

My Cole Classic – what a great day!

My name is Spot – Male: 44 years, started swim training at 20 years of age – small hands (bad for swimming), BIG HEART (good for racing)!

Please join me in going through how I got my 4th in the 2km Elite Race...

You may well be shocked as to what happened just before the race & my crazy thoughts as I tapered off in preparation for my Olympics!

Why I wrote this spiel – I would like to think that I can inspire people via coaching to achieve personal physical achievements. It is a satisfying job to do this & I feel blessed to be part of your life! However, there is more....

People look at me & say, he's lucky - he has talent, doesn't even have to try!

Wrong – I have to set goals just like the rest of you & if I decide to do something properly (which I haven't done for a long time athletically), then I go through exactly the same things as each & everyone of you. Here is my story as I taper for the Cole Classic & by opening up to you, I hope I inspire some of you. I want to be more than an athlete, more than a coach, I want to get inside everyone of you & make you not only better athletes, but better people. On January 31, 2009 after being stuck in the mud for a while, I decided I wanted (needed) to change parts of my life & this is part of it...

If you think I am weird – you may be right & I am happily weird may I say back to you!

For those that don't know, I have a pretty good engine. When someone is born with natural talent, they often feel burdened to use this blessing. Luckily, I can look back & say I have used it having achieved some solid results over the years in a variety of sports.

However, I am reminded occasionally of this talent through various mediums & there are random moments of "I have to do something special".

I turn up to races with the team & have a go not really caring as much as I should!

For 364 days & 21 hours of the last year, I have tried to give everything to my athletes.

For 3 hours on Sunday it was "Spot time".

My primary goal is to run a successful surf & triathlon business.

Sport has taught me the importance of hard work, I am proud of my business & what I have achieved. I am driven & believe me, it's not luck that I have a good business....

However, mixed in with this is a certain "ego" or standard that I would expect of myself athletically. For instance, last year I felt unhealthy & I let it go to the point that I felt horrible. Unfortunately, through sheer determination I still pulled some good athletic results. This was a double edged sword as it was still good for my business, however, it didn't make me pull my finger out & look after myself better. A heart attack probably would have done this – ha ha! I was not happy emotionally either.

We are all lucky to know that sport can provide such a great avenue to release any built up angst, sadness or emotional turmoil!

The 2km race: I lined up on the start line with 12 males & 5 females – a pretty select group & I felt very proud to be on the line with such great athletes. I have trained hard for this & feel I belong here!

I felt relaxed, a bit apprehensive & the plan was to start the usual steady pace & not caught up in the frenetic pace at the start. The major problem I had choosing this race as a goal race was that it was a flat water start & now, due to the big swells, it was also a flat water finish. I had chosen this race before either of these 2 things were confirmed & knew that this was going to be a real battle against the better pool swimmers. However, I was strangely looking forward to this as I realized it was an extra challenge & something that I had mentally dealt with before the race – besides, a dose of reality here & there is good for us all!

It is very important to be realistic in your goals, adjust accordingly as life presents it's issues - this can be very dynamic.

My main goal was to be able to sit on the feet of the first girls & not get in their way as they race for gold! This is sometimes a problem as I often end up around them & they have let it be known to me that I am annoying (get in line girls).

Bang - I dived into the water & held my streamline under water (it felt soooooo nice underwater & time froze for the few seconds I was there after all the "above water" hype of Australia's biggest ocean swim). I surfaced and realized I had a great start, but then there was the usual sprint.... **Even in a race with little skill required, you can still do the little things right to set up a great race!** I had some clear water for my first 50 metres & swam with a nice relaxed stroke. After this I moved over the back of a swimmer as most of the others were over to the right & this is where I would get a good drag off the stronger swimmers! One of the problems of starting at an even pace is that you get swum over at the start, you then have to swim back past some of these people as they drop off the person/ people in front of them. **To do this, you have to be constantly lifting & looking what is going on in front of you. There are good feet to be on & there are bad feet to be on - it is very dynamic.** This is a very specialized skill & one which I encourage every one to practice. Being able to sit on the right person's feet can literally save you a minute or more! **In short, you snooze – you loose!**

