



Playing with Blocks

Article by Sonni Dyer

By this point in the season, many triathletes can tell you what day of the week it is by simply knowing what workout is on tap for the day. For instance, if you equate: Tues. w/ track, Thurs w/ group ride, Sat w/ long run, and Sun w/ Endurance bike.....your likely at a point of staleness, plateau, and fatigue to match.

What to do?

First, let's take a look at how it comes to this.

Generally, when the calendar flips over to April, athletes begin to sequence in race-pace like sessions.....intervals. They get faster, stronger, and more efficient as a result. Gradually, they figure out that recovery days are needed to compliment/maintain their "quality" sessions.....Alas, the hard-day/ez-day sequence is born.

And this hard-day/ez-day (stress/recovery) cycle **WORKS**.....**for a while**.

So what changes as the early season wears on? "Where do things go 'south'?" you may ask.

Good question. **Here's what happens:**

The "one-day-on", "one-day-off" sequence works fine in the early months of the season because you've not yet developed the ability, capacity, efficiency (nor even the NEED) to 'dig down' to those true race intensive levels. But through those early months (& with the *help of some of those same races*), your body quickly adapts, allowing you--- as you get more race fit--- to do a more thorough job of stressing yourself in **each one** of those hard workouts.

This is GOOD! It's a sign that you're improving.

But one day (*which ALWAYS goes completely unnoticed by ANY endurance athlete*) the work levels that you can, now, achieve in a day's session **CAN'T** be recovered from in just **one** "day off".

Your ability to stress the body has grown.....and therefore.....so must your corresponding recovery.

And HERE lies the dilemma.

The need for added and more complete recovery is now, more than ever, apparent. But what do most triathletes do? You guessed it, the same 'ole routine.....one-day "on", one day "off".

Pretty soon, with no added recovery, the amount of stress that we can apply in each session 'levels out'.....and a racing plateau occurs. Those who dare 'push-through' are merely setting themselves up for over-training, burnout, or both.

So what's the solution? Ah, I'm glad you finally asked.

PLAY WITH BLOCKS!

Here's what we do. When the hard-day/ez-day approach no longer serves our goals, we 1st must recognize why.

First off, it's VERY likely that we've milked the interval sessions for all they're going to give us for a while. Mid-season, the "**what-we-get**" from them isn't as good a training investment (compared to earlier in the season) when you take into account the '**recovery-cost**' they weigh on us.

So step #1 is getting back to the basics through a mid-season break (of 4-7 days) and restarting with a "**RE-base**" Phase. This is simply a time to get back to laying the same foundation (yep....the same one we built Dec-March) upon which we can build another race-intensive phase on top of. This time, it needn't last 12 weeks.....a 2-4 week block will do fine.



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Realize that by doing this, you will NOT (unlike others) be looking to hang up the bike by mid-August. Instead, **you'll of rested YET MAINTAINED your fitness** simultaneously. **THIS IS THE KEY!!**

Because of this, when you *DO* begin the 2nd half of the season's "quality" workouts, to avoid the same traps of the 1st half's 'hard-day/ez-day' pattern, we'll sequence things a little differently this time around.

In other words, we'll stress the body in **training BLOCKS** of days that are followed by **recovery BLOCKS** of days as well.

Invariably, we all must arrange these 'blocks', somehow, to align w/ a 7-day week. So a sample 'block' may be:

3-days "on" (m-t-w), **2-days "off"** (th-f), **1-day "on"** (sat), **1-day "off"** (sun).

Another example might be:

2-on (m-t), **2-off** (w-th), **1-on** (fri), **2-off** (sat-sun).

Now "off" rarely means completely off. It simply means to either swim or do some active recovery session for recuperation. You could even alternate the two above blocks to make a 14 day cycle.

Here's what I like best about "playing with blocks". First and foremost, if you notice closely, the above 14-day sequence gives you 3 of 4 weekend days where you should do a sub 1hour workout without the guilt of being a 'slacker'. (*Tri-spouses may thank me later.*) **By this point in each week, you'll of EARNED your rest!!**

For me, Sunday's are about family, church, and rest. The Sunday family nap is legendary in our home! And the one Saturday you're 'on' is plenty enough to maintain endurance by using your other blocks wisely.

And this leads to another reason that I like training "blocks".....by allowing more complete recovery, the QUALITY of our "quality days" can be higher. **When we dig.....we dig deep. When we rest.....we rest completely. All else is the dreaded middle-ground where workouts are not hard enough to extend fitness YET TOO HARD to allow for recovery. No man's land.**

Playing with Blocks represents, yet another, strategy in making our athlete's 'hard days harder and ez days ez'er'. And in the big scheme of things, this keeps you progressing when other's have 'leveled out'.

Have fun.

Coach Sonni Dyer

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