

TAKE THAT OFF-SEASON!

By Rob Maxwell, M.A.

You are correct if you think you've heard me talk about taking an off-season in the past. Last year I talked about how to have a "successful" off-season. This is a little different—I'm trying to convince you to TAKE THAT OFF-SEASON!

I'm not sure if there is a more stressful sport to train for than triathlon. I'm sure everybody thinks their sport is the most stressful, but being objective and being around a lot of different sports, I'm pretty confident that triathlon is right up there. And the reason is not only physical but mental. We have to juggle 3 sports and tons of different workouts within a week's time. To me, the juggling alone (outside of the workouts themselves) can be very stressful. "How am I going to get to the pool 3 times this week?" "Where will I squeeze that 2 hour ride in mid-week when I work until 6:30?" "It rained all weekend—how do I make up my long ride?" We all have questions like this, and it can get stressful, especially for months on end. If you're a pro and don't work, well forget about this, but I still think you need an off-season.

WHY?

I think the better question is why not? Are you afraid of getting un-fit? If so, rule that out. I'm not saying sit around and get fat all winter. I'm saying get out of your specific triathlon routine and give yourself a break. If you're a pure triathlete and not going to race until the next tri season, is there any point at all in doing speed work in the off-season? Your body and mind need a break, that is WHY. It's called renewal, and it's like that in every aspect of our life. We work in the day and we sleep at night—this is renewal. We work hard for months on end, and we take a vacation. This is renewal. For those of you who think you're hurting yourself by taking time off in the off-season, re-think that logic. It's actually the other way around. You'll be stronger in your next season from taking a mental and physical break. I went up to NY to do a triathlon the past couple of July's. By the time I got up there, I really was already spent. I was not that motivated to race. I had been racing since March. I couldn't believe the attitudes of the athletes up there. They were all happy and raring to go. This was one of their first races of the year because it's too cold until then. You see—we don't have that option. The folks up north have to take a break. They stay fit. They do other things, but because we have the kind of weather that allows us to be outdoors 12 months out of the year, we think it's okay to train that way. Well—that "great" weather can be a curse. Everything has its season, and this is true for triathlon. Take your break and race fresh come next season.

2 DIFFERENT SCENERIOS

We really have to break this down into two different groups: Those that are pure triathletes and only compete in triathlon and those who like to put in a full running season during the fall and winter.

PURE TRI-GEEK:

Your goal for the off-season, which can be anywhere from 2-3 months depending on when you end and start your season, is to simply stay in good shape, meaning don't let your weight go up

too much—unless you want it to. Maintain a good aerobic base by doing a lot of different forms of aerobic exercise and preferably things that are different from what you normally do, and REST. Those are the goals. You should be really mentally ready for the up coming tri season. If you dread it, you worked way too hard in the off-season or you're ready to move on to a different sport. Another goal for you may be to completely heal any nagging injuries that you may have had during the season, and maybe build some strength in the weight room. But ideally, it's to rest the specific tri program and maintain a good general level of fitness.

THE RUNNER:

The runner is the same as the triathlete, except the runner is going to want to compete well in the sport of running during the off-season. Maybe he/she wants to run a marathon or PR a 5K. If this is the case, this is fine. Just keep in mind that you'll really have to keep an eye out for burn out, because this will mean that you went from one competitive season to another. If this is your plan, I suggest that you finish your tri season a little early and start your running season a little late. Try to get at least a complete month off from doing anything that is really specific and/or intense. Give yourself a break. Your goal is to also keep in the best shape you can. I strongly recommend that you keep your cycling and swimming down to a minimum so you have the same sort of off-season that the triathlete has, and maybe try different forms of cross training for your running—I think walking is so UNDERATED! If you want to do well for your running season, of course, you'll want to do your speedwork for running, but there is no point in doing speed work for swimming or biking during your off-season, correct? If you have any nagging injuries left over from your tri season, I recommend you completely get them addressed before you start planning your 5K or marathon season.

TIPS TO ENJOY THE OFF-SEASON:

- Put away the GPS, heart rate monitors and watches and just go by feel. Go for a run and turn around when you feel like it; go the pace that feels good that day---keep it unstructured. The only tool allowed: IPOD!
- Get into walking. I'm telling you—it's great. I really wish runners would walk on days in between their runs instead of running every day. They'd recover so much faster, and you still do get a great aerobic workout and burn calories. Did you know that, for the most part, you'll burn the same amount of calories whether you run a mile or walk a mile?
- Do something you've never done before. Ever try yoga? Pilates? Have you ever gone cross country skiing? (Yes I realize you'd have to travel). But find something that challenges you in another way. Force yourself to learn a new skill.
- Have some fun. Play games that are active like tennis or golf. Find other ways to get your exercise.
- Don't over do it with the diet. It's not fun having to work off an extra ten pounds when you want to get it off. Allow yourself maybe a 5 pound window during the off-season.
- Sit down and set some goals. Why do you do triathlon? What would you like to accomplish next season? Are you happy with where it's taken you thus far? If not, why?

I hope I've talked you into an off-season. Remember this, and don't forget: This is in the best interest of your fitness---it's not going to set you back!!!