



THE ART OF TRIATHLON TRAINING

A proven **guide** for **your** triathlon **journey**

By **Dirk BOCKEL**, Ironman® Champion & Olympian.

Excerpts from the book

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This is the single step that starts the journey toward the finish line. We all begin here. We are mere mortals catching a glimpse of greatness out of the corner of our eye. A spark lights the fire and we are compelled to act, and ultimately jump into that fire. Doubt might creep in, but as part of the process, it fuels us forward as we construct the path to our own personal triumph.

This is the path that takes us to places where we will fulfill our destiny, bolster our confidence, find our peace, and find ourselves. We train and compete to prove that we are able, no matter the disability, no matter the aching muscles, no matter the mental stress and strain. We take our families along so our lives remain balanced and steady. Sometimes we trek solo because our story demands it. We struggle to reach the summit and amidst the struggle, our lives become enriched and expand. We come to the race with different motivations and abilities. Define your own, to fuel your journey...

...From the novice and the amateur, to seasoned age-grouper and professional. My goal in creating this book is to teach and guide you based on the knowledge I have accumulated over the many years that I have trained and raced all over the world. My intentions are to share every bit of insight with you so that you can apply it directly to your own personal blueprint. You can use the information in this book to fine-tune your current plan of action or to start from scratch to form your path to success in achieving your goals. Some of my suggestions might be different from your current approach, but trust in my experience and knowledge and you will become fitter, faster, and more successful than you have ever been, not only in triathlon, but also in life...

...Trust in the wisdom of my experience. I will provide you with draft as you stay on my wheel as we navigate the flyways and byways of triathlon training and racing. I'll share stories from my own experience that contain meaningful takeaways that will carry you to your own success. No secret will remain untold as I reveal all of the shortcuts, the roads less traveled and the wealth of my wisdom and understanding, proven by results, science, and a quarter of a century of experience in triathlon. Together we will dissect the world's toughest one-day sport and put you on the fast track to success. We will get you 100% prepared for your peak race, wringing out the value of every minute you spend training, doing things wisely and with your goal always in mind...

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Chapter 2 – Laying the Groundwork

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”
~*Benjamin Franklin*

The best advice I can give you at this stage in the game is that there is no such thing as over-preparing. It's in the planning stages that the rhythm of your race is revealed. It is my intention to give you the tools to create the strongest foundation for the test that is to come—race day.

There are no absolutes. Any advice that you get, needs to be filtered by your own life experience and personal priorities in order to be authentic and effective. However, good foundational planning creates the best possible solid ground for you to strike from, as you propel yourself as a triathlete. Consider the moral tale of Aesop's fable “The Ant and the Grasshopper”. The steadfast ant plans for the cold of winter, gathering food for the season, while the undisciplined grasshopper whiles away the summer with no regard for the consequences. Much like the coming winter for the ant, you know the trials ahead. Best not to keep company with the careless folly of the Grasshopper. Plan for the coming winter and your success will be evident.

Imagine you are building a new house. You don't begin the project by simply piling up bricks and hoping they will take shape. Once you decide that you want to build a house, you begin with a blueprint and plan for every phase of the process. The same applies to your preparation in training and competing. Let's begin constructing the blueprints for your successful journey to becoming a champion.

From the very first step, planning is king. Reducing the likelihood of easily avoidable mistakes will save you time and effort in the long run. Let's keep that in mind while we sit down together to plan your season. Do you have your pen ready? Taking some notes along the way will certainly help; now is the time to get serious. Let's use the power of action to get going and make use of the momentum that it gives you.

Where to Begin

Your current season should be your main focus right now. Whether you are in the middle of your race block, enjoying a winter break, or you are a complete newbie who is trying to learn the ropes before you jump in, you will find valuable information here that you can apply directly

and integrate into your current approach. Ideally you should take notes, write in the margins, and make this book your own so you are able to wring out 100% of your potential. In case you are reading this mid-season, be sure to limit your changes to small, well thought through adjustments and try not to interfere with your current plan too drastically. Just implement a slight course correction if needed, and save the big moves for next season.

