



TRIATHLON ETIQUETTE

Civility among the racks: a primer on triathlon etiquette

By Amy White
Slowtwitch.com
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Amy White, editor of the triathlon Web site Slowtwitch.com, offers some hints to newbies — and perhaps some reminders to veterans — of basic triathlon etiquette.

I'm a huge fan of Miss Manners. If you've ever read anything about etiquette, after a while you learn that there's really no big secret about how to behave in this world. Etiquette is actually quite simple. It's all the Golden Rule, which I really, really favor as a way of living life: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Simple, really, eh?

So, for example, if you would not like it if someone were to cut you off at the mount/dismount line as you're heading out of T1, then perhaps you shouldn't do it yourself. Similarly, I am a firm, firm believer in the power of good karma and the need at all costs to avoid bad juju. Put good into the world, get good back. Put bad into the world, well, do so at your own peril. It's easier to be good.

An example: At the recent Sea Otter Classic bicycle races, as my dear friend Kathy Matejka and I were watching the circuit race, the announcers told the crowd that, by the way, someone had apparently stolen Ned Overend's bike that morning. That's right, Ned Overend. Perhaps it was, they hoped aloud, just a simple misunderstanding. Kathy and I looked at each other. I shook my head and said, "Bad juju. Very, very bad juju." She said, "That's a broken collarbone waiting to happen." Don't be a fool. Play nice.

This will be my fifth season in triathlon — not a super-long time, but between volunteering, officiating and competing, I've been in a lot of transition areas and I've seen lots of good, and bad, behavior.

So as our season gets underway here in the Northern Hemisphere, I thought I'd offer up my own list of ways to ensure that you have a nice day at the races:

1. Play by the rules. If you're not sure what the rules at USA Triathlon-sanctioned races are, you can find them here: Don't draft. Play fair. Plug your bar ends, plug your bar ends, plug your bar ends. This means make sure that you have a plastic plug that fits into the end of your handle bars and that it is not exposed metal. This can be dangerous.
2. Don't litter. I was surfing through the rec.sport.triathlon newsgroup the other day and there, in the midst of a discussion about the road conditions at St. Croix, came a mention from a competitor there about how he couldn't believe how many people just threw their gel wrappers and water bottles into the jungle. Come on, people. That's just revolting behavior. Carry your trash with you.
3. Don't be a rack hog. If you get to the race early, set out your stuff tidily and don't spread out like you're having a picnic.
4. And just as thou shalt not hog rack space, is it equally rude to arrive two minutes before the race start and expect your rack-mates to shoehorn you in. Ask nicely and be patient.
5. Keep your bike in good working order and go over it before the race. Don't expect the on-site mechanics (if the race has them) to have all the answers with the portable workshop they bring with them. And be nice. I've actually seen competitors treat these mechanics shabbily. Talk about bad juju.
6. No flying elbows. Yup, seen those, too. I've been on the receiving end of one, and I've seen a fair number of them handed out. The one that was most egregious, a man shoving a female competitor out of his way, well, he got a nice penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct. You can either play nice because it's the right thing to do or play nice because you might get some time tacked onto your total. You decide.
7. Be informed. Know the course. If there's a pre-race meeting, go, even if you've been racing the course since the dawn of time. Listen. If a race director wants your attention, there's probably a good reason for it.
8. Don't hand your brain over at the transition area. You are still responsible for your own well-being. If you know the course, you'll know where potential trouble spots might be: steep descents, tight corners, surf breaks. The race director is responsible for ensuring that the course is safe and the officials are responsible for ensuring a fair race ... but you are ultimately most responsible for your own safety. So compete safely and fairly.

9. Really mind your manners in the transition area. It's chaotic. Go gently, especially in T1, and most especially at the mount-dismount line. You don't want to go toppling over, and you don't want to be the reason someone else does, either. Not to mention the possibility that you can earn a penalty here for disobeying the mount/dismount orders from the volunteers.

10. If you can't say something nice, say nothing. But if you can, in the midst of your own suffering, offer some encouragement to the athlete that you just passed, or who just passed you, well ... you get karma points out the wazoo.

I promise you that none of my suggestions will lose you time in the long run. And you'll gain something in the process: the satisfaction of knowing that you've been fair and whatever result you earned, you earned completely on your own. Here endeth the sermon.