As it was a small wave, I was near the back after 400 metres when the girls came through (they always start easier & race smarter than the boys). I was careful to them a bit of room as I appreciated the importance of this race! We starting passing some of the guys as they dropped off. The girls are amazing how they swim their own race & hold a solid pace throughout! Heading towards the far can, Luane Rowe who went on to win, starting pulling away from the other girls around. This is probably my only mistake of the race as I didn't bridge the gap. It would have effectively put me into 3rd & moved me up to 2nd male, with a gap back to 4th. I was still a bit apprehensive of what I was capable of & didn't want to interrupt the girls (sometimes you drag the other girls back up to the leader who has just opened up a break & I am sure this would be very annoying....).

Halfway, I realized I was top 5 in the Cole Classic – OMG! I was so proud to this far up & there & then decided whatever happened from hereon in, all the sessions had been worth it & I was a champion (in my own lunchtime).

The 2nd girl & I then caught the last of the guys coming back to us who was 3rd at the time. Without knowing exactly my placing, I was pretty sure we would be racing for 3rd – woohoo! He looked back a few times & most of my competitors know when I am there & this sometimes amps them up a bit (have to beat the fat, old bloke – ha ha). Because I have good surf skills at the end of a race, I often do beat them, which I can imagine would be very annoying!

No surf today Spot – sadness.....

Despite being in a lot of pain by this stage, I am the ultimate optimist. My plan was to swim around him from the last can in & sprint him up the beach. I had nothing left & wasn't sure how I was going to do this, but this is just how I think! As he accelerated away from me with a big kick from the last can, I then realised I needed a plan B:

1. First things first, try to stay with him. 2. Hope that I could outsprint up the sand. 3. Hope he tripped over on the sand – by the time I was thinking this I was goooooooneeeee!!!

So, I came 4th & was so happy to have actually trained for a race & done really well. It was probably the race that least suited me without surf at the start or finish, so this made my result even more pleasing.

We all think we could do better & I am sure I can with more pool training, but we have to acknowledge our performances for what they are! Most people that read this would be high achievers & we have to be careful not to always want to go faster, higher, longer.... Of course, I now have to reset my goals to avoid the mighty "Post Olympic Depression".....

The harsh reality of the Monday 5am alarm reminded me of this & yes mum, I did my 2 hour run this morning!

We are now going to backtrack from arriving to do the race, racing the 1km & the week's training leading into the race...

Race day:

I arrive, it's raining – no-one except Tori to warm up as organised – good girl Tori!

I am cranky....

I am doing the 1km & hope to repeat my victory of 3 years ago.

Actually, I am cocky & expect to win.....

Far out, reality has just hit me - we are at the Olympics.....

It slowly dawns on me that I am totally stressed out - I can't put my race tag on, can't find my water, can't find my dry stuff, can't get out of the rain, too many people around – far out.... **I am really nervous – ha ha!!!**

I walk around in circles wasting time & all of a sudden it's time to race.

I dive in for a 2 minute warm up – feel good in the water, but have to get on the start line...

Lack of a warm up is essentially going to come back & bite me – bite me hard!!!

I rely on a big warm up & if I need to go fast, I also need to warm up fast.

We start the race & as usual, everyone takes off like maniacs. I am only here to win this race & do so as easy as possible! **Hmmm – cocky....**

Problem 1 – after 200 metres there is 1 guy left in front 20 metres ahead – maybe this guy can swim.... I will deal with this at 300 metres when hit the turning can.

Problem 2 – he can swim & I have to pick it up...

Problem 3 – as I start to pick it up, I start to have trouble breathing.

After 400 metres, I am totally hyperventilating!

I have to stick my head up & swim for 20 strokes & get air.

I stick my head back in & nearly choke.

I now swim 50 odd strokes with my head up tossing up whether I have to do breaststroke...