While motivation is fresh in your mind, you have to lay down the plan for the road ahead. Let's differentiate between two types of planning here; short term planning, which includes your weekly schedule (also called the microcycle), and long term planning, which includes a yearly overview (the macrocycle). To get an overview, it makes more sense to look at the long-term plan. Where do you want to race and what are your mid and long term goals? We'll start by filtering out which of all your desired races should be your "main event" for next season. Once you write it down, we can start to build around your main event.

Next there are a litany of questions to consider for all of your races. Is there enough time to sign up? Are there limitations such as qualifying standards? Will you be able to just sign up and go or will you face some time constraints? Do you have to race the equivalent distance in order to qualify for this race, or is there no qualification needed? For example: Could you qualify in a half distance event for a full distance championship event? Rules change each year so it is important to keep up with the regulations. Do your research. Check online and, if needed, call the race organizer and get a clear overview of the race requirements. Then, if you have to, make adjustments and corrections in your plan accordingly. Think it through and take into account all possible constraints.

Once you are aware of the constraints you have to work within, ask yourself how you can get to the final goal. When you know what is required then the game plan to get there is much easier to map out. It just takes a bit of time and reading to clarify things and make the most logical approach.

Locking in Your Goals

What do you want to achieve? Setting an attainable goal for yourself is key here. Your goal should be realistic but also challenging. Do you want to be in the top $\frac{2}{3}$ of the race finishers? Top 100 participants? Or would you like to break your personal record, or improve your swim time? Do you want to finish your first ever long distance triathlon or do you want to place high enough to qualify for a championship event? Goals are as diverse as the people that create them. Your goal might seem tiny compared to someone else's, or gigantic compared to another's, and that is completely normal and perfect. Don't worry about what everyone else

thinks at this point—you are sowing the seeds of your future here and now is not the time to look left and right.

Now is the time to take some introspective moments to determine what is going to fuel your “tri-fire”. Listen to the challenge that is pulling on your heartstrings. Meet that challenge using your own compass to guide you; pure and authentic. Maybe you always had this dream in the back of your mind but didn’t really bite into it up until now because you didn’t know where to start. Or perhaps you just didn’t think it was possible. Well, it’s time to dream big. Pick something that motivates you when you envision it. You might be climbing the epic “Solarer Berg” at Challenge Roth, surrounded by thousands of spectators. Or maybe it is making it to the finish line of the most mythical race, The Ironman™ World Championships in Hawaii. Just about anything is possible with enough planning and hard work...

... I have found that the most important mental tool to use, specifically during training and before races, is visualization. It really is the strongest mental weapon in your artillery. Once your mind believes something, then your body will follow. Imagine your next race—maybe it is your peak race. By closing your eyes, you are fast forwarding the time and picturing yourself at the race. I find it even more productive to visualize while I am training, with eyes wide open, in a similar fatigued state as race day. I feel the pain, and prepare myself mentally for the suffering that’s to come. I envision myself experiencing the sights and sounds of the race course, going through transition, and running through the finish chute.

These images help to deal with the upcoming reality. You can go through the preparations, the transition set up procedure, the starting procedure or simply see yourself out on the course, performing and achieving your goal. Imagine it and live it in your “dreams”. This visualization process will help you to feel more at ease when it comes down to race day, as you already experienced it and have become mentally prepared.

The Mental Game in Action

In 2009, when I started racing Ironman™, I decided to shift my running stride from a short distance running style into a shorter much more frequent stride that was prevalent in long distance racing. The result was that I promptly got injured. I added way too many steps per minute to my stride cadence and I ended up with super tight calves, which later developed into plantar fasciitis (a nagging injury of the tendon underneath the foot, closely linked the calf muscles gastrocnemius and soleus). Basically, I couldn’t run for the last 7-8 weeks before my first ever Ironman™ race, in New Zealand. This is what I would consider very bad timing!

