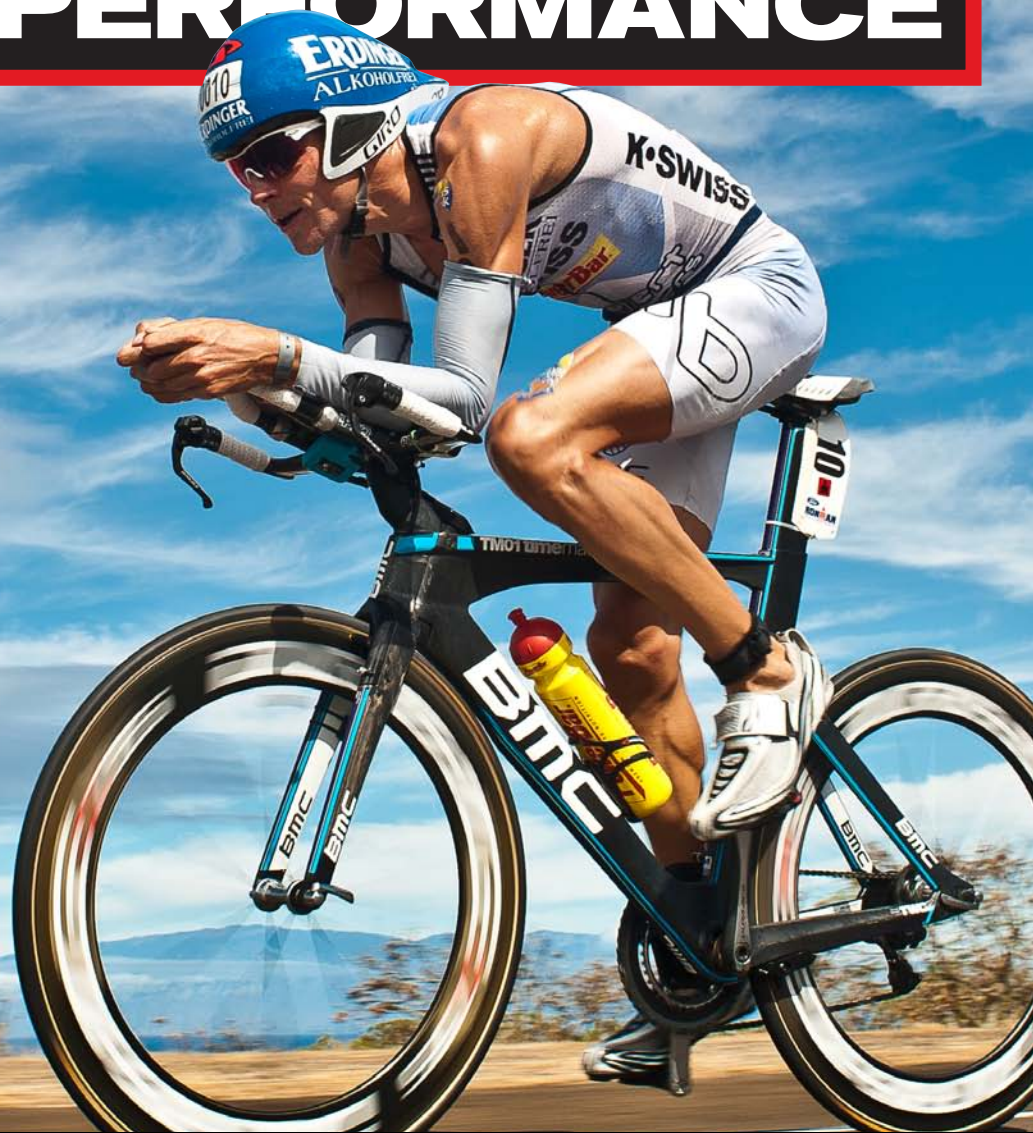


THE TRIATHLETE'S GUIDE TO **PEAK** PERFORMANCE



By the Editors of **INSIDE** Magazine
TRIATHLON

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The Triathlete's Guide to Peak Performance

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Peak Performance

Triathlon has inspired thousands to take control of their lives and get active. Participation is the lifeblood of the sport. But for a select few athletes, triathlon isn't about simply finishing a race; it's about getting to the finish line faster than ever before.

