

Notes for USAT “Art and Science of Triathlon” Presentation:

“Coaching Beginner and Recreational Multi-sport Athletes”

Steven Jonas, MD, MPH, Copyright, 2014

Professor Emeritus of Preventive Medicine, School of Medicine, Stony Brook (NY)

University, author of Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals® and Duathlon Training and Racing for Ordinary Mortals®, and, formerly regular columnist for USA-T Magazine, presently regular contributor to the USAT Blog.

Las Vegas, NV, Sept. 13, 2014

Sept. 6, 2014

I. Why are you here?

II. The Conference theme: “Innovate, Communicate, and Achieve.” For those who do not do it already (which I presume is very few, if any of you), hopefully this session will help you follow through on the theme of this conference.

III. A Bit about Me:

USA-T has had a coach certification program in place for over ten years. I had the privilege of serving on the USA-T National Coaching Commission from 2000 to 2002, when this endeavour was getting underway. While I am not a triathlon coach, I am a Level I certified ski instructor and taught as “holiday help” during Spring Break at the Breckenridge Ski Area in Colorado for about 15-years. Reaching beginner skiers is rather different from coaching someone hoping to engage in distance-sport racing but there are certain similarities in determining the focus of one’s activities.

I think that you will agree with me that to date the central focus of much triathlon/duathlon coaching has been on performance: on going fast and going faster, while preventing injury and if it occurs, recovering from it as quickly as possible. Speaking as a 32-year participant in multi-sport racing who started out slow at the age of 46, with no athletic background other than in downhill skiing which I started as an adult, and has been getting slower ever since, I can say that going fast is great. I wish that I had the genetic

www.ordinarymortals.info

base for it and the time to do the speed-work to train up. But I have neither. Nevertheless I have had just a marvelous time in our sport, focusing on getting to the starting line (which I have done 240 times coming to the end of the 2014 season) and then crossing the finish line happily and healthily, as I like to say. I have done that in all my races but two of the five ironman-distance ones I started: those two that I didn't finish, running out of time on the marathon.

IV. Why Consider Coaching Beginners

The first question before us is: can beginners as well as more experienced multi-sport athletes benefit from coaching? Certainly, if they eventually want to eventually go fast the answer is "yes." As a certified ski instructor I know the importance of coaching right from the git-go, to, from the start, establish for both the physical and the mental aspects of the sport, the good techniques, attitudes, and understanding, and prevent the development of the bad ones. But further, can beginners who just want to have fun without necessarily being concerned with going fast, who want to get under the big tent that our sport offers for the fast, the slow, and the in-between, also benefit from coaching? For me, the answer is also "yes," which is what I am talking with you about today.

Certainly some coaches, including, I'm sure, some of you in this room, already coach beginners and have had success in doing so. Further, as our sport continues to grow at an increasingly rapid rate, it seems to me that there should be an expanding market for multi-sport coaches out there, beyond coaching beginners who are from the outset already focused on going fast. There are indeed plenty of beginners, and I see them at every race I do throughout the season, who are out there just to have fun, just to get thrill of crossing the finish line. It happens that for a significant number of them the goal is simply to cross the finish line "happily and healthily" as I like to say, and keep on doing so at somewhat regular intervals. In my view, they can use coaching too, from what is the minimum amount of training required for a Sprint, to how to correctly place one's running-shoe shod

foot on the bike pedal to get the most efficient down-stroke. The suggestion here is that, if you have not yet done so, you can tap into that expanding market by expanding your own horizon about what good coaching is about and who among your potential clients can benefit from it, if you add "how to simply have fun" as well as "how to go fast" to your coaching repertoire.

Of course, there is the primary focus of training for many coaches and their athletes: on "improving performance." As Andrew Hunt, MD, Medical Director of USAT, put in his 2008 article "It Hurts so Good," (USA-T Life, Fall 2008, p. 18): "The purpose of training is to push your cardio-respiratory, metabolic, and musculoskeletal systems out of their resting 'comfort zones' in order to induce adaptation that allow increased capacity. Higher capacity means better performance." "Better performance" in this context means going faster. And that certainly applies to many multi-sport athletes and probably the vast majority of your clients. But my guess is, and that's what this session is about, is that there is another group of athletes who can benefit from coaching, who are not performance oriented, but who can benefit from coaching. Market expansion anyone?

V. What is coaching? Here is the definition that I use: "Coaching is an art and a science, the purpose of which is to provide advice, instruction, and motivation-enhancement for both thought and action, with the primary objective of aiding the client in achieving the goals that they have set for themselves." What do you think?