I adapted to my injury by replacing my run training with aqua jogging, cross training on the elliptical machine, and more mileage on my bike and swim. All looked okay until the last few

weeks before the race, where I started to struggle mentally. So, we decided to step up the mental game. My partner had the crazy idea of ordering me a gold medal and engraving it with "Ironman™ Champion". At first I felt terrible about having it on display because I thought I had to earn a win before I was able to hang it in my room. Then after giving it some thought I changed my mind and went ahead and hung it up next to my bed, where I looked at it several times a day. It was the first thing I saw in the morning and the last thing I saw before I fell asleep.

I used visualization techniques to imagine myself gliding through the clear water of Lake Taupo and exiting the water at the front of the pack, stripping my wetsuit off effortlessly, and mounting my bike to push through the crowd lined streets. I heard the sound of the spectators cheering me on during every run training session that I did through the roads of Taupo. Since I was able to train on the race course for 3 months leading up to the race, it was even easier for me to practice visualization and let the emotions and feeling of leading the race sink in on a daily basis.

Slowly, I started to accept the thought that I would actually be able to win the race, regardless of my running setbacks. Come race day, I was close, really close. I didn't quite make it to the very top that time around, but the quality of this experience fueled the momentum needed to make it to the podium, securing my Kona qualification slot. This was a win for me and it allowed me to win several races down the road. I still have that gold medal, and when I actually won my first Ironman™ I couldn't stop thinking about it. The best bet is to always be on top of your mental game, even when your body seems to be in less than optimal shape. Use mental tools to your advantage and they will be ever valuable for you along the path to your personal goals...

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Chapter 3 - Gear

“The expectations of life depend upon diligence; the mechanic that would perfect his work must first sharpen his tools.”

~Confucius

Think of me as your human guinea pig. I've worked with the best of gears and the worst of gears. It seems I've tried it all. This is the part where you benefit from the ins and outs of my experience finding the right gear. Let's put this puzzle together step by step.

The Tools of the Trade

It is vital to consider all aspects of your gear when training and competing for a triathlon. These tools, in some ways, are an extension of ourselves; acting as contact points between our feet and the trail, and bearing all of our weight, pedal stroke by pedal stroke. We have to honor our gear for what it does in allowing us to do what we love.

Because gear is so important, there is a lot of information out there for people like us, who are looking for the next big thing that will shave a few seconds (or minutes) off our race time. But, it isn't that simple. One of the biggest myths in our sport is that speed can be purchased. Alas, you can't buy speed. Some believe that if you have the most advanced products on the market you will get the golden ticket to becoming a champion—but don't fall for that marketing trap, and don't let your ego get in the way here. Today's triathlon market is flooded with gadgets and gizmos and it can be difficult to decide which products are really necessary and which can be left on the shelf.

I am of the opinion that it is not about having the most optimal gear, but about doing what we can with what we have, and using gear upgrades as incentives to work towards. When I raced my first triathlon in 1989 (boy, that sure was a while ago) I used my dad's neglected Peugeot road bike with downtube shifters. The bike was way too big for me but it was the best that we could do at the time. In that first race, I tackled the bike portion fairly well up until a rather large hill was staring back at me. It was so incredibly steep that I had to stop and get off the bike to walk up. Because I was a runner, I was convinced that I could run up faster than I could ride, so I got out of the pedals and sprinted, Peugeot anchor beside me.

On the top of the hill I jumped back on my blue stallion and kept pushing. It was my first race ever and I managed a 4th place, so I took that as a good omen and continued training for the next one. My lack of perfect gear didn't stop me from moving forward. If I would have waited until I got a fancy bike before I started to train for and race my first triathlon, then I probably wouldn't be sitting here writing this book!

Triathlon is booming and has gained share of the sports industry. It's big business, but that doesn't mean that you need to purchase all new gear in order to make it even bigger. Let's get you up to speed on what exactly is worth spending your money on, what will benefit your overall strategy for success...