Multisport mastery is no small task, and this book is not an instruction manual to guide you from registration through earning your first finisher's medal. It does not include a race-day checklist. There are no swim technique tips, run workouts or other helpful yet basic tidbits in this book. Instead, *The Triathlete's Guide to Peak Performance* delves into the finer points that separate fourth place from the podium as only *Inside Triathlon* magazine can. We selected some of the most informative feature stories published in the magazine to bring you training guidance from the sport's most knowledgeable and accomplished sources.

Coaches of Ironman champions and Olympians—Brett Sutton, Darren Smith and Matt Dixon among others—share the principles and strategies they use to guide some of the world's best to their most impressive results. Their suggestions can help you do the same. These coaches have found success with different methods, but all agree on the importance of recovery. And recovering from the intense training they prescribe is more involved than sitting on the couch. T.J. Tollakson is the pro triathlon community's version of a mad scientist, and he shares his recovery routine, which ranges from the mundane to the obsessive. Translating your physical preparation into results on race day is just as important as training, so ITU Long Distance world champion Torbjørn Sindballe shares the minutia that helped him thrive in the Kona heat and the mental techniques he and Craig Alexander use to squeeze every drop of speed out of their bodies. To inspire your own personal best, Alexander gave an unprecedented look inside the way he prepares for the Ironman World Championship and the techniques he has used en route to winning five (and counting) world titles. Pull out your training log and prepare to absorb the details that can help you reach that next all-important milestone.

Great Minds Don't Always Think Alike

We picked the brains of the greatest minds in the sport of triathlon—five coaches of top pro triathletes. They shared their thoughts on injury prevention, nutrition, life balance and everything in between.

By **Bethany Mavis**, *Inside Triathlon* associate editor

Australian **Brett Sutton** is not and never has been a triathlete, yet he's considered by many to be the best coach in the sport. His background includes being a national swim coach for Australia for 10 years, being a professional boxer and squash player and training greyhounds and racehorses, all of which now influence his coaching style. He coached Chrissie Wellington to her first two Ironman World Championship victories, coached Siri Lindley and Loretta Harrop to ITU World Championship titles and now trains top Ironman athletes, such as Caroline Steffen, James Cunnamo and Mary Beth Ellis, out of his TeamTBB training base in Leysin, Switzerland.

TRAINING PHILOSOPHY I'm an authoritarian—I think coaches should make decisions and so with all our athletes, we discuss what we're going to do and when we're going to do it and how we're going to do it. And then we make a decision on what path we're going to take. I'm very proactive in making that decision—I don't let athletes make that decision for themselves. In saying that, I would suggest that we aim more to tailor to the individual rather than the group. ... We have certain sub-groups, so within the male group, there's a certain amount of people that will do more, shall we say, anaerobic training and there are other groups that don't need to do as much anaerobic training. So they basically fit into a category that I sort of instinctively put them in. And it's the same with girls—some people need a lot of long work and some people don't deserve much at all, even though they're Ironmen. So it's a very variable situation. And I think triathlon needs to do that because—well, I just told you about physical structures, but we're talking about mental structures as well—different people need to be motivated in different ways. Some

people like the overbearing coach; other people detest it. So you've got to be knowing your athletes—which one to play while you're dealing with which particular athlete.

ON GROUP TRAINING Just because you're an age grouper doesn't mean the philosophy of how you train should change just because somebody's a professional. Professionals train like age groupers—they're just a lot faster. ... For an age grouper, training in a group mentality really does help them. I would say even more than a professional athlete because their livelihood doesn't depend on it. So you've also got the social aspect of going to a group and doing a training swim. Swimming a 4K by yourself is not a fun thing, unless you're an ex-swimmer or something. ... The way I try to deal with age groupers, again exactly the same as I do with my professionals, is I say to them, "It's about you and improving you. It's not about what the bloke next door to you is doing." So if you can get them to start to realize, "OK, my job is to improve me, my job is to use the group to improve me, not to destroy me," then you've gone a long way to making some good, positive steps forward and being able to improve rather rapidly within a group formation now. If you go there and you've got a big ego, and every day you want to go head to head with the next guy, you'll make some, what I call, artificial improvements in a short period of time because you're pushing yourself over your limit. And your body for six to nine weeks, sometimes three months, sometimes half a season or a season, you can do that. And then all of a sudden it catches up with you, and that's when the injuries come and the lethargy comes in and the tiredness, and "Oh I might be overtrained" or whatever. It takes a little while to catch up, so my idea is to catch it early and try to educate them. And every day we want to do something that's going to be beneficial to them, not something that tears you down.

