

## Transitions: The Fourth Discipline

I believe in the basics: attention to, and perfection of, tiny details that might commonly be overlooked. They might seem trivial, perhaps even laughable to those who don't understand, but they aren't. They are fundamental to your progress—they are the difference between champions and near champions. - John Wooden

Even though John Wooden is best known for being a great basketball coach, his quote rings true in triathlon, especially with the frequently overlooked portion of the race— *transitions*. These connecting segments of multisport events are often not given the thought and practice that they deserve, and a failure to understand their pivotal role in the bigger picture of a race can result in a disjointed and often disappointing performance. Transitions should be viewed as a seamless part of your complete race, not an isolated entity. Like a flip turn in swimming, transitions are at once the end of one section of the race and the beginning of another.

Frequently, races are won and lost in the transition area. Take a look at some race results and check out the transition times of the top competitors, and you will generally find that these top finishers have the fastest transition times. From time to time we see race results where a competitor has been out-swum, out-biked and out-run only to prevail by seconds at the finish line. "How can this be?" you ask. Simple—the runner-up was out-transitioned.

Use the eight points listed in this article and the transition equipment list to help refine your transitions, and watch the seconds (or for some, minutes) melt away.

- 1. Less is more**—Bring only what you will need for your race into the transition area. Too many pieces of unnecessary "stuff"— chairs, coolers, bags, tubs of water -- can clutter your area and be a hazard to you and your competitors. Have a list of your specific transition needs and, the evening before your race, lay everything out and check the items off as you place them in your transition bag.
- 2. Have a plan**—Mentally rehearse your movements through transition. Before you even get to your area, you should know in which order you will take off and put on equipment—it should be automatic. Work on a mantra for each transition: "Shoes, helmet, glasses, number-belt, bike, go!"
- 3. Be quick, but don't hurry**—Be calm and purposeful in your movements. Rushing around will just cause you to fumble with your equipment (slowing you down), or worse, to forget something. How often have we seen a runner heading back into the transition area for his race number or a runner heading out of transition with his bike helmet still on?
- 4. Expect the unexpected**—If something goes wrong (e.g., a piece of equipment is not where you put it or you arrive at your bike and a tire is flat...), don't let a "roadblock" halt your race. Have a plan for these situations, take care of them calmly, and keep on racing.
- 5. Mind your manners**— Transition areas are often very tight, so keep your equipment in your area and try not to take up too much space. Be sure that you re-rack your bike in your original spot and that you grab your equipment, not *your* neighbor's. This past season, one of our athletes noticed that his feet hurt a bit during the run portion of his race. It was not until he returned home that he noticed he had put someone else's running shoes on—same model, different size. Ouch!

**6. X marks the spot**—Use a brightly colored towel on which to place your equipment and note landmarks around the transition area that will help you locate your spot. Balloons or flags/bandanas placed at the end of your rack are also helpful in locating your rack, but do not go overboard. Your best bet is to count the racks to your section—balloons can go flat and flags can disappear. Precious seconds can be lost while you are searching for your spot.

**7. Know the flow**—Walk through the transition area several times from the swim-exit-to-your-bike-to-the-bike-exit, and then from the bike-entrance-to-your-spot-to-the-run-exit so that you familiarize yourself with the flow of the transition area. This way you are sure to take the shortest and fastest route. Also, be aware of where the bike mount/dismount line is located. Your speedy transition could be nullified by a time penalty if you mount too soon or dismount too late.

**8. Practice makes perfect**—Practice transitions prior to race-day. Just as you work on other aspects of your racing, you need to rehearse your transitions prior to race-day. Work on wetsuit peeling, running with your bike, mounts and dismounts, racking and changing equipment. It takes practice to execute these actions smoothly, quickly and safely; and the more you practice the more transitions will become a seamless part of your race. Remember what Coach Wooden said, “Attention to, and perfection of, tiny details are the difference between champions and near champions.”

#### **Transition Check List**

- Race suit
- Swim cap
- Goggles
- Wetsuit
- Towel
- Bike
- Shoes
- Helmet
- Sun glasses
- Number belt
- Water bottles and race fuel/gels
- Running shoes
- Hat

Additional items that you may need:

Socks, photo ID/USAT license, bike pump, tool kit, anti-fog for your swim goggles, duct tape, zip ties, body lube, extra clothes for a cold race (arm warmers, gloves, etc.), safety pins, thin rubber bands, extra set of goggles, an extra swim cap, and sunscreen.

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