

CRACK THE OLYMPIC CODE

Want to push through
the 2.5-hour barrier?
START HERE.



SHARE YOUR TRAINING WITH ME

Cut out this plan, tack it to the fridge, and check off your sessions as you complete them. Share your experience by e-mailing me at watsonsworkouts@competitorgroup.com. If it's epic, inspirational or amusing, I might share your story with other readers of *Triathlete!*

In an Olympic-distance triathlon, top-end speed and smart pacing come into play, presenting a substantial yet realistic challenge. There's less long-term stress on the body compared to long-course events, so you can race more frequently and see results faster. A milestone for many athletes is cracking the 2-hour 30-minute mark, the goal of this month's training plan. Even if sub-2:30 is not your goal, this high-intensity plan can help you reach a new Olympic PR.

ABOUT THE PLAN

This plan is the final five weeks of training—prior to a two-week taper—that will push you through the 2.5-hour barrier. The program will challenge you to reach a goal race time as we target specific speeds and paces. You will find that there is a greater emphasis on higher intensity training than in longer-distance training plans. Adding intensity into your program provides more stress on your body, making recovery extremely important. Make

sure you take it easy on the prescribed easy days, you take a rest day each week and you adhere to the goal paces. Be prudent—if you overdo training on your recovery day, you will compromise your subsequent key sessions. Recovery after hard training sessions is when you heal up stronger and, as a result, get faster!

As always, listen to your body and back off if you have any specific pains or soreness.

TRAINING PLAN PREREQUISITES

Before beginning this plan, you should have already completed:

- Six to eight weeks of regular 2000–3000 swims
- Three or more 2- to 3-hour base rides and 1–1.5 hour base runs
- Three to four higher-intensity run sessions with 2–4 miles total intervals
- Three to four high-intensity bike sessions with 12–15 miles total intervals
- Optional: Finishing one or more shorter (under 3 hour) triathlons this season

PACE LINGO

Since this program is time-goal oriented, all the sessions are based off achieving specific paces. I have created pace times that correlate to your self-assessed skills and goal times. You will see the following pace-targeted terminology:

Base endurance pace Aerobic or conversational. This builds your aerobic foundation, which is your staying power.

Recovery pace Approximately the same as your endurance pace, but for shorter duration. It encourages blood flow to repairing muscles, but is not hard enough or long enough to further wear you down.

Pace work Goal Olympic-distance race pace. Learn to start strong, but with con-

trol, and then be determined to sustain that pace later in the race.

Lactate threshold Slightly faster than Olympic-distance race pace. Performed at your best average 30-minute run or best average 45-minute bike pace.

Speedwork Faster interval pace. You

should feel the burn here, as your body accumulates lactic acid, and over time gets more efficient at dissipating it. This is where you build speed and dynamic strength, which allows you to prepare for shifting paces on race day and, of course, your sprint to glory at the finish!

YOUR SKILL/PACE ASSESSMENT

Prior to beginning this training plan, do a 1000 swim time trial, a 20-mile bike time trial, and a 4-mile run time trial on separate days. Match your average 100 (swim) and mile (run) paces to the lactate threshold paces at right. Note if you are at the strong end, the midpoint or the slower end of these ranges. If your times fall outside of these pace ranges, adjust your pace time relatively for each range.

Your goal splits must average the midpoint of the race goal paces (i.e. 26:00 swim, 1:12 bike, 47:00 run + 5 minutes transitions = 2 hrs, 30 mins). If you are stronger in one discipline, you have wiggle room in the others. If you are currently below a range, try to train yourself up to the pace for race day. Worst-case scenario, you still get faster than you were before!

1500m swim race goal pace: 24:00–28:00

- Base endurance and recovery: 1:50–2:05/100m
- Pace work: 1:35–1:50/100m
- Lactate threshold: 1:25–1:45/100m
- Speedwork: 1:20–1:40/100m

40K bike race goal pace: 1:08–1:16

- Base endurance and recovery: 14.5mph–17mph
- Pace work: 19.5mph–22mph
- Lactate threshold: 21mph–23mph
- Speedwork: 22mph–26mph

10K run race goal pace: 44–52 minutes

- Base endurance and recovery: 8:00–9:30/mile
- Pace work: 7:00–8:20/mile
- Lactate threshold: 6:30–8:00/mile
- Speedwork: 6:00–7:30/mile

Converting meters to yards: Olympic-distance races cover 1500 meters. Yards are slightly shorter than meters, so if you swim by yardage, subtract 10 percent from your goal time. For instance, 1:30/100m is 1:21/100y.

