

Coaches Panel Q&A

I was asked to sit on a panel with a few other coaches for the Inland Inferno Triathlon Club to answer pre-written questions on training and racing Triathlon. It was a great exercise and further affirmation that there is no one right way to accomplish a goal. I was asked to put my answers in writing for referencing.... it's a long post with some solid Q and A... Enjoy.

Please feel free to email me with any additional questions, comments or inquiries with the following form:

<http://www.tricentric.net/contact.html>

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Question:

Would it be beneficial to spend maybe one or two weeks and just focus on one discipline? Like cycling 5 days in one week with lots and lots of miles... or so? Or getting my running miles up to 60-90 miles in one week and then backing off?

Answer:

Yes... However, I think of this in two flavors: Off season and in season. During the off season, training should be fun, address limiters and skills required to achieve goals and it's also a great time to try something new such as mountain biking, trail running, cross country skiing, etc... While in season, I like to maintain a swim, bike and run and implement training blocks that have a high emphasis on one sport while simply maintaining the other two disciplines. I call these periods "Break Through or BT Blocks".

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Question:

I have a question on nutrition. I'm trying to drop another 10-15lbs before I do IMCDA June 25th. What is the best way to do so, during my training without losing fitness? It's been hard for me lately. I took off 7 weeks during Christmas because of an Injury, and it's taking a while to shed those lbs. But I know I can stand to lose the lbs. but I don't want to bonk during or after training. Thanks

Answer:

Generally speaking, using your training sessions to lose weight is sub optimal and can detract from performance and recovery. You must fuel and hydrate properly to achieve optimal performance and the result that you are working towards. There are plenty of opportunities within your daily calorie intake to improve your body composition and lose body fat. Your nutrition should be well balanced with small calorie deficits within each meal... not all at once. In addition, a strength program can aid in this goal.

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Question:

I see a lot of different running postures and techniques. Is there one “right” form?

Answer:

There is a lot of debate and discussion on this. There are a lot of good books on running form and different methods that are great reading and can only make you better educated and a more knowledgeable athlete. More important than subscribing to a given method is to find what is optimal for you.

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Question:

What are some good drills to work on proper running form?

Answer:

My favorite session is one that I call Form Strides. Nothing tricky here. Run 50 meters and focus on one thing for those 50 meters (foot strike, cadence, elbow drive, toe off, etc...). You can focus on one thing for a session or many. If done as a stand-alone session, than do them in sets of 5 and focus on something different for each set. A sample set for example is:

- 10 minute warm up**
- 5×50 cadence focus (goal is 90+)**
- 5×50 foot strike focus**
- 5×50 elbow drive focus**
- 5×50 toe off focus**
- 5×50 combing the last 4 sets**
- 10 minute cool down**

That’s a total of 1.25k of drills and approximately 2k in warm up and cool down... an effective, form focused 3k. If done as a warm up than simply do 8×50 focusing on one thing per 50. Even better if you can have a knowledgeable friend or coach there to assess your form and direct you through it.

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Question:

Why is running such a common way to injure yourself and what do you (personally) do for injury prevention?

Answer:

I find that a good percentage of running injuries are related to doing too much, too soon with volume, intensity or a combination of the two. Some good practices I implement in my training and with my athletes:

- Always warm up and cool down**
- Address form and work to make improvements**
- Do at least some of your running on trails if at all possible**
- Follow a recovery method that works for you**
- Wear quality shoes that fit well**

- Learn how to run hills (up and down) efficiently**
- Know when to “can” an ineffective session rather than slogging through it and risking injury**
- Work on flexibility**

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Question:

Is a power meter good for everyone?

Answer:

I own a power meter, I race and train with a power meter and I coach athletes with power meters. There are benefits to anyone who uses one as it gives you more data to make better decisions at the very least. The benefits for the athlete that truly learns how to use their system can be MUCH greater. However, not everyone will be diligent with the use of their power meter and everyone should be honest with themselves on whether they will invest the time to gain the benefit potential from the system. I feel it also make sense to lose the gadgets sometimes and just ride the bike on feel.

