

## Positive Spin on Injuries

by Mikael Hanson

After months of enduring arduous sessions at the track, logging countless miles on the bike, and completing every imaginable BRICK combination known to man, my day of reckoning had arrived. It was Saturday July 26th and I found myself in Michigan for the Great Lakes Duathlon Championships. After a surprising fifth place finish in last summer Midwest Duathlon Championships, I was eager to return to America's heartland for another go at it.

Unlike the extreme heat and humidity that plagued last year's race, the conditions this year were perfect - clear skies and a comfortable 70 degrees. About 200 toed the line in the duathlon and another 400 lined up along the lake for the start of the triathlon all in the back woods of central Michigan. At 8am sharp, the horn sounded and we were off in a blur of shaved limbs. The distances for the duathlon were a two-mile run, a nineteen-mile bike, finishing with a five-mile run. The opening run began on a narrow wooded trail, before dumping us out on a flat, tree-line country road. The pace was extremely fast in the beginning (all those all-American cross-country runners in the Midwest I guess), and I struggled to hang close to the lead pack of ten or so runners, hitting the 1-mile marker in a blistering 5:35. After calming down a tad, I arrived in T1 with a time of 11:30, good enough for 12th place. Not having to change to biking shoes (love those duathlon platforms!), I passed a few in transition, then made my way out on the bike course. Despite some hefty side winds, I crept up to fifth place on the bike by the time I returned to T2 (although a few top triathlon finishers rode by me like I was standing still, always a blow to the ego!). My effort on the bike left my legs a tad rubbery for the final five-mile run, but I forged ahead hoping I had built up enough of a gap on the bike to hold on for a top five finish. All seemed to be going well as I approached the first water station at mile one, however on the very next step, I felt a sharp bolt of pain shoot up my right thigh and my leg nearly buckled as my foot hit the pavement. The pain was as severe as I have ever felt and I am sure my next few steps looked more like a hobbled 100m sprinter after pulling a hamstring than a duathlete. My day was over.

Sitting in the hotel later that day with a bag of ice on my leg, I could only wonder what went wrong. Freak injury? Or did it stem from something else, something far more sinister (like over training or overuse?). Or was it the Multi-sport gods telling me a break was in order?

I am the first to admit that my passion for racing (in any form) runs a tad close to obsession. On any given weekend over the course of the summer, I can list nearly every biathlon/triathlon/road race/bike race being held in a 200-mile radius. When my wife asks me what we are doing next week, my response commonly goes something like this; "Well, next week is the final week of my building phase, before I can begin to taper, so what ever we are planning, it has to include my bike. So what did you have in mind honey?" Obsessive? Perhaps, but not when you consider I used to live by the belief that 'easy days' were for wimps, because somewhere, someone was putting in the extra miles and when you met that person they will kick your arse. Older and hopefully a bit wiser, I now know that this frame of mind is definitely not true.

Now that I have reached the exalted mid-thirties, I live by a different mantra - Race hard, Rest often. Why the change of heart? Looking back over the past few years, I find myself recalling seasons based not on certain athletic achievements, but on key injuries. Try these on for size: A bout of pneumonia in 2000 (which put me in the hospital for a couple days), plantar fasciitis and a right hamstring strain for the early part of 2001, which morphed into a left hamstring strain for the start of 2002 season. This year is not even over yet, and I can count a mild case of tendinitis in left hip and now the groin/thigh strain! While my list of personal ailments is long and illustrious, the ironic thing about each of them was the fact that I was able to battle back rather quickly and in many cases post PRs within a few months of the injury (I set a PR in the 5K this June - a mere four-weeks after ending physical therapy for my hip!). Crazy!

What my ramblings are trying to underscore is the simple fact that REST is a key component to every training routine. Beginning with a micro look at an individual training week, one should have at least one day of complete rest, in addition to 1 or 2 days of 'easy' training. Monday's are usually a great day to take off as many of us race over the weekend or if not racing, put in the extra hours of endurance

work. Also, one should try to avoid grouping together more than three 'hard' days in a row. My typical week looks something like this; Monday – rest, Tuesday – hard day of running or biking (speed work/hill repeats), Wednesday – moderate day on the bike, Thursday – hard day usually comprising a BRICK workout (run/bike/run), Friday – easy workout of either running or biking, with Saturday and Sunday reserved for racing or long endurance workouts.

Expanding our focus from a one-week block to more of a macro period, athletes should try to schedule a 'recovery week' once every month. A recovery week usually has all the same components of a normal training week, just the duration and intensity is reduced by 30% to 50%, allowing your body a chance to recover and build upon the prior weeks' work. Expanding the focus even further to a yearly schedule, athletes should look build-in at least two 'mental breaks' during the calendar year. Typically one comes at the end of the year/season, where I suggest everyone take at least one to two-weeks off. Mine usually begins minutes after the November Turkey Trot race in Philadelphia; to ensure I reach the dinner table with no underpinnings of guilt for what will transpire. The other break I squeeze in mid-summer, after the rush of early season races in May and June, but before the late season classics in September and October. Late July (or early August in my current case) is a good time to work in a four to six-day break. Now it is important (more so at the end of the year) that during your 'time-off' you stay away from the bike and/or running shoes, but this does not mean you have to remain completely inactive. Try a bit of cross training to stay active. Hiking in the fall, cross-country skiing in the winter, or golf in the summer all fit the bill. Ironically in my hobbled state in late July, I threw the running shoes in the closet and pulled out the golf clubs – and actually posted some of my best scores ever (which means breaking 100 for me).