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR LACTATE THRESHOLD

Understanding lactate threshold (LT) training is critical to improvement. Your LT determines how long and how hard you can exert near-maximum effort. There's a point when the body begins to produce lactate at rates that are too fast for it to metabolize—this is the LT.

To determine your LT, do field tests

on the bike and the run on separate days, when your legs feel rested. After a warm-up of 15 minutes (run) to 30 minutes (bike), do a 30-minute time trial on flat terrain where you can hold your hardest uninterrupted effort for that duration (a bike trainer is ideal for the bike test and the track is a good option for the run).

Pace the time trial as evenly as possible. To determine your LT heart rate, hit the lap button on your heart rate monitor 10 minutes into the time trial. The average heart rate for the final 20 minutes is your LT heart rate.

This chart will help you understand the various zones.

ZONE	% OF LACTATE THRESHOLD	BREATHING AND PERCEPTION
1	<80% of LT	Gentle rhythmic breathing. Pace is easy and relaxed. The intensity is a jog or very easy run or very easy bike spin.
2	80–87% of LT	Breathing rate and pace increase slightly. Slightly deeper breathing, although still comfortable. Running and cycling pace remains comfortable and conversation is possible.
3	88–93% of LT	Breathing a little harder, pace is moderate. A stronger cycling or running rhythm, this is “feel good” fast. It is slightly more difficult to hold conversation.
4	94–100% of LT	Starting to breathe very hard, pace is fast and beginning to get uncomfortable, approaching all-out 30-minute bike or run pace. This pace should be challenging to maintain.
5	>100% of LT	Breathing is deep and forceful. Pace is all-out sustainable for one to five minutes. Mental focus required, moderately uncomfortable and conversation undesirable.

Coaching Abbreviations/Terminology

WU = warm-up | **MS** = main set | **CD** = cool-down | **X'** = X minutes, i.e. 3' | **X"** = X seconds, i.e. 30" | **(parenthesis)** = time indication for rest in between intervals or tasks, i.e. 4 x 3' (2') | **P-ups** = pick-ups. Short accelerations at 75–85% of your maximum sprint speed | **Alt** = alternate

WEEK 1

MON	Day off: Walk and stretch.
TUE	SWIM: 1:15. Pace work. WU: 400–800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Pace work 30x50 (20–25"). CD: 200–300 freestyle and backstroke. BIKE: 2:00. Lactic threshold (LT) + speedwork. WU: 20–30' mostly easy spin, but include 4–5 x 30" P-ups to “speedwork” pace. MS: LT - 4–5 x 1.5 miles (3' easy). Speedwork - 3–4 x 1/2 mile (2'). CD: 20–30' easy spin.
WED	RUN: 1:30. LT + speedwork. WU: 15–20' easy jog, 4–5 strides. MS: LT - 6–8 x 1/2 mile (2' easy jog). Speedwork - 4–6 x 1/4 mile (2' walk). CD: 10–15' easy jog. Performance pointer: Running fast is a great way to embrace the “uncomfortable sensation” of muscle fatigue. Often the brain wants us to slow prematurely, so learn to keep pace past that initial threshold.
THU	BIKE: 1:00. Recovery ride. RUN: 20 mins. Off the bike, recovery.
FRI	SWIM: 1:15. LT + speedwork. WU: 400–800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Lactic threshold - 6 x 100 (30–40"). Speedwork - 12 x 50m (20–25"). CD: 200–300 freestyle and backstroke.
SAT	BIKE: 2:00. Pace work. WU: 20–30' easy, aerobic riding. 4–5 x 30" P-ups to “speedwork” pace. MS: Pace work - 4x5 miles (5–10' easy). RUN: 45 mins. Pace work off the bike. MS: 4x1 mile (2' walk). CD: 5' walk, 10' easy jog. Performance pointer: Prepare your transition prior to the workout and start your first run interval within 3 minutes of finishing the ride.
SUN	SWIM: 1:15. Base endurance and open-water skills. WU: 400–800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Base endurance - 800. Open-water skills - 3x200 (1') sighting every 6th stroke (pick a point to sight off at the end of the pool). CD: 200–300 freestyle and backstroke. BIKE: 2:00. Aerobic endurance pace. Performance pointer: Sighting too often and with the head too high sinks your lower body, which slows you down. Counting strokes reinforces timed sighting over a need for constant visual clues.