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Question:

If one leg is much weaker and always aches (and you do weights), what can I do? I have a short leg. My longer leg is the weaker leg. When I wear fins, that leg really hurts for some reason and my foot cramps too. It is getting worse with age (all due to scoliosis). I have lifts in both my biking and running shoes on the outside.

Answer:

Find a doctor that understands that you are an athlete and have athletic goals that you are working towards. A qualified specialist should be able to assess this issue with you.

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Question:

How long after a workout (mine are typically between 30 minutes and 2 hours depending on the day) should I try to eat and what kinds of things should I try to eat (both what types of calories and what particular foods are good places to find the right balance)

Answer:

Recovery needs vary from athlete to athlete and it's optimal to find what works best for you. Generally I like to see athletes take in quality calories within 20-30 minutes post workout (I like liquid sources with carbs and protein) when your muscles are like sponges and glycogen will be most effectively replenished. How many calories will depend on the caloric expenditure of the session but 200 to 300 is a good starting point. Include a well-balanced meal with normal portions within 2 hours of the sessions end with normal hydration and eating the rest of the day.

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Question:

I was a college aquatic athlete so my pool workouts are ok, and I have access to a group who do track workouts for running. My question is, aside from doing longer and harder rides, what can I do on the bike to get that kind of workout? I have done some 30 seconds easy / 30 seconds hard style pieces but I don't really know what to do or if it even helps on the bike.

Answer:

The benefits of interval training are many but I'll summarize by saying that if you train to increase your efficiency at threshold then you will also increase your efficiency at sub-threshold efforts. The benefits from interval training are in their repeatability. A few physiological benefits from gaining efficiency at threshold and interval training are:

- The body begins to build new capillaries
 - Better able to take in and deliver oxygen
 - Higher tolerance to the build-up of lactate
 - The heart muscle is strengthened
 - Prevention of injuries often associated with repetitive endurance training
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Question:

How do I know if I need a coach?

Answer:

My athletes would tell you that I put their training within the context of their life, their needs, families, jobs and social commitments. The benefit of a coach is in the relationship, the knowledge, the communication and perspective that he or she brings to the table. Everyone has a different reason for hiring a coach and it's a long list. I feel it's important to work with a coach that fits your style and will work with you to define and accomplish your goals. Every athlete should seek some form of coaching, instruction or education weather it's free, group clinics or one on one coaching... there are a lot of great options out there.

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Question:

I have a job & family, how do I prioritize my limited training time?

Answer:

Effectively 😊

I say it jokingly but the truth is that I'm totally serious. You only have so many hours to train towards your goals so be realistic with how much time you have and make the most of every training session. Your family and job come first so your training plan should accommodate that. It is important to factor in recovery requirements in your training time

as you don't want to get in the habit of compromising quality family or work time because you are thrashed from a training session. This gets much harder to accomplish as your race distances increase. Generally speaking... you'll have 3 key sessions per week:

- Long Bike
- Long Run
- Break Trough or BT Bike

Stay consistent with these sessions and you will build solid fitness that progress towards your goals. Family "buy-in" with your triathlon goals is a huge bonus and communication is key to balance triathlon within the context of your life... there should be a balance.

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Question:

What is the minimum training time needed to be ready for a sprint, Olympic, or half Ironman?

Answer:

The key is to get the most benefit out of the training time that you DO have. Remember... recovery should be factored in as well. Training plans are great tools however; the smart athlete will not follow their plan into a brick wall. The plan should be realistic and be planned around the time you have available. Within that context, it is optimal if you can complete the following for each distance at least once before race day:

Sprint: Swim 750, Bike 1.5 to 2 hours, Run 45 to 60 minutes

Olympic: Swim 1500, bike 2 to 2.5 hours, Run 60 minutes

Half Ironman: Swim 1900, Bike 3 to 4 hours, Run 1.5 hours

Again... it has to work within the time you have. There should be a build towards those numbers with a focus on injury free, good form, consistency and recovery.

