



Training with a Purpose

By Ian Briggs

When you begin your day's training you should ask yourself one question: "What is the specific purpose of this workout?" If you don't know the answer, then it is likely the value of the workout will be equally in doubt.

To improve your fitness, you must place new stressors on your body and then allow yourself to recover from it. If it is the same amount of physical stress, or less, or if recovery does not occur, then overload, or improvement, will not take place.

Fatigue is not necessarily a good indicator of progress. If you begin a workout fatigued, sore and generally tired, and then go through the motions of doing the workout, you are only breaking your body down further and delaying recovery. Being tired does not in any way mean that you are getting faster.

When examining an athlete's training plan for the first time I usually find a lot of junk workouts. These are workouts that do not have a specific purpose but are there because the athlete feels they need to train that day. The 'junk' workout is almost always general and redundant. Often this time would be better spent recovering or performing a shorter, more specific workout that targets a particular 'limiter' (area for improvement).

Do not confuse hours of work with quality training. Some of the greatest improvement can be gained from less training time. Your long workout addresses a particular fitness focus - endurance. Endurance is very important, perhaps the most important fitness factor for long events, but it is certainly not the only one.

Defining Purpose

The athlete that simply trains the most will not necessarily get better, however the athlete that trains the most effectively will.

Before you plan your workouts you should identify your fitness limiters and your season and race goals. What areas do you need to work the most on? For example, does your economy and technique need work? Do you lack power in the flats? What sport requires the greatest focus?

Your workouts should address these types of questions. The answers to these questions should largely determine how your training plan builds out.

Now that you know what to target, you must choose the right workouts at the right time. If you lack power when cycling, then strength training during your base phase will help increase force

production. As a result you may have to reduce your weekly saddle hours as you spend more training time in the gym.

If you have difficulty with swimming technique, time must be spent correcting your stroke. This may mean reducing the run and bike on some weeks as you spend more time in the water or with a coach.

A general plan will not address your needs specifically. In order to reach your true potential you need a plan that is as unique as you are.

Training requires energy

Often athletes will go to coaches when things have not worked. They are chronically injured, burned out, or simply over-trained. By reducing their training volume to a more manageable level they are often made faster. A training plan review simultaneously removes junk workouts readjusts the athlete's mindset that volume equals speed.

Once the athlete has greater energy and begins to train more effectively and gets faster they realize the benefit of this approach.

Reducing total hours does not mean the athletes do not train hard. In fact, they are able to train much harder than when they were chronically fatigued. They just don't train as often (instead, they make every workout count by ensuring every training session has a purpose and is designed to contribute to overall fitness development) and are allowed more recovery time. You only have a finite amount of energy to put forth. Where, when and how you apply your energy determines the efficacy of your training.

There is always a compulsion to do more. This is a natural impulse, but adding in a workout that has no real purpose can work against you. When your body is broken down and you are training simply because you feel you have to, it is non-productive. Resist that compulsion to throw random workouts in that may impair recovery. Only train with purpose.

Don't confuse quantity with high-quality training. The athlete that trains 15 hours of random miles per week is not as effective as the athlete training 10 hours of directed and specific training. The athlete that has the energy to combine strength, power, aerobic capacity, endurance, or anaerobic endurance, in the right mix, at the right time will always win out.

Ian has been coaching athletes for 10 years and is a Sports Fitness Specialist (NASM), Certified Personal Trainer in the USA and Australia, a USA Triathlon Level II Coach, USA Cycling Level III Coach, and an ASCA Level II Swim Coach. He has advanced certifications in strength training, nutrition, and endurance training. He recently stepped down as the Regional President for USA Triathlon (Northeast Region) as a result of moving from New York to Florida.

Ian currently coaches individual and group triathletes of all ages and skill levels to develop them for competition by focusing strongly on individual physiology, biomechanics, flexibility, nutrition, muscular strength and endurance and technique to maximize speed and efficiency, and to minimize injury.