VI. Primary tasks for coaching beginners (which I happen to think have a broader application, but you will have to comment on that).

A. Get to where the client is. Remember, at the outset of this session I asked "why are you here?" In my view, it is the same thing for coaching.

B. Goal-setting that will work for your athlete. What is it that they want to do, and why do they want to do it? Rational and realistic. The good coach understands

that the goals that will work for each client are theirs, not the coach's. Listening to the client and making decisions based on the client's expressed needs and desires is in my mind critical. This is what I always tried to do, not as a triathlon coach but as a certified ski instructor.

C. Helping them to mobilize their motivation and keep it mobilized. This is a principal focus of mine. Indeed I believe that how to mobilize one's motivation and keep it mobilized, even when the going gets tough, in the short term or the long, is the central element in effective training and racing. Over a period of many years, I have developed what I call "The Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation."

1. What is motivation? The longer definition: motivation is not a thing. It is a mental process that links an emotion, feeling, desire, idea, or intellectual understanding, or a recognized psychological, physiological, or health need, to the taking of one or more actions. The shorter definition: Motivation is a mental process that links a thought or a feeling to an action.

2. How people makes changes in their behavior. One widely used approach to the understanding of the process is the "Stages of Change/Transtheoretical Model," originally designed by Profs. Prochaska and DiClemente (Prochaska, J.O., Norcross, J., and DiClemente, C. Changing for Good. New York: William Morrow, 1994.). It has Six Stages. They are designated as: 1. Pre-contemplation, 2. Contemplation, 3. Planning, 4. Action, 5. Relapse, 6. Permanent maintenance.

3. The Six Phases of Behavior Change. I believe that the "Six Stages" leaves out one important step in the process that folks actually go through in making successful behavior change. This is my modification, both in the terminology and the concept, of the "Stages of Change" model. It recognizes that the key element in moving along the way towards Permanent Maintenance is crossing the bridge from planning to action. In my view, that requires the specific step of mobilizing motivation.

And so, my six *Phases* are:

1. Not on the radar screen.
2. Thinking about it.
3. Going to get going.
4. On the Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation.
5. Getting going!
6. Making it part of your life.

4. The Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation (in some detail)

This is the key to success in moving along the *Phases of Change*. The *Pathway*

itself has Five Steps:

1. *Self-assessment* is asking yourself questions like: where am I now? How did I get here? What do I like about myself? What do I not like? What would I like to change? What is going on in my life that would facilitate behavior change? Inhibit it?
2. *Defining success* has to be done in the context of you as a person, what your measure of your innate skills and capabilities is. To work for you, "success" as you define it has to be something that is reasonable, realistic

and conceivably achievable, for you, given who you are as a person and what else is going on your life (see also 4, below). It has to be such that you are not setting yourself up for failure. Defining success productively also includes giving yourself permission to fail, assuming that you really did try.

3. *Goal-setting* is accomplished by answering questions like: to where do I want to get? Why do I want to get there? For whom would I be making the change; others, or myself? What do I expect to get out of the change, should I achieve it? What do I think I can reasonably expect to do? What are the "give-ups," and can I, do I want to, commit to them? Arriving at satisfactory answers to these questions for yourself is absolutely key. For doing so, answering the questions "what do I really want to do and why do I want to do it," provides the focus and the concentration you must have in order to have the best chance of success in the chosen endeavour.

4. *Establishing Priorities* among your specific goals and between your new goals and the rest of your life is central to making the whole process work for you. If you have set more than one goal, what is their ranking? Which do you consider to be the most important to achieve? Which the least? In addition, what about priorities between your new goal(s) and other important things that are going on in your life, like family, friends, other leisure time activities, and your job? (See also 2, above.) If juggling needs to be done, it will be very helpful to do some thinking about that and yes, set your priorities.

5. *Taking Control* means putting yourself in charge of the whole process, adopting an "I can do this" attitude and perspective, given that the first four steps have been followed, of not depending upon anyone else but also not taking anyone else's direction

(advice on both process and content is fine, direction in the sense of “you must do this” is not), of accepting responsibility for both success and failure.

5. The Seven Keys to Taking Control

Since for most people, making change for themselves, not anyone else, is a central to achieving a successful outcome, taking personal control of the whole process is essential. *Taking Control* itself has seven keys.

