



Coach-Athlete Q&A

A look at some coach-replies to common questions by topic.

Racing the Ironman with a Wattage Meter Training Days

As the training value of power devices becomes more accepted, athletes will begin to race the Ironman distance with these devices. Athletes inexperienced with training with power are often compelled to reduce their training to pure numbers. First they do a test to determine watts at lactate threshold.

Then ride X minutes at Y% of LT watts. The athlete then wants to carry this over into race paces, with a plan to simply dial in watts for the duration of the ride.....and keep it there.

It's simple,but not *QUITE* that simple.

The power-meter is only as good as your skill in using it. The best learning tool is the experience of training and racing with a power device. It helps to have completed several 80 to 112 mile race rehearsals w/ your meter.

But before we begin to describe pacing plans and numbers, let's discuss 3 key points:

1)-- You will want to look at these numbers, perform some tests, and then do the math again to determine your own numbers. These numbers are NOT your numbers. One person's steady state endurance wattage can be as high as 75-77% of his/her estimated LTW. Most athletes should start at 60-65% & only work up from there.

2)-- The best lab is your training and, more specifically, the race simulation ride. Do all the lab testing and number crunching you want, but if you ride a quality race simulation in Y minutes at X watts, then you absolutely know what your capabilities are. ***There is no more useful test than the race simulation ride with a power meter.***

3..)-- "*But when I am rested and tapered, won't my watts naturally increase? If I then pace my ride in reference to my race simulations, won't I be riding too slow?*"

Yeah, maybe, but so what? They don't give Kona slots or finisher's medals to swim and bike splits and they don't award hardware to average watts. Your goal for an Ironman is to **run** a strong 20k after a 4k swim, 180k bike and 20k run. It's not about who goes the fastest but rather who slows down the least. If you do a very high quality race simulation ride for 112miles @ 200 average watts, when you toed the line at IM you'll have absolute faith in your ability to average 200 watts for 112 miles and come off the bike feeling great. Too, you may factor in that you'd had gotten a good night's sleep before that simulation-ride, had not swam 4k before the ride, and did not have the adrenaline of race day.

Therefore YOU KNOW if you could ride a smart race and average less than 200 watts.....it's like putting money in the bank to spend on the run.



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Race Day

There are 5 critical components about using a power meter on race day:

1---Ride your optimum bike split while expending as few watts as possible.

This is absolutely critical. The race doesn't care how many watts you average for the ride, or about your bike split, for that matter. It only cares about your ability to run off the bike. You can't hide in the last 20k of the run. Therefore, use the meter to take EVERY opportunity to save and conserve watts and to spend your watts where they will yield the greatest tactical gain or set you up for a successful run.

2---"Capability-meter"

The power meter tells you in real time how hard you are working relative to your capabilities, given terrain, environment and the tactical situation. You have extremely important information about your ride that your competition does not. This is an incredible advantage. This advantage is further magnified in the hands of an experienced, disciplined, patient cyclist.

3---"Fool-u-o-meter"

"Foolish" is defined as performing work outside of your capabilities for little to no tactical gain. With the meter, you instantly know when you are working too hard and can back off immediately. Your competition does not have this information. Continuous power "spikes" on your ride represent high cost efforts that yield little gain.

In other words, not all wattage averages are created equal.

There are many ways to average 180 watts during a ride. The same power "spikes" and other instances of throwing away watts for zero tactical gain have a muscular cost greater than the average watts for the ride would indicate. This is especially true for Ironman athletes trained on a diet of steady state mileage. Power spikes kill us as triathletes. Elite athletes at the highest end of racing may consider adding some roadie-like training, with acceleration and surges, to reduce the muscular cost of responding to tactical situations. But for the remaining 99% of the field, the ability to ride state on the flats remains the key.

4---Create Numbers with Meaning & usefulness to different race day decisions

Let's say you test your CP30 as 310. To be safe, let's call it a lactate threshold wattage of 300 watts. Then moves forward, begin to relate training and racing wattages to this 300, identifying numbers that mean something to you. The intent is to determine wattages to define your capabilities on race day, given the tactical situation, terrain, distance, etc.

As the training months and cycles pass, a picture of race day wattage targets begin to emerge based on these numbers:

-EZ, endurance aerobic = 180-200 watts



-Aerobic Threshold (IM-pace....also referred to as "Intensive aerobic") = 210-220 watts

- Steady State (tempo) = 230-240 watts
- Headwind = 245-250 watts, max
- Long aerobic climb (6+ min) = 275-285 watts
- LT watts = 300-315 watts. *[This one is critical for avoiding power spikes on short climbs]*

- IM rehearsal (race simulation) wattage: 220 watts *[This is an extremely powerful number to have on race day.]*

5---Riding Hills with Watts

Knowing that the idea is to conserve watts where there is marginal opportunity for tactical gain (on the climb) and spend them a bit where you have more to gain (on the crest and downhill):

-- Approach/base of the hill: avoid the power spike that is natural. Stare at the meter and willed yourself to not see the LT-watts (300, in example above). Best to enter the hill with a competitor in front of you, so they can provide you with an additional visual reference point. Let then gap you.

-- Body of the hill: settle in at your "Climbing" wattage and ignore the people around you. You will begin to close the gap as your marker-rider's body reacts to the initial power spike and backs off the watts.

-- As the hill begins to flatten out MAINTAIN YOUR CLIMBING WATTAGE. The natural tendency when the road begins to fall away is to shut it down. Simply continue with your climbing wattage over the crest, accelerating quickly into the first third of the downhill. You will quickly accelerate past your "marker-rider".

-- Getting very aero and coasting is a better strategy than pedaling hard to go faster. It takes enormous wattage to go materially faster at 30+ mph. Better to accelerate quickly to top speed using the techniques above and then coast.

-- In the intervening flat, dial in your headwind wattage so you can hold this speed for a while. Then settle back into "flats" wattage.

-- Look behind you. I guarantee you are 200+ yards ahead of the guy who hammered the climb. Works every time.

To Conclude:

1---Use high quality training rides and race simulations to determine the numbers that define your capabilities and limitations, given various tactical, terrain and environment situations. Experience really is the best teacher. I tell athletes this is the kind of subject best discussed over & over. There is just so much to learn and so many nuances. This article will give you some good starting points but is no substitute for the miles w/ the meter.

STUDIO



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2--- Have absolute confidence in the tool and the discipline to ignore the others around you, creating the conditions for a successful run.

Many thanks to professional triathlete Gordo Byrn for his online-posted reports on his extensive experience that contributed to this information.