

Law of the Harvest for Athletes

Fortunately before my days in sports, I grew up around farms and farmers. I say that because it was on the farm where I learned The Law of the Harvest.

Did you ever “cram” for a college or high school exam, only to fail miserably? Did you ever allow yourself to get out of shape during the off season, only to show up for the first day of practice trying to “cram” getting into shape, only to fail miserably again?

What growing up around farmers in the South taught me was that there are seasons and times for just about everything. Peak Performance in sports has its seasons as well.

Don't get me wrong. Harvesting a crop and getting the payoff (reward) is great. Harvest time is part of the reward for all of the sweat and back breaking hard work. But by the time I was 11 years old I had already learned that you couldn't just “do” the harvest any more than an athlete could just “do” Peak Performance. You can't cram on the farm. There is a time of the year when farmers have to work their tails off to get the fields ready for planting (like swimmers laying the aerobic base early in the season). Then they have to plant the right seed. They don't plant pumpkin seeds and expect to harvest corn (like swimmers using a sloppy stroke technique in practice, then expecting an efficient technique in meets).

Then the real work starts. They have to weed the fields, keep the bugs out, water the new sprouts—they have to tend the crops (like swimmers making sure they get enough rest, proper nutrition and hydration).

Sad to say, but I also learned that farmers weren't always able to yield the harvest they wanted, and they often felt that their hard work had been futile. I also learned really fast that farmers couldn't control the rain, the wind, the sun, the bugs—they couldn't control all of the elements that helped bring in the harvest, or destroy it. You can't control everything about the harvest in farming, and you can't control everything about competing in the zone of Peak Performance, or winning, in sports. They are just too many factors that go into winning a competitive event, much less a national championship, and into Peak Performance, to focus on just the harvest. You can't just “do” or focus on the harvest. But when things do go right, when you have done your best, when you have given your all to those things that are under your control, and the harvest does come in, it's a pretty exciting time and all of us want to be there for it.

Laws Govern

Here is how The Law of the Harvest governs swimming just as surely as the laws of gravity influence your performance.

- There is a time to prepare. When you miss the window of opportunity to prepare for the season, you diminish the harvest. If you don't put in the early season yardage you can't expect to have an aerobic base or foundation to build your season upon.
- You reap what you sow. Don't think you can practice with low intensity and a lack of commitment to excellence and then expect to perform with high intensity and peak performance come meet time.
- Equipment counts just like proper stroke technique counts in swimming. Successful farmers do not blame a poor harvest on their equipment. Successful farmers get the best equipment they can afford and then they constantly maintain it. Elite swimmers practice the most efficient stroke techniques until they become habits. They focus a great deal on proper techniques in practice so that they don't have to in a meet.
- Pay attention to the things you can control. Poor farmers focus on the lack of rain, too many pests, too small of a budget, not enough time, no good help, or too much wind (like swimmers worrying about who is swimming next to them, how fast the pool is or crowded conditions in practice). They burn themselves out worrying about all of the things outside of their control and all of the things they don't have. Even when they do bring in a good harvest from time to time they didn't have much fun or enjoyment along the way. They allow their guts to get all eaten up by the stress, and the harvest isn't worth the price they had to pay. A lot of athletes do the same thing as the poor farmer, and if they do happen to win a big meet, they didn't experience much enjoyment along the way. Successful athletes pay attention to the factors under their control, including the mind's side of performance. They enjoy the moments of practice, competition, and the harvest.
- Learn from feedback. Advanced competitors learn as much or more from what went right than from what went wrong in their practice, preparation, and performance. Learning from feedback is a major element of peak performance and of what we refer to as "**athletic intelligence**". "**Athletic intelligence**" includes learning from mistakes, reinforcing what you did right, and **consistently** preparing, practicing, and performing at higher levels. Athletes who do not learn from their competitive experiences are destined, and doomed, to repeat the same errors and suffer the same fate time after time.
- Remember The Law of the Harvest.

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