GOOD GOAL/BAD GOAL

BY ROB MAXWELL, M.A. Exercise Physiology

Is there a right way to set a running goal? Is there a wrong reason to run? Or is there a wrong reason to try to improve our running? There probably is not a wrong reason for putting one foot in front of the other and moving forward. But I will say I believe that there is a better way to approach running that is more conducive to keeping it a lifetime activity without as much let down.

Often I get into the friendly discussion of whether there is a wrong way to approach training. Again, I believe with our obesity crisis that we have in our nation that if we're out there moving and preventing that than there is nothing wrong with that. But I will say that I believe some runners/triathletes may get off track just a little which may impact there overall goal which they may not even realize they have!

I believe the most important reason to run and to do other fitness "sports" is to improve our health and keep our health as long as absolutely possible. I've worked in the health and fitness industry now for 21 years. I've seen the effects of poor fitness and eating on aging. It's not good. And it's, to a great extent, controllable. By the year 2020 it's predicted that over 70% of our country will be either over-weight or obese. Obesity is the leading cause of heart disease, diabetes, and some cancers. It also affects other less serious health concerns. Shouldn't this be our true goal? Well I think it should but who am I to judge? I just know I've seen the other side of it when a person loses their health and they are trying desperately to live and see their grandchildren grow up.

My own father Verdon James Maxwell died way too young at the age of 63. I was twelve.   He had type 2 diabetes. I believe God has a plan so I don't try to get in the way of that. But what if he ran or did some formal form of sport/exercise could this have been delayed? I believe without question it could have.

I've been through the phase of life where the ego takes itself way too serious and winning an age group award or hitting a certain "PR" seem like the only thing that matters, but thankfully I don't view my running like that anymore. I now am very happy being healthy and fit for the sake of being healthy and fit. If I run a "good time" than that's great and if I don't than who really cares? Not me.

Isn't looking for a PR like trying to nail Jell-O to the wall (as my friend Tim likes to say)? It's always moving. I was stressed so often with a new PR or a new goal that was so extrinsic in nature. What does it really matter?   As I said, thankfully, I've grown out of that. I'm not saying have performance goals are "bad". I'm saying from my perspective they need to be kept in check. We at Maxwell's train many young student-athletes. We love training them.   A key word here might be "young". There does come a point to where maybe we need to think a little less about competition and a little more about feeling and being better. If I still need a first place plaque in my age group at a local 5k to be happy I think I've missed the point somewhere in life. But who am I to judge?

I can say without certain that if we run or bike or swim or whatever to keep our bodies (and minds) as healthy as possible I believe we will continue to reach that goal. When I travel and go on vacation I love the fact that I don't get tired.   I'm moving along and am pretty willing to do whatever comes up. Why? I'm fit. I run. Or when I go to get dressed up to go somewhere all my clothes fit great because I run. When I go to the doctor my vitals (BP, weight, RHR) are always great. Why? I run. When I get my blood work back it comes back great. Why? Yup..I run. I'm not saying it can prevent all illness or guarantee a better blood work results at all times. But it certainly helps.

Good goal or bad goal? I guess that's for you to figure out, but doing all I can to be healthy and available to my family and friends is far more important to me than any qualifying time, PR, or plaque I've ever achieved.