

Over-Training, a Recipe for Disaster!!

Over-training, by far, from my experience of coaching 500+ athletes over 7 years now, is the number one mistake! Let me give you two quick examples (names are changed to protect the innocent).

Fred - During a consultation meeting a couple years ago, "Fred" said that he was training for Sprints. I discussed his current training plan and he was actually training 20+ hours a week...for a Sprint?!? My response was "Ouch!" I asked him why he was training that much and he said his buddy told him to. I cut him back to the proper amount of hours and he was as happy as a clam, not to mention a lot faster and, less fatigued and better recovered. To give you an example for weekly Sprint training you should be in the ballpark of about 5-7 hours a week (swim/bike/run). Olympic training will be around 10+/- hours a week. If you're racing sprint distance, and want to train at an Olympic training level you'll likely be fine since the chance of over-use injury is pretty low.

Barney - "Barney" signed on a couple years back to get help in training for IMCDA (Ironman Canada). I wrote his training plan for him in mid-December and the race was in late June. When he got the plan he was quite angry with me. I asked about his hostility and he questioned why I was having him train so little at the beginning? He did have a good base and some Olympic experience, so for December and January I planned his weekly training around 9-11 hours and of course it would "build" up to 15-20 hours a week as we got closer to the race. He wanted to be training 20+ hours 6 months out, and I told him that was a recipe for disaster! At that high of a sustained rate of training the risk of injury is extremely high, emotional distress is extremely high, family distress is extremely high, and burnout is extremely high. I advised him to stick with the plan but he DID NOT. He chose instead to train at 20+ hours a week in December and January (5-6 months out from the event) by putting in several 100 miles rides in addition to his weekly long runs up to 20 miles long. You can probably guess that in late January he completely blew out his IT Band to the point he could not recover in time for his Ironman race in June. Unfortunate for Barney the lesson was learned the hard way! Was I sad for him? A little, but he brought it on himself by not listening to the advice of his coach...me.

For Half IM training you're looking at about 12-15 hours a week of training while full Ironman will build you up to 15-20 hours a week. Of course you're not doing 15-20 hours a week 6 months out before your race, but rather starting with a base phase, then build, then recover, then build again, recover, build even more, recover, then peak, then taper, etc.

"How you train" defines your goals too! Meaning, you WILL NOT train at a 110% effort with every workout. Again, injury and burnout will occur. Some weekly workouts will be at aerobic pace, some will be tempo work, some will be interval/speed-work, and some will be LSD (long, slow distance). It's amazing when you actually "calm down" a little with your work-outs, and not always giving it 110% how much better of an athlete you'll become. And...always train for a reason! Don't put in "junk mileage" just to get it in. You need to train each day for a purpose, a daily goal!

I know all this is very "generic" information without a lot of details to follow but I think you get the point.

Happy (and Smart) Training,

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