

Have you ever had these thoughts?

"You want me to go to a meet and compete?? You have got to be kidding! The thought scares me to death - I know I'd choke and embarrass myself - probably get disqualified for a false start, a bad turn or illegal stroke."

We've all had those thoughts, and even fears. But many of us have overcome them and found that even if the worst happened, we survived and came back for more later. Most of us, though, performed better than we feared and didn't get disqualified.

So "why go to a meet?" You have to come up with your own reasons, but for me it is the natural progression of practice to performance. Why go to the pool for endless workouts, pain and suffering if there's no payoff down the line?

First, understand this, I am competitive. I like to compete against myself and others. I like to compare how I did this week against last week - even last month or year. Bottom line is I want to "slow the decline."

Second, I'm a goal setter. I'm not radical about it, but I like to write down which events I'm going to train for and what the goal time for me is at the Nationals or even the next meet. Going to the pool and doing the set according to the coach's direction, on his interval and repeating the sets weeks on end isn't enough for me.

Third, I'm a student of the sport. I like to know if I'm doing it "right," at least according to the current technique being used. I like to use the current terminology - DPS, catch, turnover, pace, etc.

Next, looking forward to "performance" at the next meet, making the goal time I've set, and doing it the right way, all give me the motivation to keep working out regularly. They give me the self-discipline I need to get where I've said I want to be on a certain date. One of the things I truly believe is that "there is only one discipline, that's self-discipline, all else is punishment!!"

These are just some of the things that encourage me to go to meets. Others include fellowship, meeting really great people and some who've excelled on the world stage, fun and accomplishment. Yes, the excitement of competition is great. A little scary sometimes, but some of us love it and plan to keep it up as long as we can.

Coach Lou Holtz is quoted as saying, "There are four things we all need to be happy and productive; something to do, someone to love, something to look forward to and something to believe in." In my case, workouts take about half my day, my wife, family and friends are those I love, competitive swimming is what I look forward to, and as far as belief is concerned, I'm a Christian.

Now, I believe I'll get in my suit and have a swim. Mitch.