WEEK 2

MON	Day off: Walk and stretch.
TUE	SWIM: 1:15. Pace work. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Pace work - 15x100 (25-30"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke. BIKE: 2:00. Lactic threshold (LT) + speedwork. WU: 20-30' mostly easy spin, but include 4-5 x 30" P-ups to "speedwork" pace. MS: LT - 3-4 x 2.5 miles (4' easy). Speedwork - 3-4 x 1/2 mile (2'). CD: 20-30' easy spin.
WED	RUN: 1:30. LT + speedwork. WU: 15-20' easy jog, 4-5 strides. MS: LT - 8-12 x 1/4 mile (1.5' easy jog). Speedwork - 6-8 x 1/8 mile (1.5' walk). CD: 10-15' easy jog. Performance pointer: Open your lungs and really breathe well during LT sessions. Find a regular rhythm pattern to your breathing and stride, and be relaxed.
THU	BIKE: 1:00. Recovery ride RUN: 20 mins. Off the bike, recovery run.
FRI	SWIM: 1:15. LT + speedwork. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: LT - 16x50 (15-20"). Speedwork - 12x50 as 25 sprint(!), 25 easy (20-25"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke.
SAT	BIKE: 2:00. Pace work. WU: 20-30' easy, aerobic riding, 4-5 x 30" P-ups to "speedwork" pace. MS: Pace work 5x5 miles (5-10' easy). RUN: 45 mins. Pace work off the bike. MS: 2x2 miles (2' walk). CD: 5' walk, 10' easy jog. Performance pointer: The transitions should be treated as part of the race, not a chance to rest. Practice transitions in training so that you are smooth and error-free on race day.
SUN	SWIM: 1:15. Base endurance and open-water skills. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Base endurance - 3 x400 (45"). Open-water skills - 6x100 as 25 head-up freestyle, 25 regular freestyle. CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke. RUN: 1:15. Aerobic endurance pace.

WEEK 3: RECOVERY WEEK

MON	Day off: Walk and stretch. Custom recovery week.
TUE	SWIM: 45 mins. Pace work. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Pace work - 3x200 (25-30"). 6x100 (20-25"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke. Performance pointer: Pace swimming locks you into the feel and rhythm of race day. Decide to focus consistently through the set, internalizing strong swim rhythm.
WED	BIKE: 1:00. Recovery ride. RUN: 20 mins. Off the bike, recovery run. Day off: Walk and stretch.
THU	Performance pointer: Your recovery week is planned. Stick with it, have confidence in your body's ability to recover and avoid throwing in random sessions to test your fitness.
FRI	SWIM: 45 mins. LT. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: LT - 400 (1') 6x100 (20-25"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke.
SAT	BIKE: 2:30. Aerobic endurance pace.
SUN	RUN: 1:30. Aerobic endurance pace.

TIPS FOR RACE WEEK

Keep a consistent training schedule:

Prior to a big event, many athletes disrupt their regular training pattern by adding or deleting workouts and changing the time of day that certain workouts are done. These changes force the body to adapt to an unfamiliar routine—at the precise time when maintenance of a consistent schedule should be emphasized. Have confidence in the taper, and resist the urge to go out on "test" sessions to see how fit you feel.

Get organized: Create a race checklist. Start packing these items

and buying supplies (like energy bars and drink mixes) well before you leave. Travel can cause a high level of fatigue if you do not integrate it into your race plan. Plan to stay well hydrated (not to excess), take frequent stops to stretch and arrive at least two days in advance.

Check out the course: If you are unfamiliar with the course, it is a good idea to pre-drive the race route. If you can't drive the course, the next best thing is to look for a good race course preview or talk to someone who has raced it.

TAPER NOTES

After completing this program, start your race taper. For an "A" race, a two-week taper is appropriate. Start with 3-4 days of aerobic recovery sessions and/or rest days. Follow with a couple days of final training sessions at threshold, but at 50 percent of the volume of your regular intervals. Do shorter aerobic base endurance workouts the weekend before your Olympic race, about 50-60 percent of your regular duration.

The week of the race follows a similar pattern, but reduce volume by another 50 percent from the taper week prior. Take a day off on Monday, an easy aerobic day Tuesday and do some very short threshold sessions on Wednesday and Thursday to activate your race pace energy. Finally, resting Friday and Saturday will prepare you for a great race day on Sunday.





