

## OFFSEASON: YOUR MONEY IN THE BANK

By Sean Molina

Can you see it!? Right there in front of you! It's your ticket to fantastic athletic personal breakthroughs. Just take it, it's yours! That's right, reach out and seize your golden ticket...that is, your offseason.

Hyperbole? Not at all. In fact I believe most athletes have a pretty good sense of this simple concept: your offseason training will invariably determine the level of success that you will have later during the race season. This time of year is the most effective time of year for improving triathlon performance. Training appropriately now is "money in the bank."

So why do so many let such an incredible opportunity slip by them? Afraid of success? Not comfortable with soaring ahead of friends? Don't like how you look at your lean and mean body fat %? Oh come on!...eat name-brand cereals...get what you wish for!

O.K., so maybe these aren't the problems (although not unseen). So what are some factors that bog us down at this most important time of the year? Here's a few that come to mind.

- Waning Motivation
- Inclement Weather
- No Year-Plan based on goals
- Understanding the progressive physiological nature of training

Let's put a finer point on each of these potential limiters by looking at possible solutions. Note that there is much crossover between them.

**Waning Motivation:** 1) Schedule workouts with others, particularly the more demanding ones. Create routine with training partners who will honor their commitment. You are much less likely to miss a training session if you have to keep to your word with others, which for most, will supersede motivation. Also, the social aspect can be a pull. Utilize any organized group training available.

2) Have a plan and keep a record of what you do. Seeing what you are actually doing in relation to your plan will hold you to account. Reaching for short-term training benchmarks based on a plan can produce lots of motivation.

**Inclement Weather:** 1) Invest in your success! Don't skimp on your Golden Ticket. Your investment will bring you great joy, satisfaction, and health. There are very effective tools that can move your training indoors. In fact, these tools can be a vital in improving performance, not just maintaining it. Buy a treadmill or gain access to one at a sports facility. I believe treadmills are the most overlooked of training equipment. They can help improve your mechanics and efficiency greatly, with no real drop-off in cardiovascular training. More so, if your over 40, the impacts on your body are dramatically reduced, thus allowing for better recovery and injury prevention. If you are over 45, injury prevention and management are the most important things you will do. There are many ways of making the treadmill workout more effective and enjoyable which is an article in itself...look for it here next month.

2) Have a cycling trainer or join a spin class. These are vital training pieces in their own right in your training program. There have been times when I have hoped for rain to force me onto my

trainer because I know my cycling gets better as result. Additionally, there seems to be an inherent benefit to my pedal mechanics (higher pedal rpms, which are the essence of improving mechanics) and the quality of the session is inevitably very high. It has been found that an hour on the trainer translates to an hour and a half on the road. The caveat is that it becomes a bit challenging to get my weekly over-distance ride indoors, which is 4 to 5 hours saddle time outdoors.

**No Year-Plan based on goals:** 1) Analyze Your Season. Did you meet your racing goals and training objectives? Did you peak when you wanted to? Did you go as fast as you predicted? Look then at your training objectives as stated above. They should be measurable goals that are stair steps (progressive) to your major goals. If you did not meet your major goals of the year, the answer, or at least part of the answer to why, may be right there. As you keep looking into why you did or did not meet your goals look at everything: job, personal life, relationship, etc. Stress outside of the athletic world is the number one cause of people under performing. Proactively managing your life in general will pay big dividends in your training.

2) Develop a plan using your training and performance baselines. Take into account your current level of fitness and develop a training schedule using a Periodization approach (yes I know, a whole article in itself). The long and short of this approach is to break your training/racing year into periods of time as defined by the physiological system you're developing. These periods last anywhere from one to four months. For most, the current period is the base or foundation period and focuses on the aerobic system, which is the backbone of everything you do as a triathlete. In effect, when I speak of the "Golden Ticket," it's the development of the aerobic system that I'm referring to. Your base period should schedule training loads that progressively increase and then allow for full recovery. Usually that means a 3 week build-up followed by a recovery week. The key to programming these sessions is the intensity and the progression at which we increase the volume. As a general rule, it is recommended that the duration of the long weekly run be increased by approximately 5-7%, while cycling time can progress at a more liberal rate of 10-15%. It is further suggested that with running, we build time duration in a sequence of two steps forward followed by one step back so that every third week is experienced by a slightly shorter run.

### **Understanding the progressive physiological nature of training**

I think if many athletes understood the profound importance of building a solid and large foundation, their motivation to train with more focus and commitment would greatly increase.

Imagine that you are about to construct a new house. The first thing you would do is build a solid foundation to support the future load of the building. But let's say that you were in a hurry or didn't have solid ground to build on. Although in your haste, you could still build your abode and decorate it with beautiful landscape, but it might only be a matter of time before that beautiful new dream home would crumble down. Now let's suppose that the above structure is your triathlon body and you are preparing for what you hope will be your most successful race season ever. Sound familiar? Each year, many athletes go into their race seasons with an inadequate base. This shortfall not only limits their potential for athletic success, it may also predispose them to an increased risk for injury.

More specifically, offseason is your opportunity to build a superior aerobic engine. This means that you will teach your body to use mostly fat for fuel, which is in almost unlimited supply in your body, by training with low intensity and high volume. You'll be able to race at higher speeds while preserving your precious supply of glycogen, which are essentially stored carbohydrates. With the inevitable higher training and racing intensities that come later in the season, you will

be able to greatly minimize the impacts of glycogen depletion, muscle fatigue, and consequently overtraining. You'll be dipping much less into the glycogen stores, and instead will be utilizing fats for fuel. Make no mistake about it...more often than not your house crumbles from chronic glycogen depletion, which is not hard to do.

So here we are in the offseason. Ice cold fog...Freezing rain...Short dark days...No races in sight. Ahh yes, money in the bank!!