

Race Day Prep and Tactics, for Beginners

By Rich Strauss

First of all, unless you plan to make a living doing this sport, it's all about having fun. Show up to your first race as prepared as possible, but don't forget that it's supposed to be fun and that you are supposed to make mistakes. Expect it and laugh them off.

Race Week: I don't want you to do anything particularly special the week of the race. Treat race day as just another training event. Having said that, I know you won't take my advice, so here we go:

Gear List

1. If in doubt bring it. You might not need it, but as a beginner, you'll drive yourself crazy thinking you might need it. Why fight it? Bring the sink if it makes you feel prepared.
2. Pack everything on Wednesday, triple check your gear, put it in a closet and forget about it.

Swim

1. Wetsuit
2. Swimsuit or Race Clothes
3. Swim Cap
4. Goggles
5. Pam, Body Glide, or other anti-chafing ointment

Bike

1. Bike
2. Bike Shoes
3. Helmet
4. Spare Tube
5. Tire Levers
6. Bike Gloves
7. Pump
8. Water Bottles W/Sports Drink

Run

1. Shoes
2. Socks or Vaseline
3. Running hat
4. Race number belt
5. Running shorts

Other

1. Sunglasses
2. Race Packet
3. Watch or Heart rate monitor
4. Marker
5. Sandals
6. ID/USAT card
7. Towel

8. Rinse bucket
9. Sunscreen
10. Lotion

Night Before

1. Have a good, sensible meal. Now is not the time to try some magic elixir or anything else funky.
2. Put this on your mirror: *Slow is smooth, smooth is fast*. An action performed smoothly and deliberately is faster than an action that is forced and rushed. All day, especially in T1, take a few seconds to gather yourself then go about the task at hand. Chances are you will make fewer mistakes and be faster in the end.
3. Go to be bed early.

Race Day

1. Wake up early.
2. Read mirror: everything today is slow and smooth. Relax, take deep breaths, and make slow deliberate movements. Get into a rhythm and let it carry you to the race.
3. Have a large breakfast, 600-800 calories. You want to replace all of the calories that you burned while you were sleeping. If you think you will be nervous and unable to eat a big meal, either wake up early, eat, and go back to sleep, eat less, or maybe use a meal replacement drink.
4. Plan your morning so that you get to the race very early. You can fix a lot of problems if you have time to fix them. Show up pressed for time and you'll just be rushed.
5. Set up your transition area and then ask someone to take a look and offer any suggestions.
6. Check to make sure your bike is in the proper gear.

Start time minus 40-50 minutes

1. Go for a very short run, specifically to accomplish the following: walk the transition area, from swim entrance to your bike, then from your bike to the bike exit. Know where your rack is, how to get there, and where to head once you have your bike. Also, walk from the bike entrance to your rack, so you know where to go when you come in from the bike.
2. Find the entrance to the transition area from the bike course. Walk it and look for hazards or landmarks. Don't rely on course markings or workers to tell you where to go. Learn it yourself. You are responsible for knowing where to go.

Start time minus 20 minutes

1. Take one last look at all of your gear: the essentials are helmet, sunglasses, shoes (bike and run), and bike in proper gear.
2. Put on your wetsuit, spray the legs with Pam, don't get any on your hands.
3. Suggestion: wear your race singlet under your wetsuit. Trying to put on lycra over wet skin is a disaster.
4. Walk to race start. When you get there, ask someone to zip you up.

Start time minus 10-15 minutes

1. Get in the water and warm-up.
2. If navigation looks like it might be tricky, get in earlier. Specifically, pick out navigation markers above the horizon, and try to get a view of the exit from the water.
3. If it is an ocean swim, practice 2-3 surf entries and **ask the lifeguards if there is any current**. You may want to adjust your start location or planned line.
4. Get out of the water 3-5 minutes before start.
5. Self-seed: if you know you are a strong swimmer, get in front. If a weak swimmer, get in the back or to the side. Use commonsense.

Swim

1. If it is a large, mass start, expect to be knocked around. It helps to keep your head down.
2. Unless you are a very strong swimmer, avoid the temptation to sprint at the start. Conserve your energy and be patient. The purpose of the swim is to get you on the bike. Just relax and concentrate on [technique](#), and on being as efficient as possible.
3. Things to help you relax: focus on breathing, make sure to exhale continuously between breathes. Count your strokes. Try to ignore everyone else.
4. Navigation: lift your head to sight every 6-12 strokes. If you know that you tend to swim to one side, put someone on that side.
5. Drafting is legal, use it to reduce how hard you work and for navigation.
6. When you are 200-300 yards out from shore, begin to kick more and think about what you are going to do when you exit the water.

T1

1. Slow is smooth, smooth is fast. Slow, well-rehearsed movements, rather than rushed, inefficient movements.
2. Expect to make mistakes. If you do, fix it and carry on.

Bike

1. Expect your heart rate to be very high: you have no blood in your legs and now you are asking them to work. They need some time to get started. You can help this by spinning at a high cadence.
2. Make an effort to go slow the first 5 minutes: spin, breathe deeply, and let your heart rate settle in.
3. After 5 minutes, shift gears and start racing!!
4. Race hard and smart: best strategy is to negative split the bike, second half faster than the first half. Consciously hold something back the first half, and then turn it up the second half.
5. Try to relax, have good [cycling form](#), and use every opportunity to conserve your energy.
6. Obey all race rules: safety first.
7. For a sprint race, you should really only need to drink maybe a half bottle of water or sports drink. Regardless, practice in training first.
8. 1-2 minutes out from the transition area, it's time to quit racing on the bike and time to start preparing for the run: get out of the saddle and stretch, especially your calves and hip flexors.

T2

1. Same drill as T1: slow is smooth, smooth is fast.

2. Expect to make mistakes and if you do, fix them and carry on.

Run

1. Expect your legs to feel very awkward: take short strides and conserve your effort so that your body has some time to adjust. It usually takes about 5-10 minutes to feel as "normal" as you are going to feel.
2. Negative split.
3. Don't forget to smile for the finisher's photo!!



Triathlon