ON MENTAL PREPARATION I think the biggest mistake age groupers do in triathlon is they set times. Every course changes so dramatically. And professionals do it too—it's "Oh I did this time, I did that time." It's ridiculous. You could go on a 40K loop that doesn't change every day, and the wind changes direction 10 percent, and the times are going to be 2 minutes different, whether they be faster or slower. Say you run an Ironman one year, and you go 9:11, and the guys want to go back next year and run 9 hours. The wind and the water is changing directions, so that's going to slow your swim down; maybe there's a cross-wind on the bike,

which you didn't have the year before, so it's going to slow your bike down; it might be 10 degrees hotter, so it's going to slow your run down. So I've seen so many athletes that I've dealt with that had fantastic races and go, "Oh, I can't believe it, I had a terrible race." And they had a fantastic race!

ON GOING HARD And I don't stop people from going hard—I encourage it. You have to enjoy going hard—when the body wants to go hard, go hard. When the body doesn't feel great, we don't push hard when our body's telling us not to. And that's the key—that's the mental key in helping some athletes. I've got some athletes who are so wound up because they're so desperate to do well. Mary Beth Ellis is a good example [from 2011]—I spent all year trying to settle her down because she wants to be good so much that it destroyed her for the past two years. ... You try to establish the psychological profile of some athletes, and most people think I run around with a big stick trying to stir everybody up. I actually walk around with a pacifier trying to settle half these people down because they're all too wound up to do well. And so to have the right mental approach to some people might be, "Take it easy and relax; don't push." I have one girl whom I won't mention because she might get embarrassed, but I told her to not go faster than 95 percent. "What about even if it's a sprint finish?" "Don't go harder than 95 percent." What I've done is control her from over-trying because she's a chronic over-trier. She'll train, she'll run, she'll race till the blood comes out of her, and sometimes nothing happens. And it doesn't happen because she's trying so hard—her techniques are destabilized. She swims slower when she tries to go harder; she bikes slower when she tries to go harder. But whereas if she just takes that edge off, her techniques take over and she does fantastic.

ON IRONMAN RACING Over an Ironman, it's not "I'm going to race the guy next to me." It's what your body's capable of doing—the amount of power your body can put out over a 9-hour period. Those numbers are going to win you the race. So we try to concentrate on our own personal numbers, and the only time we ever think about being in a race is when we get down the 35K mark on the run, and then we put strategies into place when we're racing. But up until then, we're about checking our body clock, running on what we believe is our pace minutes, and let the cards fall where they may. At the end of the day, we have a look at their performance, and then we have a look at the scoreboard and see where we are. And I see far too many athletes and far too many age

groupers got their head down two hours or three hours into a race, and have changed their plan because the guy they want to beat has just gone past them on the bike. So straight away, they're, "Oh, I can get faster, I'll go with him." And they leave their race right there. And as they walk for the last two hours, they're thinking about what they did in training wrong or "my nutrition was wrong." Or run training—"What's wrong with my run? I can't run. It must be my run training." But it was the rush of blood to the head six hours ago that actually killed them. That to me is the most pertinent point of age-group racing that's not looked after. They see the pros get out there and basically just give it to themselves every minute of the race, and they're going head to head with everybody. But that's not the case at all. And you've seen Caroline Steffen have an absolutely fantastic failure [in 2011] because she tried to win the race. And she went away when Chrissie and Rinny were having a bad bike day, she decided, "My only chance to win Hawaii is to blast the bike now and try to hang on." And while that was an honorable and a wonderful, shall we say, competitive spirit, it might not have been the best way to try to win the race. And it's easy for us to sit there and lounge around and discuss it. But at that particular time, when she saw the other girls weren't riding well, it motivated her to lose her game plan. And I know we've had discussions about it already, and the discussions were if maybe we stuck to our game plan, the race might have unfolded and we might not have walked the last two kilometers. So, you know, it's the same for age groupers as it is for pros—she left nothing on the course. That girl did everything possible she could to unseat the queen—she's racing the greatest ever athlete in triathlon. So it was a wonderful testament to people like you to look at somebody who was not overruled by Chrissie Wellington and was going to go out there and give it everything she had. And that was wonderful. So on one hand, I applaud her and tell her what a wonderful competitor she was, and on the other, I have to tell her the truth. You should have stuck to your game plan, and it might have put more pressure on you than you thought.

