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THE CHALLENGE OF TRIATHLON – insider tips

I have played sports all my life, and I even decided to go into physiotherapy, because I had lots of injuries and was fascinated by how the physios approached and helped my problems. I am currently concentrating on triathlon, because I found I did not have the time for team sports while I was studying.

Triathlon in South Africa has become a hugely popular sport. Triathlons are a **multi-discipline event**, consisting of **swimming, cycling** and **running**. All three are performed one after the other, with no time for rest or preparation for the next leg. There are triathlons, which cater for beginners and the serious triathlete. It is an exhilarating sport where we push ourselves to the limit.

Injuries are always a worry in any sport, but more so in triathlons as you are competing for long periods of time in varied activities. In order to prevent injuries and to get the best out of training, we need to ensure that we understand what we are doing.

As in all sports, **equipment and setup** play a very big role. Appropriate running shoes and a suitable bike are crucial to injury prevention. Your equipment does not need to be top of the range, but simply **set up** to suit your **cycling style, weight, height** and **leg length**. Running shoes must be current and not worn through. Bike, shoes and swimming gear need to suit the environment in which they are being used.

Training differs from person to person. If you are a pro-triathlete then your training revolves around equipment, endurance, strength and intensity specific sessions. Most pro-triathletes compete in many events as practice leading up to their ultimate goal. Lastly, we have participants who just want to have fun, finish the event and do the best they can. Triathlon in any of these categories is about pushing the physical and mental barriers.

Entering an event is always the easy part; training is where the effort and planning lie. I believe in the needs to establish a "**base**". This is where we start from the beginning to build up fitness and endurance. A substantial base, (depending on the event) is done for 6 - 10 weeks. In this period we work on establishing a base in each discipline. There are varying approaches on how one should train for the three disciplines.

Personally I prefer an **integrated approach**. In a week you should alternate swimming, cycling and running, not focus on one per week. This allows adequate recovery time for the different muscle groups. When building the base it is best to confirm you can achieve the distance needed, and sometimes a bit more.

Base training is done at **low intensities** with **high volumes** to condition the cardiovascular system and encourage the burning of both the carbohydrate and fat stores in our body. Fat stores provide greater energy release, but are not burnt first, which is why conditioning the body to use its optimal stores is necessary in multi-discipline sports.

Strength training is the next step. This is where we **decrease volume** and **increase the intensity**. This can be done through interval training comprised of sprints and pace management. This period of training, does not always have to be "flat out," but a change in tempo is sufficient to condition the body physically. Strength training can be done for 4 – 8 weeks

Here is an overview of a **Training Program** in minutes for a short to medium distance triathlon, which needs to be started 13 weeks before race day.

Week 1-6: Base training.

Week 6-9: Building endurance and fitness to the base while bringing in a bit of intensity.

Week 9-12: Interval training.

Week 13: Easy pace = tapering.

In the last few weeks try to bring in open water swimming.

Week:	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
1 - 3	Swim 20 Run 20	Rest (stretch)	Bike 45	Run 30	Swim 30	Rest (stretch)	Bike 45
3 - 6	Swim 40 Run 30	Rest (stretch)	Bike 90	Run 40	Swim 60	Rest (stretch)	Bike 120
6 - 9	Swim 40 Run 40	Rest (stretch)	Bike 90	Run 60	Swim 60	Rest (stretch)	Bike 150
9 - 12	Rest (stretch)	Swim 60 (30 fast, 20 med, 10 slow)	Run 40 (20 sprint, 10 med, 10 slow)	Bike 120 (60 fast, 30 med, 30 slow)	Rest (stretch)	Swim 20 Run 20 Bike 30 Fast tempo	Bike 120 Race tempo

Many of us are anxious as our event day comes closer, and we often try to put in a few hard sessions. For small events, this isn't a problem, but for the long-distance ones it puts your body under unnecessary stress. It is best to **taper off**. I do this by lessening the distances in the days before my race. This is enough to keep my muscles alert and ready for the event, but does not exhaust them.

Finally, training through pain is never advised, nor is self-medicating. If you are experiencing niggles or performance issues, please seek a physiotherapist or medical practitioner sooner rather than later. Training through an injury will only cause permanent damage.

Good luck and have fun!

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