Coaching Column, part 3

by Geoff Ellis BOK/RAFO

POST RACE ANALYSIS (PRA)

"I think self-awareness is probably the most important thing towards being a champion." Billie Jean King

A generally accepted method of improving performance is to review what happened, make some observations, make some changes and then put into action before repeating the process. The important points are the recognition that PRA can be powerful, to be aware of some of the pitfalls of PRA, and take what has been identified forwards.

©Mark Cheesman

Geoff Ellis gives a wave whilst shadowing his son on Day 2 Kenfig at Croeso.

It is very easy to be overly critical of performance. Conversations are often heard about losing 5-10 seconds here and 15 seconds there. This may be realistic for the elite athlete, but it is certainly not appropriate to be harsh on yourself for small errors. This is particularly relevant against a backdrop of a good run. It is also relevant to remember what went well on a course. Often more went well than went badly and therefore it is important to recognise what went well, and capitalise on it, whilst concurrently looking to improve areas of perceived weakness. It is worth noting that everyone will make at least one mistake or lose time on the course, even when winning the World Championships. The aspiration is to minimise the mistakes and time loss by improving technique through PRA.

Self-analysis is essential before entering into the electronic tools or team discussions, and it is worthwhile taking a little time for personal reflection. It is worth taking into consideration a general feeling about the run. What sort of run do you perceive you have had? It is also worthwhile reviewing your run against targets. If you performed against the targets then, despite any PRA, the run was a success. It may be that there are still lessons to be learned, but if the run was a success, celebrate it.

There then needs to be a differentiation between specific training and a race. Did you stick to the training objective? For the race evaluate each leg in a simple manner. For each leg was there:

▷ a Plan,
▷ an understanding of the Control - Location, feature, 3D image,
▷ an identified Attack Point (AP),
▷ a Route selected in advance to the AP and
▷ a known Exit from the control?

This will help when using electronic tools or in team discussion. The inevitable questions that then come out are about the choice of Attack Point and selection of Route.

Electronic tools are fantastic, but should be used with caution. It is too easy to become despondent by misinterpreting the data. Used wisely they are valuable PRA tools.

Route Gadget will help you recall where you went just through the act of submitting your route. It is also interesting to see where others went, but use caution. Ideally you should only compare routes with people who finished in a similar position to yourself who are likely to have similar navigational and physical abilities. Understanding how legs were tackled differently may help with route choice decisions in the future. It is worth looking at how the leading competitors went. Often similar routes will have been chosen to your own, but it is worth remembering that the best orienteers navigate at speed irrespective of terrain and climb. Your route and their route may be different because you are unique and you understand your own strengths and play to them. E.g. a strong runner might run up and over a hill. A weak runner will gain time by running the longer in distance, flatter, round the hill option, as they would have to walk the hill going straight.

Splitsbrowser, particularly its graphical display, gives easy comparison with orienteers and shows where you were in the race. The key point to draw from Splitsbrowser is the line.

A straight line at any given gradient demonstrates good orienteering at a consistent pace with minimal errors. By improving technique and speed the gradient of the line will become shallower.

A line which is uneven, particularly with steep drops, indicates errors are being made at those controls. In the PRA, look at these controls specifically as understanding why time was lost there, and taking action to correct it, will deliver greater rewards than other areas.

Winsplits is particularly useful. In its basic form it will, if appropriate, highlight legs where errors have been made in pink. These help focus the PRA on those controls and understanding what went wrong and that is the path to getting it right. The element that makes Winsplits so great is that those pink legs are pink legs for you. The system looks at your total time and the leg times and works out where you lost time on a leg compared to what the system thought you should have done. In this way 2 people can have the same leg time for a control but only one has a pink square.

Team discussion with at least one other person is a good way to learn. It can help moderate the harshness of your own PRA and provide a forum where everyone can learn something from anyone. Discussion will usually focus around leg times (for bragging rights!) with small variations being discarded. Variations that seem out of context will be discussed with the map and usually focus on the Attack Point or Route Selection.

It is during these discussions that most can be learnt. Again it is important to draw the correct conclusions and recognise your own strengths as well as areas for improvement.
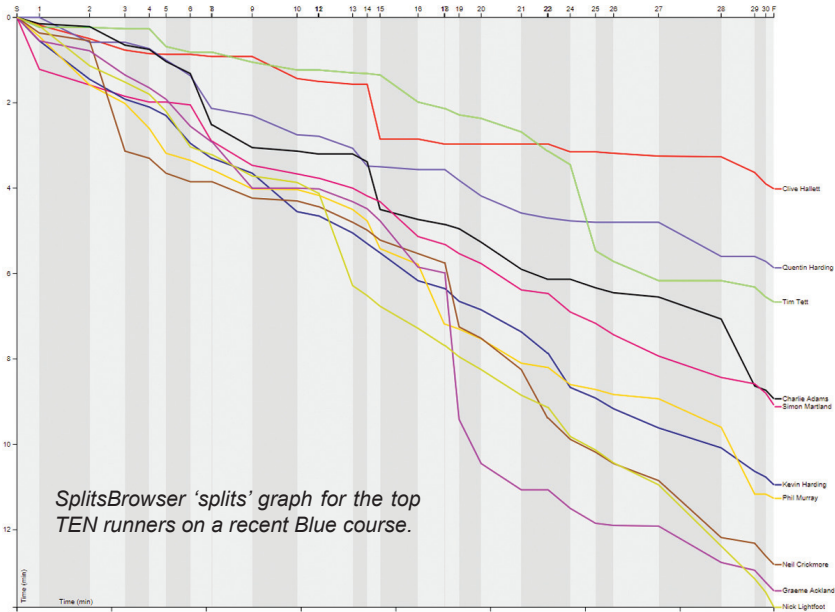
SplitsBrowser 'splits' graph for the top TEN runners on a recent Blue course.