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Chapter 4 - Training

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, therefore, is not an act but a habit.”

~*Aristotle*

...Cycling Training

The bike section of any triathlon race requires a mental toughness and stamina through the longest part of the race. You are required to reign in and redirect all of the fear and doubt that your mind throws at you for 4, 5 or as many as 8 hours. You sit with the burn of your efforts for such an extended amount of time that you begin to play with the voices in your head always chiming in with opinions. These are the conditions we remind ourselves of during our training.

Spending time in the saddle will be the most time consuming part of your triathlon journey. In the US, it is common for cyclists to drive out of town to a much quieter place to ride their bike. For a Euro, this is a pretty strange thing to do, since we just get on our bikes and go. This may be due to the fact that Europe tends to be more walkable and bikeable, and drivers are used to cyclists on the road, so there is less need to go to a remote area to ride. Of course no matter how you get it done, find the best possible way that works for you. If your city is a bit too crowded and the roads outside of town work better, then make the trip. This might involve a bit more planning and will add more time to your sessions.

Weigh the advantage of better road conditions against the time wasted traveling to a more desirable location to train. After doing this commute a few times, you will figure out how effective each option is for you and how much time is required. If you are venturing out of town, you should plan to have post-workout clothes with you and also some additional food and fluids. This will help you to recover faster while you drive back home. I prefer to start from home if there is a reasonable way to do so. I don't mind a bit of traffic as long and I am not stuck at too many red lights. For me everything is about effectiveness and efficiency, so I prefer to use the 45 minutes for recovery instead of driving.

The Finer Points of Bike Training

What is the measurement for improvement when charting 1000s of miles of bike training? To shave the minutes off your bike section, begin with an evaluation of a basic 20 minute time trial test. This will give you a baseline of what your abilities are in terms of wattage output. You have to make this 20 minute time trial test an "all out" endeavor. Hold back a bit when getting into the test but once you reach your maximum, stay strong and steady. Constant is the key word here. You are looking for your highest possible output for 20 minutes. This will give you an average watt output as a baseline. Set that as your base to measure your improvement and goal setting.

Most of your bike rides will be base rides. That means typically they range between 2-5 hrs, all in a steady pace with a lower average heart rate. There is nothing to it other than riding at base pace and getting the job done. We call it time in the saddle. Up until two weeks before race day I have really long tempo rides at race pace and also some shorter sessions that are much faster than my average race pace. The final two weeks are more for recovery, so not too much speed involved.

You'll start with your winter base mile training, then around spring time you should have accumulated quite some base miles in your legs and are ready to bolster. Typically 3 months of solid base training provides a proper platform to build on. From there on you will start adding a few tempo sessions to your normal training, which we call intervals. There is plenty of variety to make this interesting. You could do intervals in the form of hill repeats, which are usually done with a low cadence (around 60-65 rpms / rounds per minute). Focus on staying in the saddle and pushing a heavy gear uphill in order to increase your power output over time. I like those sessions a lot, as you don't have a super high heart rate, your watts are high and the training effect is great. When going uphill, it is much easier to hold the watts high compared to a flat, tempo ride...

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Chapter 6 - Race Day

... Make sure you know the conditions of the swim course on race day. For example, low tide means you have to run some distance until you begin your swim so a proper warm-up with a sprint and some jumps might be necessary. Keep in mind that if it's a deep-water start you still have to swim to the start line. For orientation reasons, check the position of the buoys and try to find the shortest passage for your swim. It's helpful to find a landmark within your line of sight of

the buoys, such as a house, a tower or a tree line. This will help you to find the buoy more easily during your swim when you are surrounded by a few others and all you see is white splash from the guys in front of you. I do that at every race, because even the race organizers in the kayak or on the stand up paddle board might not be in line with the next buoy. So it's up to you to make the proper orientation. Trust yourself here. You have to know the course.

