

Stacking Your Deck for Race Day

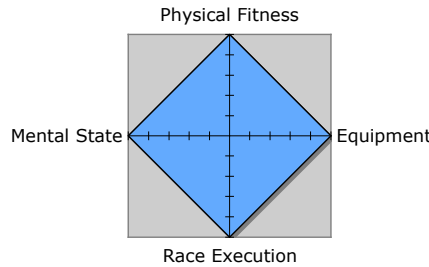
by David Glover

In the Fall 2007 issue of Tri-DC, I wrote that there are four necessary and important dimensions to optimally racing a multi-sport race:

- 1. **Physical Fitness:** overall fitness and health leading up to and during an event;
- 2. **Equipment:** the equipment that you use and how you use it (e.g., bike fit);
- 3. **Race Execution:** choices you make that impact you just before and during in a race (e.g., hydration); and
- 4. **Mental State:** mental attitude leading up to and during an event.

Although not necessarily mutually exclusive, the four dimensions provide a framework that enables us to race up to our potential.

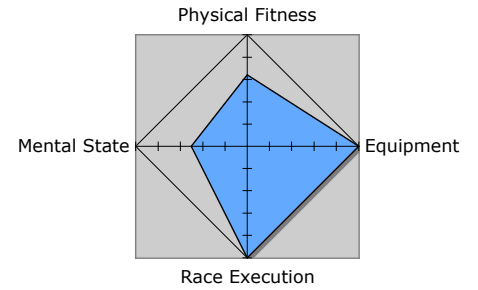
I like to use pictures to explain concepts, so let's assume that each dimension can have a maximum value of 5, which represents the optimal level. If all four components were at an optimal level, then the graph would look like this:



Note the perfect symmetry of the shape, represent-

ing the ideal conditions in which an athlete can have an optimal race.

If, on the other hand, an athlete has been under a significant amount of stress from work obligations (which impacts his or her ability to focus, i.e., lowers mental state) and works out less (i.e., lowers physical fitness), then the graph is skewed to look like this:



If any of the components are lacking, an athlete will not have an optimal race.

True, the athlete may still do well in a race, but he or she could have done better if an optimal state was reached across all four dimensions. Therefore, in order to achieve the best possible race day performance, the goal should then be to reach an optimal or near-optimal state across all four components. Creating the chart for your individual situation

"The ability to conquer oneself is no doubt the most precious of all things sports bestows on us."

- Olga Korbut, Republic of Belarus-born gymnast who won four gold medals and two silver medals at the 1972 and 1976 Summer Olympics

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provides a visual picture of how each component compares to each of the other components and can serve as a tool to identify where you stand to make the biggest gains.

Training and racing for a multi-sport event becomes an optimization problem to solve by creating our own perfect square across the four dimensions. We each have our own unique constraints such as time availability, length of recovery time, motivation level, equipment aerodynamics, tolerance for training volume, etc. The challenge for each of us then is to maximize our potential against these constraints.

In his book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, author W. Timothy Gallwey writes that maximizing one's performance in sports (or almost anything that requires focus to be successful) is dependent upon one's potential and one's ability to focus or, conversely, one's ability to minimize interference:

$$P = p - i$$

Performance = potential - interference

If interference is zero, then performance equals potential. This is the desired state.

If we apply Gallwey's definition to each of the four performance dimensions that I've outlined, we can use it as a simple tool to help identify our interferences - the things that are holding us back from achieving our race potential.

The first step is to list the interferences for each dimension. One approach to identify the interferences

is to ask questions that address a particular concern, weakness, or shortcoming within a dimension. For example, consider the following sample questions:

- 1. Physical Fitness:** Is my swim stroke inefficient? Am I unable to run on a regular basis because of chronic Achilles tendon pain?
- 2. Equipment:** Is my bike position impacting my bike speed? Why do my tires flat in almost every race?
- 3. Race Execution:** Why do I bonk during races? Why are my transitions so slow?
- 4. Mental State:** What distractions in my life keep me from being able to focus on having quality workouts? Are my goals realistic relative to my ability to achieve them?

Once we identify the interferences impacting our potential within each dimension, the next step is to identify an action step to address the interference. Finally, we then choose whether or not we want to take action or just accept the interference.

As an example, my own physical fitness was plagued by frequent knee tendonitis and Achilles tendonitis. The pain and discomfort that I felt impacted my ability to run consistently and maintain a high volume sufficient for competition in Ironman-distance races. I recognized my physical issues as interference that was keeping me from achieving my run fitness potential. I determined that I needed to

take actions to both mitigate the likelihood of the tendonitis returning and be able to combat it aggressively if I experienced symptoms again. I took Bikram yoga to improve my flexibility and strengthen the stability muscles that support my knees, mitigating the tendonitis, and simultaneously worked with an ART-certified Chiropractor (Melanie Six) to actively treat the onset of any symptoms.

At the end of the day, we each have different goals, constraints, and abilities. However, we can all take action that reduces the interferences that keep us from reaching our unique performance potential.

Take the time to recognize the interferences that are holding you back, identify action steps, and make a choice whether or not to do something about it. By taking action, you can proactively stack the deck in your favor on race day and race at your best!

David left his corporate job in 2006 in order to start up his own company (EnduranceWorks, LLC), turning his passion for the sport into a career. With more than a decade of racing experience and nearly 100 triathlons to his credit, his accolades include 24 Ironman®-distance finishes (personal best time of 8:51 and five overall wins), 6x USAT All-American, and being inducted into the Vineman Hall of Fame in 2007. For more information about his events and coaching services, please visit: www.enduranceworks.net. For more information about David, please visit: www.davidglover.net. ★

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