I finally put my head back in & do my "Yoga Breathing drills".

I am very dizzy but have not drowned.....

Problem 4 – "Alright you haven't drowned, go get him Spot"

- Go get him Spot! Don't do it Spot, your race is the 2km!

- Go get him Spot! Don't do it Spot, your race is the 2km....

Finally, I relent & avoid the temptation to chase, actually relax & swim steady to the end.

2nd place – 1st loser BUT seeing the young guy & his parents soooo happy makes me feel really nice inside! I forget about my issues for a few minutes as people are

taking photos & the vibe is amazing at the finish line – I love the Cole Classic!

As I exit back to my bag in the pouring rain, a very dark cloud comes over me....

What am I going to do? I have trained for this race & now I am feeling dizzy, really dizzy... Here are my thoughts:

- I have to get outta here.

- Ipod on & walk up to the point & watch the surf:

- I am hopeless.

- I am stupid.

- I want to go home.

- No-one is going to know anything about my race/ taper cause I delete this story this...

I am crying in the rain & desperately have to pull myself together.....

Alright Ipod – turn off Pink & let's listen to Lady GaGa & this seems to work.

OK, I will start this stupid race...

Between the point & the start line, here are my thoughts:

- Just start the race, no-one will even know when/ where you finish (this is denial as results are published in the paper).
- Go & stretch, do something positive.
- Don't talk to anyone.
- Don't worry what people think!
- Go for a warm up swim.

- I dive in the water – OMG, I am a dolphin!!! I love the feeling of sliding through the water...

- I can do this.
- On the start line, I think OK, I can beat him & him & him...
- I'm back, let's rumble Spot!
- I love the feeling just before big races when you are the line & everyone's watching!!!
- **Whatever happens out there today Spot – I am soooo proud of you!**

Ok – now for the taper: strange thoughts that may make you feel normal before a race!

The taper begins - Spot the scaredy cat....

Every year I say I am GONNA do something - like train for City To Surf, an Ironman, Sprint Triathlon or something.

Last year, I chose the Cole Classic Swim. Like a great GONNA I dreamed about winning & here is my taper story... Probably the reason why I chose this race 'cause last year I finished less than 60 seconds behind the overall winner despite starting in my age group wave & having to swim through hundreds of swimmers & going for gold swimming the last 800 metres on my own! What made my swim pleasing was that I was ridiculously unfit but knew I had 1 good swim in me for the year & had saved myself for this race.

Herein lies the problem, why don't you train Spot – you could be a freak!

I love the City To Surf & I love the Cole Classic – they are 2 iconic Ozzie races & both in my own backyard – amazing!

People would kill for my talent & it was now time to at least try.

Now as I prepare for Sunday, like the rest of you, I am now a scaredy cat....

As I check the entries – SHOICK HORROR, there is only 1 guy I know that is entered & he is way faster – this is going to be soooooo embarrassing.

I swear to God while I am checking entries & getting depressed, I get an email from race organizers to clarify my credentials – great I think, this is my chance to go back & race in my age group (scaredy cat).

- Nothing ever goes exactly as you plan & I know this better than anyone.

It's Monday, I can't walk 'cause my calves are killing me – I know weird for a swimmer!

I am trying to get fit & have been doing Sunday runs before the swims. Yesterday, I stupidly took the pre race "Panther Challenge" up the stairs at Palm Beach which effectively did 2 things – totally stuffed my calves & made me cramp for the 2nd week in a row when I caught a wave at the end of the race.... I know what you are thinking – excuse, excuses.... Ladies & gentlemen, I am just like the rest of you & I am hereby ATTEMPTING to take the pressure off myself...

- **Monday 7:30am Pool Swim:** I tried to swim this morning - 8 laps.

Yep, 8 laps – that's it. **The good thing I did do was get out of the water - sometimes hard training is not training...**

I have backed up a few races in a row & had started training across the board (swim, bike & run). I am totally stuffed & now know the importance of the mental game from hereon in... Luckily, I felt similar the week out from Bondi to Bronte & pulled off a good race!

