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Article by Brad Beven – Brad Beven Triathlon

Well running speed is something we are looking for these days and with the final leg of a Triathlon so important, focusing on it will improve your results more than in any other area.

We all see what is called the “natural” runners such as Greg Welch in his day and now someone such as Peter Robinson, but is it something you are born with or is it acquired? I believe genes have a lot to do with it but that doesn't have to mean you're behind the eight ball from day dot.

I initially started running as my dominate sport before transforming to more of a swim/biker in the vein of Craig Walton, and when drafting became more prevalent, running was again a question of survival for the future. Many times athletes don't like to venture too far from their comfort zone and if the results aren't there, typically they only work on their strengths. Lose a race by a minute and hopped of the bike a minute up so they believe they have to ride harder and start the run two minutes up. Obviously the weaker areas in your game have a lot more scope for improvement than does the beaten track of previous strengths.

Now how do we go about finding the extra seconds in the run? The speed workouts can be tailored to just pure pace so as to bring you home in a sprint finish but that is more a weapon at an elite level for grand prix style racing where one second is more critical. Seconds are important to everyone but in a perfect world we would have all the time and energy to cater for every eventuality. Unfortunately this isn't possible so best to work in the areas that we can extract the most credit.

So the speed we are talking about is a more sustained and constant pace. This is achieved by training at intervals higher than race pace but also incorporating strength. These intervals for an Olympic distance race would tend to be 800 meter to one kilometer repeats for example. As long as they are faster than race pace and are repeated at least four times, capped at ten for when you are extremely fit. The speed is there and the amount of intervals can give you the strength to complete ten kilometers in competition. A workout that might be typical would be warm up for at least ten minutes then do six or eight run through's. Do your four to six repeats at a pace faster than race pace but so you can hold that pace for the entire workout. If you work by a heart rate monitor, the recovery (jogging) can be until you heart rate gets to a manageable level, around 100 for me. The workouts I love the most are straight off the bike so I am definitely warmed up and my legs feeling strong and full of blood. After most rides I liked to jump off and do at least a one-kilometer run hit out. Otherwise more specific a session of a four kilometer ride and one kilometer run, four times.

Speed and strength can also be achieved by a work out of fartlek; it is I think one of the most important training techniques. A session would be doing one minute on one minute off for thirty to forty minutes including warm up and warm down. This could also be a ladder with the intervals going up by a minute each time with the recovery staying the same. That is, a minute on one off two on one off etc. to four minutes then back down and do it all again. This variety keeps life interesting and equips you with a few more weapons in the war chest. It trains you for the different speeds, distances and lactate levels required to race.

If you do shorter interval workouts, to obtain the strength benefits increase the amount. At the start of a grand prix season I always liked to do a workout of thirty 200's with a 200 float sitting at the same pace throughout, around the 28-30 seconds. Another shorter workout before grand prix is to not only work on the speed and strength but more so concentrate on adapting lactate levels. It consisted of 10x400's but at the end of each one I would just stand around for thirty seconds or so letting the lactate build up, not letting it dissipate by jogging or walking. This is an optimum way of facilitating lactate. Also with the interval sessions remember to keep your foot strike heel toe to facilitate more use of the hamstrings to replicate ten kilometer racing technique. At pace it is easy to use more fore foot than necessary.

Running speed without strength becomes useless in triathlon and it always interests me when you go head to head with a traditional runner and they fold. Many a great runner has come unstuck when you throw a bike leg in front of their favoured discipline. I've seen a lot of athletes that have excelled in other sports and thought it easy to move to the three-discipline combination only to discover their advantage of single sport dominance, when pitched against triathletes, is negated coming into their favoured leg. Expelling too much energy in any one area can be fatal performance wise and become magnified without the proper strength/speed preparation.

You can also join an athletic club for the off season as there is nothing better and it will also give you another perspective and group of people to hang out with. Also do this not just for the off-season but also for the season proper. The times I was running the best was when I was down at the Institute of Sport running mile repeats with some of the best runners in the country.

I suppose at the end of the day we have only so much energy to give. The secret is to prioritise time spent on each leg and constantly identify and work on any weaknesses that arise. The importance of speed in the final leg of a race speaks for itself and should always be a top priority. This is in a sport that has complexity in its multi tasked nature and one that we never stop learning from no matter what the level or approach.

