

Train Your Head

By Rich Strauss

"In war, the moral is to the physical as three is to one." Napoleon Bonaparte

In war, a smaller, well-trained, motivated, and aggressive force can often defeat a much larger, unmotivated, demoralized force. "It's not the size of the dog in the fight; it's the size of the fight in the dog."

I think that focusing on the training volume necessary to finish an IM is misleading and misses the more important essentials for a successful day. On race day, you race much more with your head and your heart than with your feet.

Rich's Simple Formula for an Ironman Finish:

- Create a conservative training progression that leads you to the successful accomplishment of the following training "milestones:" 4k swim, 6-7 hour bike, 2.5-3 hour run. Complete these milestones at least once before race day. If you can get more in, good on you.
- Show up to race day healthy and well-rested.
- When the gun goes bang, start swimming.

Head Training

Everything else is about your head and your heart and what you have done to train these two organs.

There are two types of "Head Training:" race day knowledge and race day problem solving. Race Day Knowledge encompasses a solid race day nutrition, hydration, and pacing plan. This plan has been developed, honed, refined, and REHEARSED at every long training opportunity. It's not enough to know what, when, and how much to eat, but also WHY. This "why" brings us to Race Day Problem Solving. If you know the why of what you are doing, you can better fix things when the plan goes to hell. Problem solving also includes your mental state on race day. Most people call it "racing in the moment," only control what you can control. My process is the OODA Loop: Observe, Orient, Decide, Act.

There are two kinds of Heart Training: Distance Perspective and the Eye. When you begin your IM training, the volumes that you will have scheduled for yourself will seem overwhelming. "How will I ever be able to ride 100 miles? Or run 18? Or do them both in the same WEEK?" But a funny thing happens on the journey to your Finisher's Medal: "It ain't so bad."

As your training distances get bigger and bigger, once insurmountable goals become mere training events. A 60 mile bike is no longer a huge obstacle, but a nice morning with some friends. Your "normal" weekday run goes from 30 minutes to 60. Before work. You don't even think twice about it. In short, all distances become much shorter and manageable, making THE distance less and less intimidating. "Been there, done that."

The Eye

The Eye is the window to the heart. Your heart is what gets you across that line. You can see it on race day. Some peoples' Eyes are happy, taking in everything around them and enjoying the day. These people draw on the positive energy around them to pull them to the finish line. Other peoples' Eyes are cold steel, focus, determination, a machine that will not stop, for anything, until the mission is accomplished. These people put themselves into a "place," a mental state that solves the problem of pain and discomfort by using it, enjoying it. Whatever your Eye is, you train it months in advance by challenging yourself, succeeding, and then reassessing yourself.

Make a big training day something special. Rehearse your pre-race carbo-loading plan, wake up at the same time, wear the same clothes, and use the same bike setup as race day. Complete an extraordinary milestone event and then pat yourself on the back. Relish the great journey that you have undertaken and congratulate yourself for stepping up to the plate. What you are trying to do is very unique. Remind yourself of this and say, "If I can do THAT, then maybe I really CAN do 140!!"

You want to step into the ring with the quiet confidence earned by having already conquered almost everything that you will experience on race day. This is the Eye.