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Question:

What is the most common mistake that age group athletes make?

Answer:

There are many but perhaps the most damaging is overtraining and lack of recovery and rest. Other common mistakes:

- Making up skipped sessions
- Not addressing limiters such as technique, body comp, strength, etc...
- Training at only one intensity
- Doing what you "can do" instead of what you "should do" □
- Lack of consistency
- “Letting yourself go” in the off season
- Sub optimal bike fit
- Lack of transition practice
- Under-educating

That's the short list!

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Question:

Starting from zero, how long does it take to train for an Ironman?

Answer:

Answers will vary from athlete to athlete depending on your skill level, body composition, physiology, starting point, etc... Generally speaking, 9 months is safe if no injuries arise and training is a consistent build toward the distances/durations required to complete the race. If considering a first Ironman, best to give yourself more time rather than less to achieve:

-Optimal fitness

-Optimal body comp

-Optimal education on racing and training for triathlon and The Ironman Distance

-Avoiding burnout

I like to see athletes migrate to long course after at least a solid year of training and racing shorter distances creating a two year perspective for IM training.

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Question:

Is training alone better than training with a group?

Answer:

There is value to both. Training alone can be mentally cleansing and allow you to train at your pace and intensity. Training with a group can be very fun, introduce you to new skills, intensities, training concepts, and generally provide a solid avenue for training events. I personally enjoy both and divide my training time up so I get the most value from each. I feel strongly that we should all have group training options as it creates accountability and a support infrastructure for you. I got through some of my worst moments on a bike with friends and had some of my best moments alone... in retrospect, the worse moments were better 😊

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Question:

How do I know if I'm training hard enough?

Answer:

I'll put this question into two contexts:

1. If by hard, you mean effective training? You should be building fitness while addressing limiters that progress you towards your goals. There are many ways to assess and analyze performance (testing, power meters, HRM's, etc...) and learn how to train more

effectively. You should be seeing adaptations indicating fitness gains.

2. If by hard you mean intensity level? There are a lot of options available to help you determine intensity levels and training zones:

- a. Heart Rate Monitors
- b. Power Meters
- c. GPS or pacing gadgets

You should understand why you are doing a given workout, what benefit will be derived from it and how to execute it. When we understand the “why” behind the training that we do, we put more trust and confidence into our execution and ability to analyze performance. Knowledge is king.

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Question:

How can I overcome my fear of open water?

Answer:

Determine what it is that you are afraid of and educate yourself on it. Understanding how to manage your fear is typically a function of knowledge, safety, skill and practice. Always swim open water with a group and use the buddy system. If in the ocean, study the break and identify the patterns. Use lake swims as a build up to ocean swims to get used to the feeling of open water swimming. Focusing on your swim form can also keep your mind on the session and not the condition that causes fear.

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Question:

Should I always train & race with a heart rate monitor?

Answer:

No... like any other tool, it should be used effectively. Training tools give us a lot of data to make better decisions, analyze performance and recovery and be a beneficial aid to training. I feel that it is a very useful tool that all athletes can benefit from.

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Question:

How do I set goals that are high but still obtainable?

Answer:

Goals should be reasonable, realistic and attainable. A good coach can work with you to set high, yet attainable goals and put it into a context and structure that works for you. If self-coached than be reasonable and honest about your strengths and limiters and set a goal that is within reach. This means maintaining your strengths while addressing limiters.

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Question:

I want to qualify for Kona, what do I need to work on most?

Answer:

Racing at the Ironman World Championships in Kona is perhaps the Super Bowl of Triathlon. It's a goal worth pursuing and may take many years to accomplish. Ironman is not a race that you figure out overnight... that's true for pros and age groupers alike. There is no such thing as an easy age group... they are all competitive. To keep it simple, you'll need to research the average qualifying times at the various qualifying events and train to be competitive with those athletes and race times. There is no magic bullet... it will take consistent work and discipline.

