



Turning Up the Heat with Intensity ...a 3-level approach

Article by Sonni Dyer

By this point of the season the term "*Interval workout*" is a pretty common moan in weekly training strategies.

Without thinking, most triathletes will join in a weekly interval session w/ a group (or even alone).....and by the end, if they've achieved fatigue, nausea, or lactate-induced pain, then they figure: "Hey, that must've been a good session."

And while "**discomfort management**" is a key in *some* type of interval sessions.....these sessions should be used VERY sparingly. You see.....what is most lacking in race-specific workouts is simple F-O-C-U-S.

So how does one gain "FOCUS" in your race-intensive workouts?

Ahhh.....this is the key to the vault, because when you master how to answer this question (& know how to adjust the workouts accordingly) you maximize your time/energy "investment" for the greatest "return".....and do so w/ the least possible **damage-effect** to your recovery or volume each week.

The better that you recover from these sessions.....the more you can do. The more you can do (**without over-training**), the longer that your intensive training cycles can be. And that means one thing.....**improvement**.

In determining what a workout's FOCUS should be, know that the first step is to honestly ask the question: "**Where is my game weak right now?**"

Then ask: "**Does this weakness REALLY affect my race goals?**" (*For example: If you have an endurance weakness but are planning for a season of sprint races, then endurance may really be a secondary issue. If you're targeting sprint races and find that you 'blow-up' after hard efforts in a race.....then THAT is a race-specific weakness..... because you'll very likely dance the line of "hard efforts" often in sprint races.*)

When you've honestly assessed where you could stand to most improve.....then you simply choose from 1 of 3 "intensity-tools".

As a coach, believe me, I know that the prevailing attitude towards intensity training is that..... "an interval is an interval is an interval".

NOT SO!! Here are the 3 types:

1-Threshold.....This is the least used (and most effective) race-specific intensity training there is!! It offers a very high 'return' on a relatively minimal 'investment'. Muscular damage and recovery are compromised very little.

Threshold pace, subjectively, is a pace that can be described as "**comfortably difficult**" & could be held for 20 to 30minutes w/ ease. Very often, I call this pace "tempo" when communicating w/ our athletes. Because the pace is sustainable.....the duration of these efforts can be longer. 'Threshold' would be an intensity that most could race a half-ironman at. **I find that MOST people tend to want to over-run their threshold intensity.**

Here are some samples of Threshold sessions:

For the swim: (main set) 4 x 500m, 2 x 1000, or 1 x 300-500-300-500-300

For the bike: (during a 1:30 to 2hour ride) 1-2 x 20minutes @ tempo-pace

For the run: (during a :35 to 1:20 run) 1-2 x 20minutes @ tempo-pace

The purpose of a 'Threshold session' is to being able to clear lactic acid accumulation from blood (ie: blood lactate) at faster and faster speeds while swimming, cycling, and running.

Going any faster than "tempo" pace in these sessions is **NOT better for you**.....because it drastically raises the need for recovery and is, still, not fast enough to gain a speed-benefit from. If you train w/ a hrm, 'tempo/threshold' pace occurs at *about* 90% of max-hr.

The goal is not to do these sessions at harder and harder heart-rates throughout the season. It IS to be able to travel faster and faster at your tempo hr.



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2-True VO2-max Interval Training.....This, on the other hand, is the most OVER-used type of training intensity. "Intervals" are hard..... (*duh!*).....and because of this, they require very thorough & specific recovery measures.

"Intervals" are a training pace that stresses one's VO2max.....your capacity to deliver oxygen very fast to working muscles.

The term "interval" actually refers to the **brief rest between efforts**.....not the efforts, themselves.

Here are some samples of Interval sessions:

For the swim: (main set) 6-8 x 200m taking only 15 seconds between each

For the bike: 6-8 x 3minutes (seated climbing or a 'wattage-interval' on an indoor trainer) w/1min. rest between each

For the run: 3-5 x 1000m with a 200m ez-jog (2-3min.) between each

As a rule, most folks will begin true interval training after a base build.....continue it from spring until fall.....and then wonder why their so tired late in the season!?!?

Interval training is like a grinding stone.....it can SHARPEN you for a period. But after that, if you keep it up, it can wear you down.

We employ intervals for specific "race-prep" cycles (& ONLY after some 'threshold work' to prepare an athlete).....and then **LEAVE THEM ALONE** when we feel that we've milked them for all their worth. As an athlete gets more "race-fit" {because of them}.....interval sessions positively impact his/her game **less**, yet the need for recovery remains high.....this is NOT an ideal 'return-on-investment'.

It's best to cycle them well before A-priority races.....and stay away from them the week before a target event. In other words.....'love-em & leave 'em' and USE them intelligently in your training.

3-Speed Repetitions....or "Reps"These intensive sessions are focused on ONE OBJECTIVE in your training.....**ECONOMY of movement**. That is the ability to swim, bike, & run faster on less effort.

"Reps" are also the most fun to do, yet, very few triathletes will make use of them. They are short.....done very fast.....and you are to take FULL recovery between each in order to keep intensity/pace high. Shortening the recovery portions (to make it "hurt more") is a huge mistake.....because this diminishes the intensity of each.

Don't think that 'reps' are all-out sprints. They are not. But they are as close to sprinting as you can come without actually sprinting.

Here are some samples of "Rep" sessions:

For the swim: 20 x 50m (full recovery)....focus on maintaining your stroke-count and form @ the highest speed/pace possible.

For the bike: Find a flat road and go to one of your easiest gears. Spin for 30-40 seconds @ 110 to 125rpms. Repeat 10 times. [This can also be done while hanging on to the back of a fast-moving pace-line in an ez gear.]

For the run: 10 x 200mwith a 200m WALK between each

To conclude, I recommend using each of the three types of intensity in your workouts keeping some 'creative variety'.....but ultimately making the focused decision on WHICH type by reviewing your last race and determining the biggest area of improvement.

Know too, that you can do "focus-bricks" by combining swim/bike, bike/run, & even swim/run sessions.....@ threshold pace, in intervals, or w/ reps.

Have Fun.

Coach Sonni Dyer

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