

Yes, You Can Fake a 10K!

By Bob Husson

Early this year, a cousin whose husband works for the Alzheimer's Association, asked me to join a family team for "The Longest Day." This is a yearly event on the longest day of the year, June 21 this year, that is a major fundraiser for the association. The idea is for a group to perform some "activity" (running, swimming, bridge, rocking chair, pretty much anything) from sunup to sundown in a relay fashion, passing the "torch" to the next person, etc. Of course we would recruit sponsors as in other such events. We were going to be a virtual team, as we lived from New Jersey to Honolulu and lots of points in between. Since both my father, and my cousin's grandfather, my Uncle Rich, had suffered with this terrible disease before they died, and perhaps also their mother, I readily agreed and I registered myself for a four-hour swimming block.



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I had swum the 5K in 2010 when I shared the Meet Manager duties, and completed it without any problems, stopping once for refreshment, and getting a few cramps after completion. This was the longest single swim I had ever completed. And as I thought about how to tackle the 10K, I searched for the article by Ali Hall, posted on usms.org in 2011, entitled, "So You Want to Swim the USMS 10K Postal.." I knew I had to come up with a strategy, so I looked to this article for help.

The one thing I had remembered from reading this very well-written, comprehensive article originally was, "You can't fake a 10K!" Well, if I was to complete the swim, I certainly would have to fake something, because I wasn't going to live up to the preparation parameters laid down by various contributors: 20 - 35,000 yards a week for several months! Well, my April total for the MONTH was 26,900 and my May total was 42,150. And the biggest part of that swim is the mental aspect. I have never particularly liked counting to a high number while swimming. So my first decision was to only count to 20, by breaking the swim down into 1,000m segments. I can handle counting to twenty ten times; can't you?

It seemed so much easier to think about it that way than to think about counting to 200! But, could I complete the 10 X 1,000 workout in four hours? Breaking it down, that's 1,000's on the 24 minutes. I thought that seemed doable, and as June began, I tailored my workouts to finding my pace for the swim. I know what you're thinking;

that's awfully slow, even for an old "so-and-so" like me. But remember, my first priority was finishing the swim for the relay. And besides, Bob Bruce had moved into my age group, so any thoughts of a championship were dead anyway. So my somewhat sporadic June workouts, totaling 24,260 up to the swim, consisted of a lot of 500 and 1000 yard pace swims, with 100 kicks in between. I could see that I was swimming about a 52 - 53 per 50 yard pace, and I thought that could translate into about a minute per 50 meters. But I was just going to set my pace by what felt good on the day.

As the day approached I didn't change my daily routine or try to get more sleep, just tried to not eat a lot of junk. I got up at my usual time and had my daily oatmeal and fruit breakfast. Then about 11:30 I had a full lunch of grilled chicken, cooked vegetables and fresh fruit. My dear wife, Susan, drove the hour to Goldsboro, and served as timer, counter, and cheerleader, while Hans and Greta were swimming their 5Ks in the adjacent lane.

I had a Gatorade Prime before I began, took about ten strokes to loosen up, and began precisely at 3:30, planning to use the first 1,000 as the warmup/pace determinator. There was a large pace clock that I could see as I completed each 100, and I swam the first 1,000 in 20:22. I had already decided to take a minute rest or so after each 1,000 to make sure I was recovering, and it pleased me that I was going at a 21:30 interval. I had a swig of Gatorade and a small bite of Power bar or banana (bars seemed to work better) at each stop. I continued at about the same pace, hitting the 5K at 1:45 on the nose.

I felt good, but gave myself an extra 45 seconds or so at the midpoint. I also changed goggles several times during the race, to change the pressure points on my face. Only once, when I pushed off funny, did I ever feel a twinge of cramp, but that went away quickly. I did all open turns, and checked my time each hundred. I never sang "100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall" as the article had suggested, but spent a lot of time thinking about Dad and Uncle Rich, and all the good times we had over the years. I finished at 3:30:48, which was pretty close to an even swim, considering the breaks. I continued with a very leisurely 500 warmdown to complete the four hours. Then I immediately had a Gatorade Protein Shake and headed for the restroom! I took two ibuprofen before bed as a precaution, and had no stiffness or soreness the next day. And I'm proud that I helped my family raise over \$1,900 for the Alzheimer's Association.

If you're dreading the idea of a 10K race, or think you're not in shape, don't think of it as a race. Do as I did, and consider it a very long interval workout with reasonable breaks. Of course, it helps to have something like "The Longest Day" for motivation. Keep swimming!