ON AVOIDING OVERTRAINING The thing is an age grouper, to speculate, there's a family behind some of these guys and they've got work. So, for instance, if I've got an age grouper that's down to do a fast run or whatever on a Wednesday night, and they've had a rough day at work, I'd tell them don't do it. Don't do it. It's only going to make it worse. "I've had a really tough day. I've had a shocker. I had two business meetings." Go outside, and go for a run, and then if you start to feel

good, pick the pace up. And then if you start to feel real good, pick the pace up more. And if you can, go out at night. Why? Because psychologically when you're running at night you feel better. The darkness seems to galvanize you a little bit better, the wind goes a little bit more in the hair, and then you're going faster. So that's how I'd arrange it. But if I go out and give them five 800s on the track after they're stressed, you're giving them more stress. Just because it wasn't physical stress—it was mental stress all day—doesn't mean it's not stress. And then we're going to give them physical stress—that's when they're going to get tired, they're going to get irritable and that's when things break down.

Canadian **Joel Filliol** has built quite a reputation as an elite coach. For one, he coached Canada's Simon Whitfield to silver at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. But beyond that he's served as head coach for the national federations British Triathlon and Triathlon Canada, and has worked with top names such as Alistair Brownlee, Jonathan Brownlee, Tim Don, Helen Jenkins and Jordan Rapp. He's currently based in Victoria and working with ITU and Ironman athletes alike.

TRAINING PHILOSOPHY What we're really trying to do is the maximum sustainable training load for any given athlete, and the key word is "sustainable." That's a word coaches talk about—consistency. And what does that really mean? It means that the level of training, the level of work you can back up day to day and week to week for a long period of time, and the idea is that we progress that over time—that athletes can progress to be able to tolerate and absorb a higher and higher level of work. And of course you adapt as you go. That contrasts to an approach that's more varied or uses more traditional cycles, like build 1, 2, 3 and then have a week off, a down week. It varies from that—where we're looking at longer periods of time where the goal is to have a really consistent period of work. ... Of course, you need the right level of intensity to stimulate improvement, and that can come in different ways. That can come from intervals at various paces or from using natural terrain like hills or from higher frequency or varying the volume. So there are lots of ways we can adjust that workload, but we're trying to have basically the highest average workload for a longer period of time, and that's what gets athletes fit, and then some specificity into the kind of races they're preparing for, and then the right amount of rest based on all of that.

The Battle Inside

Prepare your mind to get the most out of your body with these tips and experiences from Ironman champions

By Torbjørn Sindballe, *two-time ITU Long Distance world champion*

I finished the bike and knew I was in for a brutal day. Stars spun wildly around my head the final 20 miles of riding as I crashed through dizzy spells and fought to remain upright. My legs were powerless and my muscles were buzzing with soreness. Every hill devoured me.

Like hitting a thumb with a hammer, my body had become numb to the constant muscle firing forced by my will power and desperate need to compete. While clawing through the pain, I had lost three minutes in the last lap. Although I was leading, my internal situation was as grim as hanging from a cliff.

I was still in the black zone when my feet started pounding the pavement. I doubted I would be able to finish. In the punishing sun and 90-degree heat, the 30 kilometers of running stretched out in front of me as might an implausible nightmare. As I passed T2 after the first 3K of running, my coach, Michael, yelled, "Twelve minutes!" The voice in my head responded, "Twelve minutes? What's he talking about?" I was convinced my lead had shrunk considerably after my miserable last lap on the bike. A few seconds later I saw Craig "Crowie" Alexander coming out of T2, starting to chase me from 3K behind. My lead was in fact 12 minutes. Wow, even though I got the hammer, everyone else was struck harder and let up five to six minutes in the last lap. Despite the miserable state of my body, the gigantic lead knocked me into race mode again. I willed my legs to move faster. There was no jump, no spring-like feeling in my legs; I just tried to motor all I could. I had no idea why nothing clicked into gear despite taking down fluids, salts and energy to rebound.

