

The 4 Pillars

by John LaFreniere

Any of us that train for triathlon understand that finding a balance between work time and WORKOUT time is likely the most challenging thing we have to deal with as amateur athletes. In my ~ 15 years of competing in triathlon, I have tried a lot of different things when it comes to workouts. I think when it comes to the **Bike/Run** portion of our sport you want to shoot for 1-2 key sessions in bike/run each week, in order to maximize the time that you have (4 Pillars). In my opinion everything else that you are able to do on top of these 4 key sessions is pretty much gravy. I also think that these workouts are most effective if spaced apart by at least 24 hours, i.e. you would not do these 2 key workouts as a brick workout on the same day, I don't believe you will get as much out of them since you will likely be doing them below the ideal intensity. While training BELOW race intensity is beneficial for building endurance, it is not very effective at building speed. The ONLY way IMO to get really fast in our sport is to spend a certain amount of time AT or ABOVE threshold. For just about everyone, threshold is the fastest pace/effort you can sustain for approx. 60 minutes.

RUN

1. VO2 Max run

VO2 max is your 5k race pace or faster. Shoot for 1 run/week that puts you in this zone for a total of 16-36 minutes by completing intervals that last between 2-8 minutes. If you haven't done these for a while, you can start with less. It may take several weeks or more to build up to 30 minutes. They don't have to be fancy! 400's; 800's; 1000's; 1200's; 1600's are all pretty effective at getting you out of the comfort zone. If you haven't done these in a long time, start next week with 4 x 400 (quarter mile) and build on that. These are meant to be really difficult! If you aren't gasping for air at the end of this workout, you aren't doing it right. You do want to show some restraint on the early intervals since they will get harder the further you get into the workout. Done properly, you will not see drastic differences in target pace over the course of the workout. For example if you do 8 x 800 and your first 800 is done @ 7:30pace and your last one is @8:00pace, you are going out too fast. Rest interval between each set should be about the same TIME that it takes to complete the interval or LESS. So 800's done in 3m30s should have rest or recovery jog of 3 to 3.5 minutes. The rest interval doesn't count towards the zone goal of 16-36 minutes.

2. Threshold or Tempo run.

Threshold or TEMPO is somewhere between your 10k and 15k RACE pace (unless you are a sub 1:30 half marathoner, then it is between 15k and 13.1 RACE pace). Personally I have come to like adding my tempo run portion to my once weekly long run. I will usually spend the first half to 2/3 of my long run at a comfortable pace, then I'll spend 18+ minutes at my 13.1 race pace followed by a cool down jog to end the run. If you are just getting started with tempo intervals, start with 18 minutes and add 2 minutes each week until you get to 26 minutes, then move to 2 sets separated by short jog or rest (2 x 14 minutes with 3 minutes recovery). You can add or subtract from these buildups as you see fit. For marathon training, you should target about 40 minutes max (2 x 20). For multisport; shoot for 30 minutes.

Once you have reached 30 minutes and 40 minutes of VO2 & Tempo, you don't have to do the max every week. Mix it up depending on your race schedule. Also it may be difficult to get a TEMPO and VO2 run in EVERY SINGLE week, make sure you do at least 1 of them. I usually count short sprints or races as a VO2 workout, listen to your body and if you think you need a week off speed work after a race, go ahead and take it...Just try not to let 1 week become 2 weeks... then 3 etc...

3. VO2 max in cycling is the same physiological concept as cycling. Unless you are a track cyclist or well rounded, pure cyclist, you are probably neglecting (at your own peril) these workouts. Most of us have gotten so accustomed to grinding out 3-5 hour rides in preparation for Ironman, we have forgotten some key workouts that are much more EFFICIENT ways at making you faster. Short hard intervals of 5 minutes and less is what we are talking about. One of THE most effective VO2 cycling workouts you incorporate into your weekly rides at the 30/30's. After a 15-20 minute warm-up and preferably a 1-2 minute all out effort (opener) 30/30's are pretty self-explanatory. 30 seconds as hard as you can go at a very high cadence (100RPM+) followed by 30 seconds of easier effort but still at a very high cadence (90-110 RPM), repeat x 10 with no let down. Start with 1 x (10 x 30/30) and add an additional set each week until you get to 3-4 with 10 min ez spin in between. If you are training by feel without a power meter, you do need to gauge your effort such that you are not dogging it on the last few 30/30/s. Usually the first 4-5 will feel OK, when you are getting to the last 3 or so you can expect to be cross-eyed and it will be difficult to keep track of which one you are on. Just remember the entire set = 10 minutes. Similar to run VO2, once you reach a maximum of 3-4 sets of 10 x 30/30... you don't need to stay at the max of 3-4 sets, you can drop down and back up based on your race build. These are not only good for sprint distance racing, they are tremendous for your overall fitness and can help increase your run VO2 without the additional pounding of doing multiple track workouts during the week which will help reduce chance of injury.

4. Threshold or TEMPO is pretty much your Olympic distance (or faster) effort. It is = to whatever effort you think you can hold for 1 hour. These intervals are usually 5-20 minutes in duration with recovery time usually 5-40 minutes between. Again, the goal is to hold a very steady effort over the duration of the interval AND across all sets. They are obviously easier with a power meter, but you can certainly use things like heart rate and to some extent MPH. Obviously wind direction and hills can complicate things when you are trying to use MPH, so you really want to focus on the effort. Starting with something like 3 x 5 minutes with 5 min ez spin recovery in-between each set. This can build to something you could incorporate into your long ride. For example you could do a 3 hour ride with 40 min EZ spin then 20 minutes at tempo x 3 hours. I can assure you this is more effective at building fitness than trying to ride hard for 3 hours straight.

Everyone should recognize that training the MOST and putting in the most hours does not guarantee the best results, and will likely result in burn out and sub-par race performances. There are times when it can be beneficial to hammer for the entire duration of a long ride, just be aware that you need to be careful about doing this every week. Having race simulation every weekend or getting sucked out of your plan by peer pressure is a surefire way to not succeed. If you are unsure about what you are doing or need to do, please don't hesitate to ask me anytime. Unless I'm in the middle of a 30/30 LOL

My name is John LaFreniere- If you think you need help preparing for your next run or triathlon race, I believe i can be of assistance. Feel free to reach out via email or cell.

jlafreniere@iwp-llc.com or call 407-454-0676.