Nothing beats experience & sometimes hard training means not training!

1. Physical – 0/10.
2. Mental – 1/10.

- **Monday 6pm Pool Swim: It was so nice to be in the water – THIS IS WHY I LOVE SWIMMING!** It is so relaxing sometimes & I thoroughly enjoy the sensation of sliding through the water! Nothing special – I start at 45 – 46 seconds but speed up to 43 – 44.

Next set I start to feel good in the water & start to swim under 40 seconds per 50 metres, heart rate is only 120 – nice! I then do 4 sprints of 10 stroke & go back to feeling like the totally uncoordinated distance swimmer I am! Time to get out.....

**Importantly, this is my first mental victory – I am gonna need a few this week....
If you remember 1 thing here – the mind is stronger than the body!**

1. Physical – 3/10.
2. Mental – 6/10.

- **Tuesday 5am – no sleep, this is ridiculous.** I am just an old has been athlete trying to have a good Ozzie go – what's this no sleeping, mind ticking over, can I keep up rubbish going through my head?
- **Tuesday Bike ride: 5.30am – 7am.** I do the session at nice steady aerobic pace & actually feel really good on the bike!

1. Physical – 6/10.
2. Mental – 6/10.

- **Tuesday 8am Mercy Surf swim** – I drive down to the beach, listen to music & just take in how lucky I am to live so close to the beach (despite being totally self absorbed about a stupid swim race)! I end up doing a few ins/ outs through small waves with my barrister buddy who is probably charging someone for this swim....

Swimming is my safe place & it crystalises that this is where I am going to feel at peace with the world this week!

1. Physical – 6/10.
2. Mental – 7/10.

- **Night Yoga Tuesday – Bikram Yoga & I nearly faint!**

This may or may not surprise you, but I use part of this session as mental toughness training. I smile politely when the yoga instructor discreetly asks me if I am OK when I go off balance 8 times in a row...

Mind is stronger than the body...

Mind is stronger than the body...

1. Physical – 3/10.
2. Mental – 6/10.

- **Wednesday 7:30am Pool Swim:** do a solid swim set without going too hard as I plan to swim harder tonight. I comfortably swim 1:15 odd, so a good morning.

1. Physical – 7/10.
2. Mental – 7/10.

- Wednesday 6:30pm Pool Swim: OMG – I feel incredible in the water during my first 4 x 50m. 29 strokes per lap – 44 seconds, this is it!**

I have a session planned to do 8 x 100 with 1 on 1:10 & 1 on 2:10 but as I am not sure if I will make this, decide on a shorter “confidence boosting” set of 16 x 50 metres = 1 on :35 & 1 on 1:05 x 8 sets.

It feels so good to swim faster & I do my 8 faster ones comfortably under :35.

A few sprints & easy swim down & I am on top of my game now!

 1. Physical – 8/10.
 2. Mental – 8/10.
- Thursday 9am surf: yes I go for a surf!** I catch heaps of waves & feel really strong when I am paddling! Surfing & any type of paddling helps you use your full bigger swimming muscles. I have been paddling on Saturdays for the last 8 weeks & want to keep the bigger swimming muscles firing, so this is a great session.

May go for a Saturday night surf before the race – I love surfing!

 1. Physical – 7/10.
 2. Mental – 8/10.
- Competitor NIGHTMARE sorted:** after scrolling the internet a thousand times, I finally make contact with race organizers & I get a list of swimmers in the open wave – **the amount of energy I have been wasting on this is ridiculous!**

Importantly, I now recognize some names & luckily, find some swimmers I will beat – woohoo x 10! **The pressure is easing....**
- Thursday 5:30am cycle = sleep in:** I have given up on sleeping properly, so any extra like this morning is a bonus....
- Thursday lunch time Yoga – don’t ask.** Yes, session 2 in 3 days & 3rd time ever 3 days before the race... Felt great & taper is starting to kick in – more sleep definitely helped!

