

Triathlon and HHH.

There are 3 factors that present a challenging race day. They are Heat, Head winds, and Hills, which I am calling HHH.

It seems that no matter how you prepare, there will be a new dimension on race day when facing Heat, Head winds or Hills.

Here are some helpful hints for your race day success.

The Heat:

I remember running the Desert Half in Osoyoos on July 12th 2009. After a tough (hot, hilly and windy) bike ride the temperature rose to 43C/110F on the run course. How could I train to prepare for these conditions? The answer: I can't. In order to successfully run the half marathon your body will use an additional 5-10 bpm to cool your internal core temperature. Here are some helps;

1) Be sure to follow your rehearsed race day management Hydrate adequately and apply water/sponges to your body and put ice under your cap.

2) Adjust your race pace effort for the conditions. Think back to your training and adjust your race pace for 5-10 bpm lower than you planned to run (or bike).

3) Do not overhydrate or overeat. Elevated heart rates can cause your body to shut your stomach down. If you keep on filling your stomach when it shuts down the contents of your stomach will come back up! Another thing that results from over-hydration during a race is over-hydration negatively affects electrolyte balance. Even drinking concentrated Gatorade will lower your electrolytes and cause cramping and/or fatigue.

4) Training Preparation. If you know that you are headed for a hot race day you can prepare somewhat by training with extra layers of clothing. The goal is not to train hot, but to normalize your body to heat and increase its capacity to sweat and maintain optimal performance at race pace. If you are headed to a race vacation in a warm climate it might be best to arrive up to a week early to give your body time to adjust to the hot and/or humid conditions.

The Head Winds:

Most people do not like windy conditions, especially on the bike. In spite of this fact race day can be frustrated by a strong headwind. Here are some strategies and tactics that I applied two weeks ago at the Oliver Half Iron on June 2nd 2013:

1) Dial in your race pace. A strong head wind will narrow your race pace zone (by effort / heart rate). If you push too hard on the bike against a strong headwind your heart rate will increase very rapidly and you will not be able to maintain your effort (unless you plan on doing a walk for the run course). If you do not push hard enough your heart rate will decrease (even when you think you are going hard) and as a result your bike time will suffer significantly).

2) Take Mental Breaks. Not only is a strong head wind physically tiring. It is mentally draining as well. You can only focus on performance for so long before the head wind challenge will cause your attitude to become negative. To maintain a positive attitude on race day be sure to think about things

you love, people you care about, or what beverage you like to consume after you cross the finish line. You need something that you can focus your mind so that you remain positive.

3) Take Physical Breaks. The wind might be persistent, but you can change your approach and give you a much needed break. I usually go five minutes before I switch up to a higher or down to a lower gear. I will aim for a 90 cadence, then switch it up to a 80 cadence for a while, back to 90 cadence for a while and then up to 100 cadence for a while. The changes in cadence will add something new and fresh to an old and stale situation, while maintaining a constant race pace effort.

The Hills:

A hilly bike or run course can significantly alter your race day performance. More importantly, hills will measure your triathlon hill training. Here are some ideas for you to consider to include in your next year's training plan.

1) Hills Repeats. One of the best ways to become a stronger triathlete is to do hill repeats (both on the bike and the run). Increasing your speed on the hills is a great strategy for improving muscular strength and improving your time. You can find a suitable hill of 400-500 m and a 3-5% grade and repeat climbing and descending up to ten times. A good way to tell if the hill is appropriate for your ability is the hill (or the portion of the hill) takes almost maximum effort to complete while seated and takes 2-4 min to complete. When you do your hill repeats alternate sitting and standing each time you complete a hill climb. This hill climb would be also suitable for the run. It is helpful to train on courses that are most similar to your race.

2) Cresting. The best way to increase hill efficiency is to lower your pace / effort and the bottom of the hill and work up to your maximum effort / pace until you are over the top of the hill and at maximum speed on the descent. The faster you can get up to speed after the crest of the hill, the more seconds you will save. This is called "Cresting" and it is a useful practice on both the bike and the run. Use the descent to recover and hydrate.

3) Core Training for the Bike. Hill climbing is a core workout on the bike. Be sure you engage your core in your off season training and your base training. Engage your core by doing your bike workouts in the aero position at a cadence of 80 rpm (also called grinding or mashing). Select a suitable hill of 2-3% grade, which takes 8-10 min to climb. Engage your core by increasing your cadence over 80 rpm when standing (a high cadence stand on the bike engages the core to keep your body weight off the pedals). Another way for advanced cyclists to improve your core training and hill climbing ability is to regularly ride a road to a ski resort (see the evaluation web site <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/~avt/rdclimbs.html>) or practice on the Cowichan Challenge course, the old IMC course (Richter Pass / Yellow Lake) or the Malahat. Nothing like a good 1 hour of climbing at race pace effort for a great core workout.

The triathlon HHH will one day find you on race day. Hopefully you will be better prepared for a successful day!

Stay safe,

Coach Steve