1. Understanding for sure that motivation is not a thing, but a process that links a thought or a feeling with an action.
2. Following the first four steps of the Ordinary Mortals® Pathway to Mobilizing Your Motivation, from the beginning.
3. Making sure to examine what you already do well: health-promoting behaviors that are already part of your life.
4. Recognizing that gradual change leads to permanent changes.
5. Dealing with both the fear of failure and of success.
6. Being ready to explore your limits while recognizing your limitations.
7. Appreciating the process of psychological immediate gratification.

D. Of course there is also the standard package of coaches’ tasks, but adapted to your particular client who is out primarily to have fun, to finish happily and healthily, to stay in the sport for the long-term. And so, of course we will need to deal with: Choosing the race(s); designing the training program (for my beginners/recreational triathletes training programs, see the end of these notes); the equipment package;

technique; setting up and getting through the transition area; pre-race planning; the check-list; and so on and so forth.

E. Then there are Steve's "Basic Seven" of Effective Training for the Beginner/recreational athlete (and there is some repetition here):

1. If they are to work for you, the goals you set must be reasonable and rational ones, for you.
2. Gradual change leads to permanent changes.
3. Explore your limits while recognizing your limitations
4. The hard part of regular exercise is the regular, not the exercise.
5. In training, the keys are consistency and regularity.
6. Minutes work for some folks; miles work for others.
7. One size does not fit all.

F. Remember your first race. I suggest making sure to tell your client to remember their first race, for they will never again do their first triathlon on duathlon. I have done 240 tri's and du's. I surely don't remember them all. But I do remember, in some detail too, my very first, the 2nd Mighty Hamptons Triathlon, the first to be held at Sag Harbor, NY, on September 17, 1983. I had no idea at the time to where my experience that day would lead (although I did start laying out the book that would become Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals® in the transition area after that finish). But it was a life-changing day. What a ride it has been since. And I do remember it well.

VII. Finally, I do hope that this session has given you some food for thought, to help you "Innovate, Communicate, and Achieve."

Training Tables: For "Coaching Beginners"
(With apologies for variations in the formatting!)

Table 1. Getting Started

(Times in minutes per day)

Day	M	T	W	Th	F	S	S	Total
Week								
1	Off	20	Off	20	Off	20	30	90
2	Off	20	Off	25	Off	20	35	100
3	Off	20	Off	30	Off	25	35	110
4	Off	20	Off	25	Off	25	35	105
5	Off	20	Off	30	Off	25	35	110
6	Off	25	Off	30	Off	25	40	120
7	Off	20	Off	30	Off	25	35	110
8	Off	25	Off	30	Off	25	40	120
9	Off	25	Off	30	Off	35	40	130
10	Off	30	35	Off	30	Off	45	140
11	Off	35	30	Off	35	Off	50	150
12	Off	40	35	Off	40	Off	50	165
13	Off	40	35	Off	45	Off	60	180

13 week total, 1625 minutes (125 minutes per week)

Table 2. For the Sprint-distance Triathlon: five workouts on five days. (Times in minutes; average of 3.5 hours per week for 13 weeks)

Day Week	M	T	W	Th	F	S	S	Total
1	Off	20	20	45	Off	55	60	200
2	Off	20	20	45	Off	60	65	210
3	Off	25	20	55	Off	60	65	225
4	Off	25	20	55	Off	60	70	230
5	Off	25	25	60	Off	60	65	235
6	Off	30	Off	25	Off	25	20	100
7	Off	25	Off	35	Off	35	50	145
8	Off	25	30	65	Off	60	70	250
9	Off	25	30	65	Off	80	75	275
10	Off	30	35	75	Off	70	90*	300
11	Off	30	35	55	Off	55	120*	295
12	Off	20	25	50	Off	60	40	195
13	Off	30	25	20	Off		Race	

*These two workouts should be combined (bike/run or walk), so you can get some experience changing your clothing and doing 2 sports consecutively.

Table 3. For the Sprint-distance Triathlon: five workouts on five days (modified upwards).

5 Workouts per Week Program (*Times in minutes; average of 4.5 hours per week for 13 weeks*)

<i>Day</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>Th</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	Off	45	55	55	Off	60	65	280
2	Off	45	55	55	Off	70	75	300
3	Off	55	60	60	Off	65	75	315
4	Off	55	65	60	Off	70	75	325
5	Off	60	65	65	Off	70	75	335
6	Off	40	30	25	Off	25	35	155
7	Off	30	40	35	Off	45	55	205
8	Off	50	65	60	Off	60	65	300
9	Off	50	55	60	Off	70	75	310
10	Off	60	70	70	Off	70	75	345
11	Off	50	55	60	Off	70	105	340
12	Off	45	Off	60	Off	70	45	220
13	Off	20	20	20	20	Off	Race	

Table 4. For the Standard-distance Duathlon (3-12/15-3).