When it's time to stop going over the logistics of the race itself, you will know. Your work is done and now it's time to put yourself on autopilot. You've got this. Focus and relax before you are sent off to begin the race. During the next several hours, you will be forced to focus on the current moment. The real beauty in racing is that it forces us to pay attention to where we are, and not to think too far ahead or behind. There are no shopping lists going through our minds or thoughts about your last conference call, there is only this moment in time. A focused mind is always operating in the background during the race. It is present and yet invisible all at once. If we try to think about what will happen 100 miles down the road, we will falter. In the last few minutes before the race begins, simply be present...

...Into the Fray

Now you are in the thick of it. You are engaged with the race. You are out there by yourself for the rest of the day. No outside assistance is allowed, no matter if you puncture a tire or if you cramp. That's good. It's a race. It's your race. I love to call it "man versus the elements". Control the controllable and let the rest be. Go with the flow and accept how things unfold during your day. There will be things you simply can't change and so why waste precious energy on it? As you navigate the unexpected, always be looking to get back on track. Finding that rhythm again is where your focus should be when things go south. There will be plenty of ups and downs and there will be unknown territories and challenges awaiting you. I think we forget that this is the experience we trained for. Move through it. Always bear in mind, it's just a swim, a bike ride and a run...

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Chapter 9 - The Mindful Champion

... We are taught that a life well lived requires us to follow our dreams. What becomes your passion tends to define your life and qualify your existence. With the ebb and flow of competition and the writing and rewriting of your triathlon resume, an understanding develops toward the wholeness of one's life story. Defining your life by punctuated moments of racing

successes and failures can leave us still unfulfilled. Perhaps delving into the twilight of my career will impart some wisdom to carry you through your current station of training and competition. It's these moments of clarity that cause our dreams to stretch out and encompass a greater narrative.

Transitions

With space to live and breathe without the constraints of training, you might have asked yourself the question "what is next" after completing your extensive analysis of the big milestone race? Are you planning your next adventure, or do you find yourself content with making that one big bucket race and are now moving on to something else? Regardless of the path you choose, once the accomplishment sinks in, our brain often starts to bring up a variety of questions...

"In every life there are events that reshape one's sense of existence. Afterward, all is different and the past is dimmed."

~Annie Proulx, Barkskins

Don't live in fear and later have all those regrets about your life. Now is the time to make the first step. You must have had fear starting your first race in triathlon but you still did it. You must have had doubts but you knew it was the right decision. It is always the battle between the rational mind and the emotional mind. Your rational mind tells you that this is what I want but then the emotional mind creeps in with fear and doubt. The emotional mind coaxes us do something closer to our comfort zone...

...Nobody will come knocking on your door to deliver all of the goals and aspirations you dream of in your life. You need to work for it. Life is always going to give us challenges. It's really in the first step, moving toward transformation, that the fear is overcome. Action is required and it always starts with the first step, no matter how big or small that step might be. Acting is the key. Don't start measuring it yet. That will automatically happen over time.

You will pass milestones on the way to the big goal. There will be ups and down included, and the road ahead might be bumpy (it usually is, sorry). Preparing for that and accepting this fact will make it all much easier.

Through your triathlon training you have learned discipline and perseverance. Use this very valuable tool as you move in the direction of your life's purpose. You didn't stop in the middle of your workout, did you? Having a clear defined goal in mind taught you to follow your dream and never to give up. Some triathletes say: Death before DNF (Did Not Finish [the race])

that may sound a bit extreme but it shows the dedication of the breed of super athletes that we belong to. We want to achieve it and so we will work for it

Above all, we set out to achieve something crazy and superhuman. Finishing and succeeding at such a grueling event should give you the necessary confidence to tackle every area of your life that you can imagine now. We taught ourselves how to become a champion and this is where we allow that to follow us into every aspect of our lives. The journey never ends. The thread is never broken...

THANK YOU

for reading the excerpt from the book.

The entire 5 book package will be available only on my webpage
www.liveandletri.com

The three written books will be available on Amazon & Kindle starting October 1st.

More announcements shortly on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram

Yours,

Dirk Bockel