Steve Bentley and Scott Howitt

So You've Decided to Try a Triathlon... Now What?

WHILE THE IDEA OF PREPARING FOR A TRIATHLON MAY seem more overwhelming than the competition itself, practice and persistence will carry you to the finish line. The equipment required along with the combination of swimming, biking, and running may intimidate some people, but it really shouldn't. The races are quite simple to register for and the training to prepare for your big day, although time-consuming, is easier than you think.

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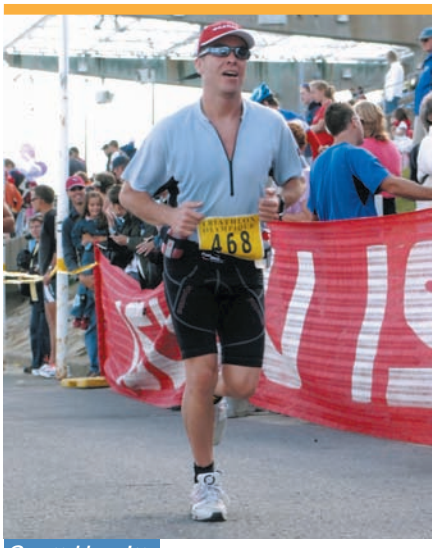

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The first step is to pick your race. In Ontario, the quickest way to get information and sign up for races is to go to the Ontario Association of Triathletes (OAT) website at www.triathlonontario.com. Other provinces also have similar associations.

Once you've picked your race, your goal should be to make the training fit into your lifestyle and to make it as effective as possible. Many triathletes are busy, driven individuals who need to juggle their schedules to make time for their work, family, and training. Most fitness enthusiasts find that incorporating training as part of their daily routine is the best way to make it a habit. Any successful training program should maximize the effectiveness of the training, and minimize unnecessary effort.

Some athletes hire coaches to develop their training plans and to work on their technique, and although this can make you get faster sooner, it is not essential. Alternatively, many athletes simply buy a book such as *Joe Friel's Triathlon Training Bible*, and go from there. Either way, developing a proper training plan that is consistently followed is the best way to get to your race without burning out or getting injured. An adequate training plan will allow most people to complete a triathlon without too much difficulty.

Periodize Your Training

Effective triathlon training plans include a proper periodization strategy. Periodization entails breaking your training plan up into distinct phases, each with its own major focus to help your training progress. Each of the phases has specific periods and workouts that need to be followed to get the optimum results from your training. This type of training ensures that each phase builds off the gains you developed in the previous phase.

Initially, you need to develop technical efficiency for all three sports and learn how to maintain this technique through increasingly longer workouts. This early base-building phase of training is called technique endurance and ensures that you develop the ability to go for long periods of time efficiently. Training and then ultimately competing with bad technique is awkward and it increases the likelihood that you will waste energy, but even worse, it predisposes you to injury. Remember SMOOTH = SPEED!

Strength Endurance Phase

When your aerobic capacity has been developed and proper technique is established, the focus then shifts to strength endurance. This phase is characterized by higher resistance sports-specific activities, i.e., swimming with pool buoys and paddles, running hills or with a weighted vest, and low cadence-high intensity work on the bike. In conjunction with the sports-specific strengthening, an individualized weight training circuit program also needs to be followed.

Strength circuits are great for developing core body strength, which should be the basis of all strength-training programs. A stable and strong core is necessary to realize the strength gains in your limbs and other peripheral muscles, needed for success in a triathlon. An important point to remember with weight training is specificity. The closer your race day approaches, the more specific your strengthening exercises should be in order for strength gains to be useful. Strength from weight training won't transfer unless you've made it specific (exercises should mimic triathlon actions).

Power Phase

Following the strength endurance phase, power is established through a further refinement of your training. This phase is to develop speed, so the emphasis is on power, which is needed to go fast. The 'going fast' portion of your training should focus on harder, shorter training components as well as some race pace (speed specific) sessions. This phase of training sharpens your system to get ready for the stress of racing.

Taper Phase

The final component of your periodization plan, the taper, involves rest and recovery. Relative rest is a concept that needs to be considered throughout your training. Without rest your body will not strengthen or adapt to the training load you place upon it. Injuries are the most common and unfortunate result of a lack of rest and recovery in your training plan.

Preventing Injuries; Listen to Your Body

The most common types of injuries suffered by triathletes are overuse or repetitive strain injuries. Muscle imbalances in strength and/or flexibility amongst these athletes is the most consistent predisposing factor. Recognizing the signs of injury and listening to your body allows you to adjust your training. Soft tissue therapeutic interventions (Active Release Technique, Graston Technique) and rehabilitation exercises can easily be utilized by your sports health professional to ensure a speedy recovery and prevent the dreaded chronic injury.

Many athletes, especially triathletes, have a tendency to do too much training too soon, and unfortunately peak too early to have a chance at performing their best for their goal race. Overall, your training program should focus on balancing out your weak areas, maximizing your strengths for your particular event, and working to get you to the start line fit, injury free, and with a life that you can still go back to after the event has been completed.

*Look for **part two** of this article in our next issue.*

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A Sample Week of Training (Note: this heart rate (HR) is simply used as an example)

Monday

Swim base 500 warm up as 75 drills and 25 swim (drills of alternating closed fists and super slow swimming of getting head back in water before recovering arm passes); 2 x 1000 steady (focus on nice long strokes) breath on every 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th strokes every 50 (breathe in during first part of breathing arm recovery, hold breath during breathing arm pull, exhale during breathing arm push); 400 warm down as 8 x 50 alternating breast stroke pull with pull buoys in and back stroke.

Ideally, for your swims this month try and use pool buoys and eventually paddles more and more to work on your strength. The low stroke rate should have helped with that, but try and carry it on with paddle work.

Cycle warm up 20 minutes easy riding then ride hard (RPM over 85) for 20 minutes (with HR in the 150s, watts to 260). Warm down for 20 minutes.

Tuesday

Run strength (extensive hill repeats). You may find this workout easier to complete on a treadmill. Warm up and down as required. Workout is 3 x 6 min. of a long, moderately hard hill (recovery is 4-5 min. of really easy running or walking. Grade on the hard section to be from 4 to 6% (pretty tough).

Weights/strength circuit

Wednesday

Cycle 1 hour to 1.5 hours with warm up and cool down as required to complete time. Workout is 4 x 8 minutes of Big Gear on the flats. RPM will rise up to 70 max on the hard sections and spin up to the 80s on the recovery. Work effort should be fairly high (HR to 150s, watts to 300). Rest interval is full recovery (around 6-8 min).

Thursday

Swim 400 warm up as 4 x 75 drills, 25 swim (drills are fists only, 10&2, kick on side, and super slow swimming focus on head back in water before recovering arm); 2 x 200 easy focusing on two of above drill targets (don't enter with your thumb) (20'RI); kick hard 8 x 25 on 1"; continuous pyramid of 2400.

Run warm up and down as required (20 min each). Work set is 20 min tempo run. Aerobic but close to max aerobic effort (HR to high160s/low170s). Stay light and fast with cadence to low 90s. Run over your feet. (cadence = the # of times your foot hits the ground/min).

Friday

Strength Circuit/Weights or OFF

Saturday

Cycle long base pace (HR 120-132) for 3.5 hours with 3 x 20 min (HR 140s) at goal race pace.

Sunday

Run long base pace for 1.75 hours (HR 145) with 45 min at goal race pace (HR high 150s).