Four workouts on four days (Times in minutes; average of 3.5 hours per week for 13 weeks)

Day Week	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	Total
1	Off	40	Off	45	Off	55	60	200
2	Off	40	Off	45	Off	60	65	210
3	Off	45	Off	50	Off	65	65	225
4	Off	45	Off	55	Off	60	70	230
5	Off	50	Off	65	Off	60	60	235
6	Off	30	Off	25	Off	25	20	100
7	Off	25	Off	35	Off	35	50	145
8	Off	55	Off	65	Off	60	70	250
9	Off	55	Off	65	Off	80	75	275
10	Off	60	Off	70	Off	80	90*	300
11	Off	55	Off	65	Off	55	120*	295
12	Off	40	Off	50	Off	60	40	190
13	Off	30	25	20	Off		Race	

*These 2 workouts should be combined (bike/run or walk), so you can get some experience changing your clothing and doing 2 sports consecutively.

Table 5. The TFOMTP (Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals Training Program) for the Olympic Distance Triathlon: The 6 Workouts over 5 Days per Week Program; swim on the two-a-day
(Times in minutes; average of 5 hours per week for 13 weeks)

Day	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	Total
Week								
Set 1								
1	Off	40/35	45	Off	45	65	60	290
2	Off	40/40	50	Off	45	70	65	310
3	Off	45/40	55	Off	50	75	70	335
4	Off	45/45	50	Off	55	75	65	335
5	Off	50/45	55	Off	65	75	60	350
Set 2								
6	Off	40	30	Off	25	35	25	155
7	Off	30	40	Off	35	45	55	205
8	Off	55/50	70	Off	65	80	70	390
9	Off	55/50	60	Off	75	80	75	395
10	Off	65/60	75	Off	75	90	100*	465
11	Off	45/45	50	Off	55	45	150*	390
Set 3								
12	Off	45	Off	60	Off	70	45	220
13	Off	20	20	20	20	Race		

*These two workouts should be combined (bike/run or walk), so you can get some experience changing your clothing and doing two sports consecutively.

Table 6. The TFOMTP (Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals Training Program) for the Olympic Distance Triathlon: The 5 Workouts over 5 Days per Week Program; (*Times in minutes; average of 5 hours per week for 13 weeks*)

	<i>Day</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>Th</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>Su</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Week</i>									
<i>Set 1</i>									
1	Off	45	55	Off	55	70	65	290	
2	Off	45	55	Off	55	80	75	310	
3	Off	55	65	Off	60	80	75	335	
4	Off	55	65	Off	60	80	75	335	
5	Off	60	65	Off	75	80	70	350	
<i>Set 2</i>									
6	Off	40	30	Off	25	35	25	155	
7	Off	30	40	Off	35	45	55	205	
8	Off	65	80	Off	75	90	80	390	
9	Off	65	70	Off	75	100	85	395	
10	Off	75	85	Off	85	100	120*	465	
11	Off	65	60	Off	55	60	150*	390	
<i>Set 3</i>									
12	Off	45	Off	60	Off	70	45	220	
13	Off	20	20	20	20	Race			

*These two workouts should be combined (bike/run or walk), so you can get some experience changing your clothing and doing 2 sports consecutively.

Table 7. The TFOMTP (Triathloning for Ordinary Mortals Training Program) for the Olympic Distance Triathlon: The 6 Workouts over 5 Days per Week Program; *(Times in minutes; average of 5 hours per week for 13 weeks)*

Day	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	Total
Week								
Set 1								
1	40	35	45	Off	45	65	60	290
2	40	40	50	Off	45	70	65	310
3	40	45	55	Off	50	75	70	335
4	45	45	50	Off	55	75	65	335
5	45	50	55	Off	65	75	60	350
Set 2								
6	Off	40	30	Off	25	35	25	155
7	Off	30	40	Off	35	45	55	205
8	50	55	70	Off	65	80	70	390
9	50	55	60	Off	65	90	75	395
10	60	55	75	Off	75	90	100*	465
11	55	45	45	Off	50	45	150*	390
Set 3								
12	Off	45	Off	60	Off	70	45	220
13	Off	20	20	20	20		Race	

*These two workouts should be combined (bike/run or walk), so you can get some experience changing your clothing and doing 2 sports consecutively.