

### ***Indoor Training Sanity***

*“Athletes should measure their training success not by how many hours they log, nor by how wide a sweat pool they can produce in dark and dank basements, but instead by how fast they ride when they eventually take to the roads come spring.”*

Another cold and dark winter looms just around the corner. Athletes from the northern latitudes are busy preparing their video stockpiles in an effort to combat the impending mind and butt-numbing indoor cycling sessions they feel they have no choice but to endure if they are to be competitive in the season to come.

Many of these same athletes will follow the rote script of building base with low intensity training where the only training variable is ever increasing volume. Thus, as the winter gets longer and darker, the bounds of these athletes’ sanity is continually pushed to the limit. Rote base formulas insist that they have no choice but to keep doing more...and more still, for this is the only way to build base.

*Might there be another way to build proverbial base in the dark of winter?*

Yes! For more than a dozen years both myself and a growing cadre of coached adults who eat Frosted Flakes, train more purposefully, and feel GREAT!

Indeed, there are few athletes or coaches who are greater advocates of indoor bike performance training than myself. In fact, I will not coach you if you do not have an indoor trainer.

However, my athletes effectively build winter *base* through concise indoor training sessions that last on average one hour. I would never prescribe a 3 hour indoor *base-building* session for there are other ways to build base that are more effective, less time-consuming, and much more interesting than the tedium that 2-4 hour indoor slog-a-thons watching the same videos over and over again represent.

I confess to having first discovered the expansive benefits of indoor performance training by a fluke, and whose circumstances you can read below under Genesis. Short version is that I got stuck in Boston in the winter of 1991, could not stomach riding for more than an hour indoors, had the circumstance of having my very first ride outdoors in many months be a tough 70 mile ride in Spain where I rode inexplicably well, took the time to ponder just how that ride was possible, and then revisited the indoor concept and studied it for the next dozen years. See Genesis below for more detail.

Couple the above circumstances with a belief system that tells me if something isn’t fun and interesting it isn’t optimal, along with not wanting basic convention to limit my training options, I allowed instinct and open-minded observation to guide me in exploring ways to maximize performance.

Thus, over the years I have crafted a wide variety of performance enhancing, yet time-efficient training progressions. The effectiveness of these progressions has been proven time and again by the hundreds of athletes that I have coached. My athletes will be the first to tell you that training smart with the methods I have developed produces the following benefits:

- Allows them to train far less than what is generally recommended, thus alleviating the stress of cramming training into a week with too few hours, only to finish frustrated by an inability to do so.
- Sees them improving performance relative to previous years training with volume-based methods.
- Makes training fun! The workouts offer both variety and challenge, such that you can save your Tour de France tapes for afterwards while sitting in a comfortable chair.

So why is the program I describe so unique in general training quarters?

Three reasons come to my mind:

1. *Unfamiliarity with the medium.*

Most top coaches and/or athletes will have largely trained *optimally* in warm weather climates where the thought of indoor training would not present itself, other than as a rainy day sub-optimal fallback

option. Thus, they have not had the opportunity to explore a different medium as I have done exhaustively for more than a dozen years.

2. *The ideas I present challenge convention, traditional training pyramids, flowcharts, etc.*  
Too much of what passes as coaching these days is simply passing on age-old formulas whose basis is that's the way it's always been done.
3. *Failure to see Triathlon as its own sport.*  
Traditional base-building models are built on the idea of one sport. Triathlon combines training for 3 sports and whose crossover effect accelerates building the base engine.

Of course there will always be people that disagree with the concepts I am describing. However, I doubt that those that disagree have had first-hand experience in the methodology of applying the principles I advocate, much less have successfully implemented this proven method with countless athletes of all abilities.

In short, their only frame of reference is if one were to do less of the same kind of monotone training the results would be a poorer performance, and this would likely be true. The key is to change the way you train, not simply to train less.

So, if you live in Maine or Minnesota, and are determined to ride for endless hours indoors to build base, go ahead and do so. But be aware that there are far more thoughtful ways to train, and which make base building more fun, less time-consuming, and ultimately more effective. The athletes that I coach will already know this and will use the extra time balance their other training and life matters.

Afterall, athletes should measure their training success not by how many hours they log, nor by how wide a sweat pool they can produce in dark and dank basements, but instead by how fast they ride when they take to the roads.

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*Related articles that might be of interest are [Rethinking Base Training](#), and [Training Backward, the Pyramid Turned Upside Down](#).*

### **Genesis of M2 Indoor Performance Bike Training**

The genesis of my indoor training sanity revelation dates to 1991 when I was unable to return to my winter training quarters in sunny Spain. Instead, it was me and my Blackburn windtrainer in my Boston Back Bay living room. It was a particularly nasty winter that year and whereas I do not enjoy being cold on the bike, much less dealing with combative Boston drivers unaccustomed to seeing cyclists in winter, I road indoors exclusively from January to April.

My indoor sessions were generally about one hour duration and involved experimenting with a variety of fairly intense workouts in order to stave off boredom. My longest indoor ride was 2hrs and I did this only once. In fact, that 2hr exercise in tedium remains my longest indoor ride to this very day.

When a back injury that had prevented me from running was finally cured, I flew to Spain in early April where I was anxious to get back to training outdoors in the company of professional and semi-pro riders. My very first ride in Madrid turned out to be a 70mile hilly ride in the company of semi-pro riders, a seeming certain recipe for disaster considering that my average ride duration for the past 3 months was 1-hour.

Much to my surprise, not only did I endure the 70 miles, but I rode very strongly throughout, despite my complete lack of "base." Shocked and quite pleasantly surprised at this ride, I remember thinking that there clearly must be something of extra value to training indoors. Nevertheless, now that I was in sunny Spain with its challenging roads, I could now take my cycling to an even higher level.

Two months later, I found myself noticeably slower than when I had arrived, despite an abundance of miles and good riding partners. Hmm, what had changed?

And so it was that in the month of June, I searched Madrid's bike shops for a windtrainer. My Spanish friends could not help laughing at this American who traveled to Spain to ride indoors twice a week.

It was this same crazy American that was to have the last laugh when I leaped from anonymity to winning Ironman Canada that same year, breaking the bike record and defeating many of the sport's top IM athletes in the process. Something about that indoor training...

Since that eye-opening and career-changing year in 1991, I used the windtrainer and subsequently a computrainer as a year 'round laboratory with which to experiment, test, and evaluate different workouts and training progressions.