 1. Physical – 8/10.
 2. Mental – 8/10.
- Thursday 6:30pm run:** I keep up most of my regular bike & run schedule, but take it a bit easier at these sessions. This keeps me burning fat & maintaining the schedule helps keep the body & mind ticking over like it’s a normal week, not a “self absorbed it’s all about me” swim race week....

Despite telling my running buddy that I was going to flog her morning 1km rep times of sub 4:00, I decide to stick to my original plan & do 4 x 1km at 4:00 which makes it nice & aerobic. I can feel some tightness from the yoga sessions but we have 3 nights sleep til race day – all good! I feel better for having done this but it wasn’t great....

 1. Physical – 6/10.
 2. Mental – 6/10.
- Friday 7:30am pool swim – lack of sleep still & despite being knackered I am really looking forward to this session.** Part of me hopes that I can swim faster than Wednesday & dreads if I feel terrible in the water. The stronger part of me knows the taper is kicking in & I will swim well.

I don't much of a warm up (4 x 50m): I think great – I have no control of this (like race conditions) & like a boxer from the Bronx enjoy the challenge of things not being perfect (I know weird).

We do 100 metres leaving on 1:10 & 100 metres leaving on 2:10 x 4 sets or 8 x 100m. We do 1:05, 1:06, 1:08 & 1:06 for our fast ones – I am behind Justin & whilst it feels fast & very solid pace, it feels really good to swim faster. This is the fastest I have swam for a long time in a pool – woohoo.

As a side note & you may find this extremely strange how I think – Josh who should win, will swim 1:03 – 1:04 per 100 metres for the whole race & I will somehow swim 1:08 – 1:10 per 100m.

Yes, that does not add up to my pathetic pool performance, but I constantly remind myself that I am a surf swimmer not a pool swimmer.

My greatest asset is my mind & this is the only way I can explain the above!

1. Physical – 8/10.
2. Mental – 9/10.

• **Saturday 9am surf swim: surf is pumping with an unbelievable rip at North Bondi.**

We swim out in the rip absolutely flying, turn right & head south for 100 metres & catch a wave back to the beach x 5 times = fun!

A couple things I do to build my confidence:

1. Wear my spare body suit to get the fast swimming feeling! I normally wear boardies, so even swimming in speedos feels fast, let alone a body suit!

* 10/ 10 for this – I feel great!

2. Make sure I swim fast & beat my buddies. Lukey is flying as he is not racing & tries to take advantage of us nervous faster swimmers – go Lukey! Dougie is in boardies & challenges me on 1 which annoys me but I do what I have to do!

I like to have a bit of a hit out the day before a race to let the body know what it is in for & the above session works a treat!

I am ready to race whether I sleep or not.

1. Physical – 9+/10.
2. Mental – 10/10.

Other things I have done today to keep mind strong include:

1. Only 15km at the bike session – easy pace. Actually felt really strong on the bike – tapering has had the added benefit of letting my body recover my cycle muscles – woohoo! Yes, I still had to get up at 5:15am in the rain – poor me!
2. Coached from the beach at the 10:30am session & let Mermaid take control!

Saturday night surf – me & the sharks....

I swear to God I had to talk to a squad member in the pouring rain & promise that no shark would eat her if she raced Kurnell Triathlon tomorrow.

As I entered the rainy, brown watered, empty surf at North Bondi approx 7pm – her words of fear briefly rang through my head.... However, any worry leaves me as I have a great surf – I love surfing Bondi when no-one is out there. It's the only beach where the locals love bad weather!

1. Physical – 8/10.
2. Mental – 8/10.

* Strange rating you might note as my last session has rated lower than earlier in the day. This is duly noted by me & I question if I really had to go for a surf.....

Well that's it – I had a great race, enjoyed the journey (well – maybe not the last week but that's part of it).

AVOID ME at all costs at the end of December as I start my taper for the Busselton Ironman!

I hope you enjoyed my journey & next time you are feeling a bit uptight before a race, TRUST ME – I know EXACTLY how you feel.....