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Question:

What do you do with the pork chop bone after eating the meat during a long training ride or better yet race? Especially, with the new litter laws being enforced by USAT

Answer:

I just stick it back in the wicker basket of assorted meats attached to my handle bars 😊

Seriously, don't litter. Stick trash in your pocket until you can get it to an aid station or trash can. The more laws and rules we break, the harder it becomes to train and race on public roads.

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Question:

Assuming one has developed a decent freestyle stroke with reasonable body position and a good catch, how important is the rate of stroke turn-over to an improved IM swim split?

Answer:

An effective turn-over is more important than an increased turn-over. In open water, especially choppy water, a slight increase in turn-over and slight decrease in reach can be more effective. Learning how to effectively draft, navigate, buoy turn and swim the distance with a good stroke will go a long way towards an improved swim split. Keep in mind that we are aiming to get through the swim with as little energy expenditure as possible; you can't have a great day purely on your swim! You can however have a bad one.

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Question:

How much of a hindrance, to an improved IM-distance swim split, is unilateral (one-sided) versus bilateral breathing?

Answer:

Bilateral breathing is nice to have in your arsenal. Most will gravitate towards breathing right or left and that is fine. Breathing bilaterally will enable you to maintain balance, rotation and a streamlined position in the water for a larger percentage of you total swim time yielding a more efficient swim. It also has the added benefit of being able to breathe on the opposite side when you are stuck swimming next to that guy or gal that is flicking water in your mouth every time you breathe 😊

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Question:

If one is carrying excess weight (fat), but is otherwise perfectly healthy, is there a point of diminishing returns, from a performance perspective, when you're really better off simply focusing on cutting caloric (food) intake than increasing training duration (caloric expenditure)? Frequently, after a workout, I come home famished and then, as a direct consequence, driven to over-indulge — seemly negating much of the benefit of the workout. It is the quantity, not the quality, of these calories that is of concern here.

Answer:

It's all related. Your nutrition must support your training and recovery requirements. It's as simple as this; in order to lose weight (fat), you must burn more calories than you consume. The best way to do this is with consistency in training and nutrition. By learning what your basal metabolic rate is, how many calories you burn during training and how many calories you consume, you can create a plan to lose fat in a healthy way. Quality calories in excess are still going to yield an increase in fat stores. Consider looking at your in session nutrition; if you are famished than I would conclude that there is an improvement opportunity for you.

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Question:

With a middle-aged body, a long daily commute, and a career/family/home to maintain, I find that it's nearly impossible for me to strictly comply, for any length of time, with ANY of the published IM training plans I've seen. I can do the required weekly long swim/ride/run session, but have difficulty doing the stuff in-between without either physical melt-down, getting fired from work, or a divorce. To maintain some semblance of a non-tri life, I find it necessary to omit, or drastically shorten the duration of, the mid-week workouts reflected in such training plans. I believe this phenomenon, among real world age-groupers, is much more common than the expert writers of such training plans realize or care to admit. Please comment.

Answer:

Published or off the shelf type training plans can be a great tool. They are generally free or

cost effective and designed to provide a general structure to develop the specific fitness required for your race. But they are generic and must appeal to a broad spectrum. As I see it, you have a few choices:

- **Adapt a generic plan to your unique needs**
- **Have a training plan custom built to your specific needs, schedules, strengths and limiters all within the context of your life.**
- **Hire a coach to manage this all for you**

The fact that these resources are even available to us is light years ahead of where we were not too long ago. At the very least, you have more information to make better decisions but we are all responsible for our own training and making it work within our lives. As coaches we here it all and most are well in tune with real world age groupers. I don't make a dime from pros nor do I want to. I work with age groupers as do most coaches in this sport. Training for an IM is perhaps the largest athletic undertaking that one can make and it's important to find what works for you.