

## **YOU WANT TO GET FASTER, SO WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?**

Have you ever noticed how much we all tend to complicate things? Have you counted the number of books out on the lost value of common sense? I think we runners and triathletes are very guilty of both overcomplicating what should be very simple and losing touch with common sense. We're willing to try just about anything to get faster, except what really works! Don't worry, I'll explain what that means. But before I get too far, I want to stress that getting faster isn't only for the elites who jam up to the very front of the starting line. Getting faster is for anybody who laces up a pair of running shoes and hits the streets. I think we should all strive to get faster at running, walking, cycling, and swimming. Why not? Getting faster simply means we're getting more fit. And getting more fit is a good thing. But what do most of us do in our pursuits? We run more miles, we buy more gadgets, we do train harder – at times, we buy lighter shoes, we eat all the right pre and post workout/race foods, and we hydrate. But do we really work at getting faster? Do we go faster to get faster? If so, how do we know?

One of my favorite quotes from the late, great George Sheehan is, “We train for the marathon by training for the mile.” This is so true. If we can get to the point where our mile (our 1 MILE) is at its very fastest, won't our mile splits at any distance also be faster? All things being equal (motivation, nutrition, hydration), of course they will be. Again, that's only common sense. If you can go to the track and run a mile all out in five minutes, then holding a six minute mile is fairly comfortable, right? Of course, we need to have endurance to run a marathon or any longer distance event, and we gain endurance by running lots of miles (although most people do too many). But we gain speed by running faster – period.

I'm fortunate to come from a body building background that gives direct feedback on your training. Body builders know that if they are not getting stronger, then they are not adding muscle. This is a very valuable lesson for me and for anybody who has been involved in strength sports. The results are not going to happen by chance. If you want to add muscle, but you're still using the same weight you did a couple of months ago, it's not going to happen. So each workout, depending on the area being worked, you push yourself to go beyond what you've done before. Now, how many of you runners do that on a regular basis? The lesson learned in my body building days was reinforced in my exercise physiology coursework. The principal I'm referring to is called SAID (Specific Adaptations to Imposed Demands). This means your body will adapt to the level of stress that you provide. If you run the same miles week in and week out, you'll be the same ol' runner.

We also know that we don't want to overtrain. So a marathoner doesn't want to run a marathon each week a little faster. Let's keep in mind the common sense statement from earlier! Instead, we want to set up our running challenges in intervals. But often runners make the intervals too short. I'm a much bigger fan of racing every week (NO, not a marathon or any long distance). The training races need to be based on the distance that you are focusing on for your real races. If you are training for a marathon, there is no better form of speed training than a weekly 5K or 10K. And for the 5Ker, I really like to use one to two mile races to build up 5K speed. Obviously, there are not many of those around to enter, so you simply make them your weekly interval workout. Go with a group of friends to a track, warm up, and run the mile like it's a race, or set up your own 1.5 mile course in your neighborhood. It really doesn't matter how you

do it. Simply do a mini race or a real race as regularly as possible. And keep track. If your mile is not getting faster on a regular basis, you are not getting more fit (faster).

There is no question that there are other factors that will improve your speed beyond what I've mentioned. All of the following will also help:

- Work on your running mechanics and economy.
- Improve your strength-to-weight ratio by controlling your weight and working out.
- Learn what works best for your body nutritionally.
- Find motivation in setting goals.

But if I had to pick one thing above anything, it would be setting up an objective measurement and striving to better it on a regular basis. There is no question that this can get grueling. It hurts to push yourself to be your best. So you must find ways to keep yourself fresh. Practice periodization by using the last week of every month as an "easy" week, when you do not challenge yourself. Another good way to keep fresh is to rotate the distances at which you are challenging yourself. For example, if I'm working with people who want to improve short course times (5K and 10K), I'll rotate from week to week the 1 mile, 1.5 mile, 2 mile, and 3 mile, and then start over. Just keep in mind that if you're serious about getting better, the direct route may hurt, but it works!

How to set up your speed week:

- Set one day aside each week that you go beyond what you've done before.
- Set up your intervals or mini races based on what distances you are focusing on. The longer the goal race, the longer the mini races should be. But I don't recommend anything longer than a 10K weekly.
- Real races are always better. I don't care what anybody says, we all go harder when we pay an entry fee and know there is a clock at the end. But when it's not feasible, set it up yourself.
- Work in recovery weeks. Take an easy week on a regular basis (maybe monthly) and don't do any speed.
- Take an off-season. You don't need to try to build speed year-round. You'll burn out.
- Remember other factors that help: Work on biomechanics and economy, learn what good nutrition means, be confident, be goal oriented.
- Never push through pain. If you find that your speed program, or any part of your running, is causing your body too much stress (you have an injury brewing), back off and rest.

For you multi-sporters, it's really the same thing:

- Swimmers will benefit by doing weekly time trials (TT) in the pool. Again, the distance of the TT depends on the distance of the race. But the TT should always be shorter than the actual race.
- Cyclists benefit greatly from incorporating a weekly TT into their routines. If you don't like to cycle solo, group rides (which really are mini road races) are a great way to challenge your speed on a weekly basis. The group ride isn't as objective because there are many other factors to consider, but you know if you can hang in there with a group you couldn't in the past, then you've made progress!

- If triathletes really want to take the SAID principal to heart, they can set up mini tri races for themselves each week. Doing all three sports may not be feasible, but setting up a short TT on the bike followed by a short TT for the run would be an excellent speed workout. The same could be done with the swim and bike or swim and run. The key is to keep it somewhat consistent so you can measure improvement.
- The one final consideration a triathlete must make concerns dealing with three sports. You do not want to overtrain. Remember, your body will still feel the effects of hard training even in a different mode. So don't try to do a run TT one day and a bike TT the next. Look at triathlon as one sport, not three. There are many ways to split it up, but I suggest having no more than once or two hard days total in a triathlete's week.

So, you want to race?