



Alan Wrosh for The Wall Street Journal

'If you have to go as fast at 50 as you did at 20, you will grind yourself into the ground,' says Mark Allen, a former triathlon champ once known as the world's fittest man.

Older, Wiser, Slower

After 50, Avid Athletes Find That to Stay Healthy, They Must Let Go of the Need to Win

By KEVIN HELLIKER

During Sunday's Chicago Triathlon, I kept my heart rate low, cut my pace at every hint of muscular or cardiovascular pain and crossed the finish line about half an hour behind my personal record in that race. It was exhilarating.

What I accomplished is a goal I once considered unreachable, not to mention undesirable: I raced without competing. My ranking among the more than 4,200 participants in the Olympic-distance triathlon couldn't have mattered less to me. More important, I ditched the notion of competing against oneself. That had been an appealing concept at age 40, when I was fitter, faster and trimmer than I'd been at age 20. But at 50, the triumphs of the last decade—the time I flew past most of the few-and-proud at the Marine Corps Triathlon—are far behind me, and anyway my cardiologist is urging moderation since the discovery of an aneu-

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rysm in my aortic root. "Race all you want," he says, "but keep your heart rate below 120," far lower than most peak workout targets.



His heyday: Mr. Allen competing in 1992.

Amid ever-rising calls for more exercise in America, there isn't much guidance on cutting back. As the baby boomers who fueled marathon and triathlon crazes enter their 50s and 60s, their unquenched competitiveness can become a threat to their stiffening joints, rigid muscles, hardening arteries and high-mileage hearts. And it doesn't help that nearly every exercise message they hear emphasizes more. It's as if nobody wants to acknowledge that exercise isn't the fountain of youth.

"The no-pain-no-gain mentality suggests that you can keep making gains if you just work harder," says Mark Allen, a 51-year-old athletic coach once known as the world's fittest man for winning six Ironman Triathlon World Championships. As co-author of a new book called "Fit Soul, Fit Body," Mr. Allen argues against fighting age with more hours on the treadmill. "If you can't let

up on the competitive part of it, if you have to go as fast at 50 as you did at 20, you will grind yourself into the ground and become stressed out, bitter and unhealthy," he says.

A growing number of exercise scientists are questioning the more-and-harder philosophy of fitness, and not only for aging athletes. A study published last year in the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* reinforced other recent research showing that intensity tends to diminish the view of physical activity as pleasant. "Evidence shows that feeling worse during exercise translates to doing less exercise in the future," says **Panteleimon Ekkekakis**, an author of that study and a professor of kinesiology at Iowa State University.

Taking on new sports or challenges can give long-used muscles a break while feeding the desire for new goals, says Marjorie Albohm, president of the National Athletic Trainers' Association, who at 58 has become a recent devotee

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INSIDE HEALTH & WELLNESS



Bye-Bye Bugs

Scientists are sorting through the 300 to 400 distinct chemical odors of the human body to find what repels mosquitoes. Some of the chemicals are related to stress. In the Lab, Page D3.

'Mosquitoes fly through an aerial soup of chemicals, but can home in on those that draw them to humans'

—James Logan, one of the researchers who identified human odors that repel mosquitoes.



Abs in Training

Six-time NFL All-Star Terrell Owens on the off-the-field work to get his chiseled 3-D abs. What's Your Workout, D3.

Matt DeTurck for The Wall Street Journal