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Intermediate Bike Training News

Create a Sustainable Healthy Lifestyle

January 16, 2008

Dear Rick,

2008 has started off as a busy year for me. I apologize for not writing weekly as I know a lot of you eagerly await each issue. For those of you who have been through the yearly cycle before you know that I write more frequently as we get into the busy part of the riding season and there is more to write about. We have now entered the 4th month of the 2008 training season. Now that I have the attention of you newbies I will explain the training so that you won't panic.

We begin the training season on October 1st. I chose that date deliberately for those of us in Denver who like to prepare for the ski season. October training consists of basic core exercises. There is a plethora of books on the subject so just pick one you like. Basically, it's virtually impossible to overwork your core except for the muscles of your lower back. Be very careful with those. The problem is that you won't find out they are overworked until several hours after you exercise. November training consists of more advanced core exercises where we focus on controlled breathing during exercise. Pilates or Yoga exercises are great for this month. For those with a little more advanced fitness December is a time to work on calisthenics and plyometrics. These come in the form of ski fitness, power pump, and other classes. Again there are lots of books on the subject.

WARNING: plyometric exercises are very intense if done properly. The average recreational cyclist will have no use for them. They help the advanced cyclist accelerate the bike rapidly to chase a breakaway. To be safe don't even attempt these exercises until your second training season unless supervised by a qualified fitness trainer.

A small group of cyclists follows my cycling-specific weight training program from Sept thru Feb. It is designed to develop muscular endurance using very high repetitions. While most weights are set lower than for body building the leg press weight can approach 2-4 times your body weight. You can contact me to arrange an hour long session if you are interested in learning the routine.

I have seen a lot of people train over the years and study fitness on a daily basis. I believe most people never develop their full physical potential for several reasons. 1) Too complex - academia has conditioned us to believe that anything worth doing must be complex. I see all sorts of programs specifying periodized training, sets, reps, dozens of exercises, etc. Yes, you need to do this for the last 3-5% of performance when competing. For most of us keep it simple. Navy Seal basic training is situps, pushups, pullups, running, and swimming. Do something every day and increase the volume each week. Not real hard and they're in amazing shape. 2) Not Intense Enough - people who have been geeky most of their lives (like I was) may be shocked to find water pouring out of their skin when they first start exercising. Gasping for breath doesn't help much either. The best thing about training with a coach for a few weeks to get started is that they can help you exercise at the proper volume, intensity, and frequency for your level of fitness. They can also reassure you that you won't get hurt and will live through intensity that you are not used to. 3) Too Intense - the other common problem of the weekend warrior is trying to make up for years of declining fitness within the first week of starting a new program. This usually results in injury, suffering, and demotivation as you wrongly confirm to yourself that you are out of shape and will never get back into shape again. When I have dropped people down to 2-3 days per week of working out from 6-7 their fitness usually increases exponentially within a few weeks. This is because you cannot exercise at your optimal intensity each session if you are fatigued from overtraining. Also, your body adapts to exercise during REST. If you keep tearing it down just as it starts to recover then you don't make any progress.

BOTTOM LINE: if you are starting out keep your routine simple. Do a few core exercises every day. Do other exercises / sports 2-3 times per week but do them with perfect technique and with reasonable intensity. What's reasonable? Hire a coach for one session.

About 18 of us have already ridden a Century (100 mile) ride. The New Year's Day Century was rescheduled for January 5th due to weather. The ride took place in winds of 25 mph gusting to 38. This is the last month for the "Show and Go" rides. We will start riding specific routes in February. The RMCC printed schedule is available. Pick up one from a ride leader at one of the ride starts. My personal schedule is available on the www.midlifecycling.com website (see link below). It is a subset of the RMCC schedule and you can get an idea of how I plan my rides for the season. Riding just once a weekend I don't want to do just climbing rides every weekend for several months. At some point we have to go to flat ground and work on speed also. For those who ride both days of the weekend and some during the week climbing every week is not as much of a problem.

FINAL THOUGHTS: it's easy to get excited and overtrain. As your fitness increases it is easier to exercise more which increases your fitness and makes it easier to exercise even more. At some point you will be able to keep up with the top club riders for a while at the start of a ride. But this can give you false confidence. They are just warming up and you are running close to max effort. They drop you and you get discouraged. Remember, most of us are just trying to improve our health so that we live long lives with hopefully no serious health problems. Some of us want to develop above-average fitness so that we can lead more active lives. It is not unusual to attain cardiovascular fitness that is 20 years younger than your chronologic age. A few of us diehards want to maximize our fitness but within the time constraints that family and career impose on us. And, finally a few fanatics will go on to compete.

So relax and let fitness come to you at a pace that is natural for your body and lifestyle. Compare yourselves to other cyclists **ONLY** to see what is possible and to set your next goal. Stop living vicariously through Lance and be grateful for having (or soon to have) fitness that is better than the majority of the people around you. Have a great week!



Rick Russon

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