

With Much Regret, Another Season Draws to a Close

by Mikael Hanson

If you are anything like me, the arrival of fall elicits mixed emotions. Sure, the turning of the leaves signals the much-anticipated start of the football season and the approach of another World Series, it also means the days are rapidly growing shorter and the morning air has that edge that can only mean Winter is knocking on the door. While the month of October has many fine selling points, unless you are doing a fall marathon (god bless your souls!), late October means that yet another Triathlon season is drawing to a conclusion and the reflection period can officially begin.

Regardless how your racing season ended up (good, bad, or just plain ugly), one thing everyone needs come November/December is good old fashion rest. Inside Triathlon magazine recently did an interview with multi-sport legend Ken Glah (who successfully completed his 21st Hawaii IM this month). In the interview, Ken outlined his five steps to racing longevity and while we all may not have racing resumes quite as impressive as Ken Glah, that does not mean we can't benefit from his years of wisdom (so I thought there were worth repeating here).

- 1. **Enjoy your training** – this is the only reason to be involved in our sport, so find the aspects of training you like the most and focus on those.
- 2. **Enjoy the races** – which may come from the sheer thrill of competition, but also doing races in different destinations is a great way to include family and friends.
- 3. **Be realistic** – if you are in the sport for many years, it is important to adjust your goals from year to year, making sure they are attainable (as unreachable goals will only disappoint and decrease your enjoyment).
- 4. **Don't just train** – While the three main disciplines will dominate your time, engaging in other activities will keep you going for the long term (such as regular massages, weight training, yoga, pilates, and stretching).
- 5. **Take time off** – yes, training and racing are addictive, but it is critical to have recovery time in your schedule as well as planned time off during the year. You'll never last in this sport if you don't have a rich personal life outside of triathlon.

How to approach the off-season? Let's begin with tip number five from above. The first step many of us fail to take is the brief, yet complete off-season break. This break should be a period of five to ten days in where one does not worry about hill repeats, weekly running mileage, mile splits, or exotic Brick workouts. Leave the Triathlon toys at home and take some time to enjoy your family and friends. Go to a football game, take a drive in the country, go for a hike in the hills (yes, some form of mild exercise is okay), or just have a beer or three. Reward yourself for a successful season. This is also a great time to drop the bike off at a local shop for that end of the year tune-up, which will help remove the temptation of riding for the duration of the cleaning. As for myself, I eagerly look forward to this period to let the body begin healing all of those small aches and pains collected over the summer – and trust me after nearly twenty races, they add up (my 2004 race tally so far: 2 cross-country ski races, 3 biathlons, 3 running races, 4 bike races, and 7 triathlons).

Once your mini-break is over, it is time EASE back into training, with an emphasis on the word EASE! With over five months before the start of the 2005 triathlon season, there is no need to rush into things. However, on the flip side, one must realize the importance of building a solid foundation in the early season (Dec to Feb). Take a page from Lance Armstrong's training, as he has often said that the Tour de France is won in December and not July. Before beginning your early season work, take a hard look at your 2004 season. What worked in your training? What didn't work? Where were your strengths and weaknesses? How did your fitness hold up over the season? And finally, what are your goals for the 2005 season? Only after you have accurately answered these questions, can you begin to build your 2005 program.

Use the early season to focus on your weaker sports. For me that means leaving the bike alone for a few extra weeks while I focus on some longer endurance runs and a few extra sessions in the pool. December/January/February is also a great time to try your hand at a little cross-training outside of the three disciplines. Cross-country skiing, roller blading, and hiking are all great endurance building activities, while yoga and pilates can help with your core strength and flexibility – all things we begin to lose as we get older.

The off-season typically means lower training volumes for most of us, as we slowly rebuild our fitness levels as the season approaches. Fewer four hour plus bikes rides past Nyack, means less of a need for that Krispy Kreme doughnut in the fuel tank. While I am a self-proclaimed doughnut junkie in the summer months, one must exhibit some self-restraint in the dead of winter. Some weight gain over the holidays is expected and normal, however we don't want to over do it (ala Jan Ullrich – who is a big fan of his mother's baking come winter). A rule of thumb is to try and avoid weight gains of ten percent or more on your frame (15lbs on a 150lb frame), as those extra pounds will come back to haunt you if they are still hanging around in June. By no means does this mean we should starve ourselves during the holidays, just pay close attention to the soda and

alcohol intake, leave the dinner rolls for the in-laws, try avoid eating dinner after 8pm, perhaps consume a tad less pasta for dinner, and the one that kills me – less Krispy Kreme breakfasts!

Remember, while we are not professional athletes, we all share a small obsession for our chosen sport and the lifestyle that accompanies it, so rest and train smart so you can enjoy a lifetime of racing success!