

The Matrix

In my first two articles on bike training, I introduced two of my basic training principles:

#1: Quality versus Quantity, Less = More

#2: Training backwards; the Pyramid turned Upside down

I went on to discuss the general absence of these training principles in the community of athletes training for Ironman distance events.

Three factors contribute to widespread counterproductive overtraining:

Ignorance

Triathlon is a relatively new sport and there has not been a lot of time for different ideas to be tried, tested, and validated

Fear of the Distance

2.4 + 112 + 26.2 = Fear, Uncertainty, Doubt

Peer Pressure

Your buddies are doing more miles than you! How can you ever keep up?

Those of you who have seen the movie Matrix might appreciate the following quote adaptation:

"The matrix is everywhere. It is all around us. Even now on this very site.

You can see it when you go to the pool or when you ride your bike. You can feel it when you go to track, when you go to the gym, when you pay your entry fees. It is the world of excess that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the healthy truth."

I received a lot of feedback from readers of the two articles. Unbeknownst to many and as in The Matrix, there is an underground cell community of "Less=More" athletes that took pride in reporting to me that they too had enjoyed greater success in Ironman events on drastically reduced training. Some of these reports reminded me of those commercials that show adults sheepishly admitting to eating Frosted Flakes; as if they felt that they were doing something wrong by racing better off of less but more structured training.

Of course there were also those that wrote saying the concepts I introduced were fundamentally unsound, couldn't work, etc. I suspect that these nay-sayers represent a mix of folks who have never tried another approach to training or who have earned *coaching credentials* on the basis of a weekend course or more simply by placing the word 'Coach' before their name.

However, there is one point that I think all athletes and coaches can agree on:

Ironman represents a daunting challenge, and a lack of adequate preparation will become painfully obvious during the event. No amount of sheer will and determination will be sufficient to propel one to an inspiring performance if the training has been inadequate.

Hence, the fact that many athletes have turned in significantly better performances while supposedly *undertraining* demonstrates that conventional Ironman wisdom regarding prerequisite miles needs to be updated.

Quality versus quantity translates into indoor training on the bike for sessions that generally last about 1 hour. To be successful with this principle, one must follow certain critical development steps:

1. Acquire a viable indoor trainer; mag trainers are not useful because they do not offer progressive resistance, ie. the harder you pedal the more resistance you encounter. A computrainer is the ideal choice, next best is a windtrainer with fan resistance
2. Use a HR monitor, know your lactate threshold, and understand HR zones
3. Use a cadence counter
4. Devise a training schedule that employs these tools in a logical training progression

Proper implementation of these steps has been tested, proven, and demonstrated to aid elite and age group athletes repeatedly at every distance.

Sport specific strength and more intense threshold-based training are the keys to reaching your endurance potential. It is very logical really; muscles that have been trained to be stronger and faster apply more force and move faster. Apply these revved up muscles to an endurance program that doesn't deaden the legs and you will move to the next level.

In my next column, I will introduce my Training Principle #2, Efficiency is Everything, as it applies to cycling.

Michael McCormack is a two-time Ironman Canada Champion and has coached elite and age group athletes since 1995. You can read more about Michael at his website triathloncoach.com or you can e-mail him at michael_mccormack@compuserve.com

Readers interested in reading athlete accounts of application of these training principles to Ironman events should reference triathloncoach.com, and go to Athletes in the News. At the bottom of the page there is an article archive. Reference Less = More, and Kona bound Ralph.