

Coach's Corner - David Glover

Mental Fitness:

Surviving the Post-Season

FUNK

With the 2007 triathlon racing season over and the start of the 2008 season still a few more months away, we are in what is commonly referred to as the "off-season."

Like every year before this year, once again, I find myself in a state of "funk" after my last race of the season. The days are colder and shorter. I intend to meet my friends in the morning for our 6 AM swim workout, but I hit the snooze button for more than an hour instead, before giving up and turning off the alarm. I climb onto my trainer to watch TV rather than take the time to dress up in tights and gloves to ride outside. I'm exercising less now than in the fall, but I feel like I need to sleep more.

Does the "funk" sound familiar?

A good analogy is waves on the ocean; each wave has a crest and trough, representing high and low points of a triathlete's fitness during a year. Each complete wave cycle (from crest to trough) stretches across a period of time from a few months to a year. The point is that for every crest (i.e., peak), there is a trough (i.e., down time and "funk"). Higher crests can also create deeper troughs.

We can broadly categorize the types of triathlon training across a yearly cycle, in terms of the principle of specificity - that the training must stress the body's specific systems that are critical for optimal performance, to achieve desired training adaptations. For example, if you have a goal to run an 8:00 minute per mile pace in an International-distance triathlon, then you'll need to train your body to run that fast off the bike. Conversely, the further away you are from a key race, the less specific your training needs to be. In other words, training

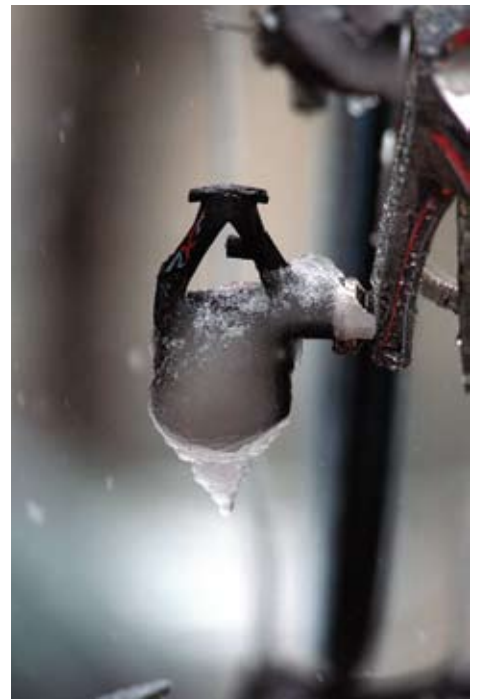


Photo by Ed Hazelwood

needs to be very specific as you approach the crest of your training wave, and less specific as you travel through the trough.

"All things in moderation, including moderation." - Mark Twain

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So what to do about being in a “funk?”

Let the “funk” happen and run its course. That’s my advice. Even if you feel great physically after a season of racing, it’s time to take a mental break from the discipline and focus of structured triathlon training.

By no means am I suggesting doing “nothing at all” through winter; rather, I am proposing a shift from “focused-training” to “fun exercise,” in order to take a mental break, while still maintaining a base level of cardiovascular and muscular endurance fitness upon which to build in the spring.

What is “fun exercise?”

Fun exercise is exercise that does not consist of specific swim, bike, and run workouts with a purpose. For example, fun exercise is spending a weekend on the ski slopes, hiking with friends in the Shenandoah Mountains, or mountain biking in the woods; but not stressing out about sleeping in and missing a Master’s swim practice or a weekend group ride. Put the heart rate monitor in a drawer for a few months and exercise for the pure enjoyment of it.

Maintaining some consistency through the winter is still important with at least one swim, bike, and run workout per week. Most work-

outs should be easy, but it’s also OK to “play around” a little bit to break up the monotony. There is plenty of time to build volume, power, and endurance in the spring, once the weather warms up. Using myself as an example, when cycling during the winter I can only ride for about an hour on my trainer before I become uncomfortable and bored. I will ride longer on the weekends year round, but if the weather is cold and wet or icy, I will skip riding altogether before doing a 3-hour trainer ride that day as a substitute.

OK, how does one mitigate the “funk” (assuming it’s happening to you right now)?

The key is both patience and action; patience to let the “funk” run its course, and action to take advantage of reduced training time to start thinking— but not obsessing— about next year. The “off-season” is an excellent time to:

- ⇒ Plan your race schedule for the next season, if not already decided by early race sell-outs.
- ⇒ Establish and document goals, along with a list of actions to meet those goals.
- ⇒ Work on improving swim, bike, and run economy through drills, one-on-one coaching, and other athlete feedback.

⇒ Train your weaknesses. For example, if running is your weakness, consider shifting to a run focus for a few months and running some road races to gauge improvement.

⇒ Finish all the home projects that you neglected during the summer when you were doing your long rides and runs on the weekends.

When February comes around, don’t worry about not being the fastest swimmer in the pool, cyclist on the road, or runner on the trail. If your first key race is in June, then be fast in June. Think “crest.”

After leaving his desk job at Capital One in 2006, David took a leap of faith to follow his passion for triathlon by competing, coaching and race directing full-time. Now competing as an elite (professional) triathlete, David has completed more than seventy triathlons including twenty-two Ironman®-distance races since 1995. At the Ironman distance, he has personal best time of 8:51 with four overall wins. He is also a six-time USA Triathlon All-American. For more information about David, visit his web site at www.davidglover.net. For more information about his races and coaching services, please visit www.enduranceworks.net. ★

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