A few kilometers into the second lap, I passed Michael again. He yelled, “Crowie is closing fast—seven minutes down.” Crowie would catch me if things stayed like this. I surged. I found a threadbare rhythm for a few kilometers and motivation from my experience that chasers usually slow down on the second lap, so if I kept pushing I had a chance. My legs were starting to cave, my quads were gone and I began sliding into the place where I feel like I’m running on big stiff painful logs of heavy wood that are driven forward from my hip without any hint of technique whatsoever. A few kilometers later my calves started to buckle and my core with it. I was running on will alone. I approached the final 10K lap and Michael’s voice rang out: “Three minutes, 10 seconds. Come on, you can do it. This is it. Come on.” Had I been functioning closer to normal, the race would have been a done deal. Not this time, however.

With 9K to go I went into what I call “the black hole.” For energy I relied on mental images of my family and all the work and sacrifice I had given in training. I focused on every tree and every turn like rungs of a ladder, prying myself along and inching through the course. I would think, “Come on. Run as hard as you can to that corner.” At first, I could keep it going for a quarter of a mile but the pain would break my concentration. Thoughts of quitting seeped in: “Stop. Sit down and have a Coke. Call it quits. Slow down.” Negative thoughts poisoned my mind. Within the final 5K I bounced between doubt that I would make it and belief that I could. A bit of breeze or a patch of shade from a tree would lift my mood for an instant, but it would always collapse a moment later. It was push, collapse, push, collapse, push. I had no idea whether Crowie was closing. Finally within 2K of the finish, I started looking back. I could not see him, but I might have missed him. The finish line approached. I looked back over and over again. No one in sight. “Keep pushing,” I told myself. I tried lifting my arms over my head as I ran up the last 100 meters to the tape, but I just couldn’t. I crossed the line: ITU long distance world champion for the second time. I sat down in the nearest chair. I rested my head in my palms and started crying. I couldn’t celebrate; I could scarcely speak. I had given everything.

The 2006 ITU World Championship in Canberra, Australia, was the hardest race of my career, and the words above are my account of the battle that raged inside me on the final run leg. I have always wondered how other athletes have felt in those times when they are pushed further than they thought possible—when they break into new territory and

force themselves to go on. How does it feel?

I asked two of my former colleagues, Ironman world champion Craig Alexander and multiple Ironman winner Belinda Granger, who, as veterans of the sport, now have their share of suffering under their belts.

What was your hardest race?

Craig Alexander: I think mentally the toughest races are also the toughest physical races. It is no coincidence. When things are going well physically, you have a lot of confidence, and those days probably don't require the same amount of mental strength. One that comes to mind was the ITU Long Course World Champs in Canberra in 2006. I had never raced longer than a half-Ironman distance race at the time, and I had just won the Ironman 70.3 World Championships in Clearwater the weekend before and then traveled home to Australia. I'd say physically I was in some of the best shape of my career, but I wasn't really up to speed with nutrition for long-course racing. It was a very hot day and a fairly tough course, and I cramped a lot and ran out of fuel. The final 10K of that race was more mentally challenging than any other race of my career. I learned a lot that day.

Belinda Granger: This is a tough question. When I think back to all of the Ironman-distance races I have done, Ironman Canada 2006 stands out as it was a turning point in my career. I actually didn't even know I was doing the race until about four weeks beforehand, when my coach at the time, Brett Sutton, told me I was going. At first I was totally against the idea as I knew Lisa Bentley [an 11-time Ironman champion] was racing and I honestly thought it was impossible for me to beat her—especially in her own country. But Brett insisted I go. I remember being given a time split when I dismounted the bike and it was around 20 minutes. I started to believe that I might just be able to pull off the upset of the year. I ran the first lap of the run feeling like I was invincible. The second lap, however, was a whole other ball game. I started to feel heavy and of course I knew that Lisa was eating away at my gap in leaps and bounds. All that kept going through my head was, "Can you do it? Can you hold her off?"

I started getting desperate and was trying to get splits back to her every opportunity I had. I stopped focusing on my run and my form and get-