



How To Race a 'Pool-Sprint' Race

Article by Coach Sonni Dyer

What follows is an attempt to prepare each triathlete for the preparation, strategy, and "game-plan" of racing a "Pool-sprint" style race. {I approach this in "Q&A" form to answer real questions that I've been asked about these type of races.}

1-What time should I prepare to begin for my race on the morning of? With the pool-sprint format, realize that [because the swim is a staggered-start] you may not begin until well after some folks have finished. Upon checking in, time your warm-up so that you begin it about 1 full hour prior to your start-time & be in line on the deck ready to go w/ 5-10minutes to spare.

2-How do I approach the swim portion of a pool-sprint? The temptation is to go out way too fast in a pool-sprint race because there's a lane-line to follow, the swim-distance is much shorter than a regular tri, and there's a crowd (500+ spectators stadium-style) watching YOU for your start.

Of course, you don't realize this until the 100 to 150m mark when you're gasping for air and must slow down. In a pool-sprint.....the strategic theme of the race is to **'BUILD' THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE EVENT**. So for the swim, your last 50m should be as fast (or faster) than your 1st 50m. This sets you up for the bike.

Here's some bullet-points of some other swim-tactics.

*-Aim to swim for the wall right next to the lane-line you're getting ready to go under. This prevents the chances that you'll come up directly UNDER the lane-line (OUCH on the head!).

*-If you get caught by the person who started behind you (& their smart enough to tap your foot).....by all means.....LET THEM PASS! First, it's a nice gesture. Second, you can DRAFT off of them and go faster @ a lower heart-rate. But let 'em pass at the wall....then push off and follow closely in their wake. Thank them later.

*-Use the walls. How often in a tri do you get free speed in the swim by pushing off the walls? In a pool-sprint, push-off and glide as far as possible. This gives you a rest and ensures that you'll take fewer strokes through the whole swim.....all while going just as fast.

*-After ducking under the lane-line to 'lane-exchange'!.....begin with an arm-stroke w/ the arm that's opposite the lane-line you just went under. This ensures that you don't 'hook' the lane-rope slowing you down, breaking your rhythm, and cutting up your hand/fingers. Trust me, there will be several bloody fingers after a pool-sprint race.

*-In the last 50m of the swim, increase the beat-count of your kick. This transfers blood from the upper body into the legs BEFORE you get out of the water and need to actually USE those legs. Failing to do this means setting yourself up for the "T-1 Tango". This is that little dance you see people do when they're in T-1 and bend over to put on the shoes/helmet and start wobbling because they're dizzy. Use the legs before you need to.

*-When you exit the water.....if you check your swim split, DON'T be alarmed if it's slow. Contrary to popular belief, a 500m pool-sprint swim **is NOT 500m**. If you swam that many laps in the SAME lane, it'd be 500m.....But you've got to traverse your way down to the other end of the pool (50m away!)so it's longer. {Why does no one believe me when I point this out?} Don't pay attention to the watch.

3-How do I approach the bike leg of a pool-sprint? You're out of the water, made your way through transition, & now out on the bike. Here's what you should know:

*-Leave transition in a smaller gear. The last thing you want to do is hop right on and start to mash a big gear and dump a lot of lactic acid into the legs.

*-Gradually begin to shift into larger gears.....but always maintain a 90+rpm cadence.



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*-Since pool-sprints often are centered near bike-courses w/ plenty of corners....predict the gear you'll need to spin OUT of those corners to reaccelerate.....and do the same w/ hills. Don't try to stand & mash huge gears up the hills. Stay seated and spin up them....and then stand to attack the top and reaccelerate your speed for the trip down the other side.

Increasing your cadence (ANY time) spreads the wattage that you're producing over a greater number of pedal strokes with less pooling of lactic acid in your legs. Your bike-split can be improved and you're certainly improving the condition of your run-legs BEFORE you get off the bike.

*-Set yourself up for a great run. Your intensity on the bike shouldn't be so hard that (while you may gain 40seconds on the bike).....you may end up losing 1:30 on the run. **Focus on setting yourself up so that the last 1.5miles of the run is the most intense part of the pool-sprint race.**

4-Any tips for T-2? The 2nd transition is crucial in that you dismount, put on your shoes (use lace-locks or ez-laces) grab your number-belt and take off. How you leave T-2 is maybe the most important point of the whole race.

Towards the end of a pool-sprint.....nearly everyone will be gradually slowing down and struggling to overcome the effects of the swim and bike on their body and legs. As you exit T-2, you should picture yourself jumping rope. Have you ever jumped rope while landing on your heels?

Of course not. You're up on your forefeet while you're heels barely touch. LEAVE T-2 THE SAME WAY! It'll help you get your run-legs under you A LOT sooner. Focus on short strides, avoiding the heel-1st strike, and getting your heels and knees up higher.

5-How do I attack the run? At this point, the goal is to set yourself up for a strong finish. MOST folks will gradually die on the way to the finish line. Your goal is the opposite. You want to make the final mile the fastest.....so begin by being patient with those 'bike-heavy' legs.....and, again, **stay away from that heel-1st foot-strike.**

Find a rhythmic breathing pattern that corresponds to a higher cadence leg-turnover. This helps to ensure that, as you fatigue, you don't try to maintain your pace by lengthening your stride (& heel-striking). Also, make sure to keep moving your arms.....and not in such a way that it causes you to twist at the waist. Arm movement should be straight up and down.

As you approach the "half-mile to go" mark, REALLY begin to pick it up. The closer to the line you get...the more you can afford to open-it-up.

In a pool-sprint you're essentially racing against your toughest competitor**YOURSELF**.....since the swim-starts are staggered. DRIVE yourself ALL the way to the line.

6-Anything I need to know about after I'm done?-Absolutely. Realize that in the pool-sprint format that other people are still racing after you're done. Walking into the transition area to gather your gear while others are still making the mad-dash through transition (as part of **their** race) is NOT a good idea.

Kick back, get some calories and fluids in yourself, and cheer others on to their best pool-sprint ever.

Be safe and have fun.

Coach Sonni Dyer

****For more information on the [Studio7MultiSport](http://www.Studio7MultiSport.com) training programs, you can visit our website at www.Studio7MultiSport.com or email Sonni at Sonni@Studio7multisport.com .