Training Intensity in the Race Prep Phase

Article by Sonni Dyer

Ahhh, the smell of fresh ink on your skin at the body-marking tent in the morning. It MUST be Spring……and time to race!!

This is the time of year when triathletes begin to group together at tracks & group rides to get some race-like intensity in before the next big event. So there's no question that there is a need to go harder (ie: higher heart-rate, faster pace, etc…) than one has been training in the Base-phase.

The question is, however, "How hard?"……."and for how long?"

Good questions, actually.

We'll begin to address them by going back to the concept of ***'specificity'***…….just a fancy term that says that our training time/energy is best spent doing things that most replicate the event we're training for
……..ie: ***specific* training.**

As races approach, do you get on a rower to prepare for a triathlon? Of course not. It's not specific. But that same person, (by that same measure), would run 800m intervals at a pace that they could ***never*** touch in a 5k at the end of a sprint-triathlon. This is an example of non-specific **INTENSITY**.

Would you run 2hr long runs on the weekends to prepare for sprint and Olympic distance races?……non-specific **DURATION**.

So what IS **specific training**? Well, take a look at your upcoming events. If a series of sprint events are on the horizon, you'll not need to exceed a one hour run at any given time. If you're registered for a half-ironman, the 2:30-4 hour bike rides **are** a necessity.

But let's talk about heart-rate, here. When we write programs for athletes, never do we specify a session to be done at a heart-rate ***above*** one's Lactate Threshold…….(the point at which someone is accumulating more lactic acid in the muscle than they can get rid of).

Why? Well, a triathlete needs to be able to sustain a high output for several minutes to hours at a time. Before we can even begin to improve one's efficiency at race-pace……..they **MUST** be efficient at lower, *AEROBIC* heart-rates. Your "aerobic-engine" is/was developed in the base phase with a lot of, (what I call) "middle-ground" heart-rate hours……more scientifically called "MAF"…….**maximum *aerobic* function.** (We even monitor this efficiency w/ periodic 'maf-assessments'.)

As we get closer to the races, though, we need to get ***away*** from the *middle-ground* in our 'break-through' sessions. Our **hard days must get harder**……..more race-like.

But to achieve this, [**and DO NOT miss this point**] ……..our **ez days must get easier!!**

Performing intervals at a heart-rate above this Lactate Threshold is very "old-school". You know, more pain = more gain, mentality. The problem is that such sessions yield only marginal results over sessions done at just ***under* one's LT.** Yet, the **cost** (with regard to "muscle-recovery" and your weekly sequencing) is much too high.

You require too much recovery time **(in the following days)** by going too hard!

You can reap huge benefits by reducing the intensity a bit and extending the **duration** of a single session……or even the **number** of these sessions in a given week because you didn't dig yourself into a 'recovery-hole' on any ONE workout.

Long intervals that are at, (or just below), one's lactate threshold develop the ability to sustain race-like output (ie: pace, power, heart-rate) in the actual races.

Short, 'above-threshold' intervals will make you too tired to spend a sufficient amount of time, each week, to produce a positive training response.

NOW…….does this mean that we **never** prescribe anyone to go REALLY fast? Nope, we have some KILLER speed-oriented track sessions…….but the longest of these intervals is 400m! By the time the heart-rate gets up to that 'point-of-no-return', the interval is over. So if

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we're going to train the body to go fast (for leg-speed), we're going to do it in an interval where the speed can be sustained…… from 100 to 400m, (because this is primarily '*neuromuscular-conditioning*' in nature).....& do it very fast.

If, on the other hand, our workout goal is to push back one's lactate-threshold (**thereby making them more efficient at race-pace**), our aim is to create a race-like interval that's specific in terms of the target-race's intensity in a workout that's duration-specific to that target-event.

This is the single biggest reason we get the feedback, "Coach, I don't feel like I'm working-out as hard……..yet I'm getting alot faster!"……..**Bingo!**

See you at the races.

Coach Sonni Dyer

*****For more information on the Studio7Multisport training programs, you can visit our website at **www.Studio7MultiSport.com** or email Sonni at **Sonni@Studio7multisport.com** .