

Get Started on the Right Foot— Seven Early Season Tips for a Successful Year

Set Goals: Setting 1-3 main goals for the season will help you train with a purpose. Knowing what you want to achieve (specific time for a race or leg of a race, qualifying for an event, weight loss, etc.) helps you plan for your workouts. You need to ask yourself, “What do I need to do in my daily, weekly, monthly training to reach my goal?” To learn more about appropriate goal setting, check out these two articles, *Goal setting (part one)* and *Goal setting (part two)*.

Make a plan: Once you have set your goals, work backwards from your “A” races (most important) and plan your season—set your training hours per week, design your workouts with a specific purpose (endurance, recovery, muscular endurance, etc.), be sure include rest days and rest weeks (one “off” week--reduced volume and intensity—for every 2-3 weeks “on”), balance “hard” (long or intense) workouts with “recovery” workouts. Remember to ease into your plan, slowly building frequency, duration and intensity—too hard, too much, too soon can lead to burn-out or injury.

Keep a log: A training log, either online or with pencil and paper, is a great way to keep track of your progress. An up-to-date log will allow you to look at your data to see what works (you are staying injury free and gaining fitness) or what doesn’t (your fitness is stagnant, an injury pops up or over-training occurs).

Be prepared: Most everyone has time constraints when balancing family, work and training, and you need to use your time wisely. Be prepared for your upcoming workouts by getting ready ahead of time. Have an early AM swim?—pack your swim gear bag the night before, set the coffee pot, have an easy quick snack (bar, Boost, Ensure, banana) ready to grab and eat on the way to the pool. Doing an indoor ride on your trainer, stationary or spin bike at home?—have your indoor training area all set-up and your bike ready to ride (see the article, *Indoor Training—Trainer and Treadmill Combination Workouts*, for tips on setting up your trainer area). Heading out for a run at lunch time or before or right after work?—check the weather the night before, so that you have the appropriate clothing at hand. If you train in a cold environment, check out the article *Cold Weather Tips*.

Hire a coach: New to multi-sport? Did not progress as well as you had hoped last season? Stepping up to a new race-distance? Then you may want to consider hiring a coach for this season. Professional coaches can bring the structure, discipline, accountability and guidance that you need to reach your goals.

Work on your weaknesses: It is easy and comfortable to do what we are good at—choose a performance weakness that you have (hill climbing, run turnover, swim technique, etc.) and dedicate time each week to build your weakness into one of your strengths.

Strengthen your core: A strong core helps you to maintain proper body alignment in the water, helps maintain the aero position on the bike and helps maintain proper posture during the run. In short, a strong core can help you maintain proper form, which in turn can make you more efficient, which makes you faster. Be sure to dedicate at least 2-3 training session each week, just 10 to 20 minutes, to strengthen the muscles of your abdomen and back. See the documents on core body weight exercises, core medicine ball exercises and core Swiss ball exercises for some of my favorite routines.