do not allow swimming and of course local pools are not big enough for the size race we are hoping to continue to build. We chose the national forest for that reason – the space, as well as the venue of forest and the multitude of trails to build a course from. Interestingly, I'm not aware of the Pagosa Peak Duathlon but I'm curious what happened with it.

●) what type of field does this race attract and what would you say are the courses most salient features?

We are still a young event – this will be our 3rd year, so we are still working on our target audience of racers. This year we added 2 new races – a kids fun race and a shorter course to try and attract all levels of athletes. The original course is a 6 mile run and 12 mile bike. The new Half Duathlon is a 3 mile run and 7 mile bike. So far it seems we are getting some interest for this added event, but we'll know better on race day. So we are still figuring out who we need/want to target, but personally I like the availability of race options that accommodate all people who would like to participate.

The most salient feature of our course is hands down the views and the venue of one of the most beautiful national forests Colorado has to offer. The course has intermittent single track trails, ATV and forest service roads, as well as gravel roads. This allows for a variety of challenges on the course with some technical portions as

well as portions that allow for speed and agility. As you noted in your next question, mountain races are rare. Too often races are on hard, hot asphalt with little to no variety beyond curves and hills. The Pagosa Duathlon incorporates nature, beauty and cool mountain air that you'll only find on a mountain trail well off the beaten path.

●) you are filling a great gap in American Outdoor Sports; the mountain duathlon is a rare find and an absolutely precious one...what has inspired you to do what it takes to pull off this event?

It is a lot of hard work and takes the commitment of our dedicated planning committee. My inspiration is of course why we are raising these funds – for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Nonprofits continually try to figure out ways to raise funds, but this particular event holds more meaning than fundraising. I strongly believe that when people get out and exercise, work towards a personal athletic goal whether that be weight loss, endurance, or competing in a race, they are less likely to be a victim. Why? Because when you honor your body, when you love yourself enough to work hard at achieving a goal, you may be less likely to allow anyone to abuse you. I believe a strong personal self-image that can come through many means, including exercise, makes you less vulnerable to fall prey to violent offenders.

●) tell me more about the Archuleta County Victim Assistance Program and your connection with it.

The Archuleta County Victim Assistance Program is a nonprofit organization serving victims of violence, mostly domestic violence and sexual assault. Trained advocates respond with law enforcement on-scene to provide immediate crisis intervention and support services. Advocates then continue to work with a victim and their children to assess their particular situation and work towards reaching a healthy, non-violent lifestyle. This may include obtaining long-term safe housing, employment, and financial assistance; or court advocacy to obtain protection orders or participate in the criminal system that's holding their offender accountable; support groups for women and children; and many, many other support and advocacy services to help them transition from victim to survivor.

I am the Executive Director of the program and have been for the past 11 years.

*for more information on ACVP and the Pagosa Duathlon visit;
<http://www.acvap.org/>*