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WEEK 4

MON	Day off: Walk and stretch.
TUE	SWIM: 1:15. Pace work. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Pace work - 30x50 (10-15"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke. Try to swim the same times for 30x50 as during week 1, but with less rest this week. BIKE: 2:00. LT + speedwork. WU: 20-30' mostly easy spin, but include 4-5 x 30" P-ups to "speedwork" pace. MS: LT - 5-6 x 1.5 miles (2.5' easy). Speedwork - 5-6 x 1/2 mile (2'). CD: 20-30' easy spin.
WED	RUN: 1:30. LT + speedwork. WU: 15-20' easy jog, 4-5 strides. MS: LT - 3x1 mile (3' easy jog). Speedwork - 5-6 x 1/4 mile (2' walk). CD: 10-15' easy jog. Performance pointer: These are fast miles. Divide the intervals into sections and resolve to be strong over the last 2 minutes of each one, maintaining your start speed. This is where massive mental and physical gains are made!
THU	BIKE: 1:00. Recovery ride. RUN: 20 mins. Off the bike, recovery run.
FRI	SWIM: 1:15. LT + speedwork. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: LT - 6 x 150 (35-45"). Speedwork - 10x50 (20-25"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke.
SAT	BIKE: 2:00. Pace work. WU: 20-30' easy, aerobic riding. MS: Pace work - 3 x 10 miles (7-10' easy). RUN: 1:00. Pace work off the bike. MS: 5x1 mile (1.5' walk). CD: 5' walk, 10' easy jog. Performance pointer: When riding fast, be low, aerodynamic and steady. All your energy should go toward creating smooth momentum on the cranks, pushing the bike forward. If it's a windy day, use this as a chance to relax and cut through the wind with finesse.
SUN	SWIM: 1:15. Base endurance and open-water skills. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Base endurance - 1000 nonstop freestyle at an easy aerobic pace. Open-water skills - 8x100 (30") drafting with a partner. Take turns leading each interval. The athlete trailing regularly touches the feet of the leader. CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke. BIKE: 2:00. Aerobic endurance pace.

WEEK 5

MON	Day off: Walk and stretch.
TUE	SWIM: 1:15. Pace work. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Pace work - 8x200 (35-40"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke. BIKE: 2:00. LT + speedwork. WU: 20-30' mostly easy spin, but include 4-5 x 30" P-ups to "speedwork" pace. MS: LT - 2x5 miles (10' easy). Speedwork - 4-6 x 1/2 mile (3'). CD: 20-30' easy spin.
WED	RUN: 1:30. LT + speedwork. WU: 15-20' easy jog, 4-5 strides. MS: LT - 8-12 x 1/4 mile (1' easy jog). Speedwork - 6-8 x 1/8 mile (1.5' walk). CD: 10-15' easy jog.
THU	BIKE: 1:00. Recovery ride. RUN: 20 mins. Off the bike, recovery run. Performance pointer: To nail your transitions, practice mounting and dismounting quickly at a line like there will be in a race. Draw your own line and practice smooth mounts and dismounts in this session, including buckling your helmet strap (a race rule).
FRI	SWIM: 1:15. LT + speedwork. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: LT - 16 x 50m (15-20"). Speedwork/pace work - 12 x 50m as 25m speedwork, 25 pace work (30-35"). CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke.
SAT	BIKE: 1:30. Pace work. WU: 20-30' easy, aerobic riding. MS: 20 miles. RUN: 1:00. Pace work off the bike. MS: 3 miles (2' walk), 3x1 mile (1' walk). CD: 5' walk, 10' easy jog. Performance pointer: 3 miles off the bike is your best opportunity to practice locking in race pace and rhythm for an extended duration. Decide this will be a great day and do some positive visualization about race day during this session!
SUN	SWIM: 1:15. Base endurance and open-water skills. WU: 400-800 including freestyle, drills and kicking. MS: Base endurance - 2x800 nonstop freestyle at an easy aerobic pace. Open-water skills - 10x50 sprint from a deep-water start, starting with shallow legs from a scissor kick rather than a push off the wall. CD: 200-300 freestyle and backstroke. RUN: 1:15. Aerobic endurance pace. Performance pointer: After your "peek" to sight, lower your head immediately and focus on taking several smooth strokes to maintain swim speed. You will want to refocus on arm turnover after the mind was distracted by sighting.



LifeSport head coach Lance Watson has coached a number of Olympians, Ironman and age-group champions. Visit Lifesportcoaching.com or e-mail coach@lifesportcoaching.com.

