

Williams Lake Triathlon: Advice from an Expert

By Dave McGovern

As a renowned racewalking coach and now an HVTC Willams Lake Triathlon veteran, I feel highly qualified to give advice to triathletes, from beginners to those with Ironman aspirations. And I know the importance of getting good advice from a seasoned athlete before an event. Primarily because I didn't get any before Wednesday evening's race. The following are the kinds of things that maybe, just maybe, my big-shot triathlete brother John could have mentioned to me some time *before* the post-race buffet was over--which is, incidentally, about the same time that I completed the race.

Swim

Blue swim goggles look really, really cool. Giant florescent orange swim buoys do *not* look really cool as seen through said cool-looking blue goggles. In fact, they look invisible. Or at least they take on the same gray/black hue as the water, trees and other swimmers, making navigation somewhat difficult. And navigation takes on added importance when the nearest swimmer to you reaches the invisible buoy 100 yds. before you. In contrast to the turn-around buoy, freshwater jellyfish *do* look really cool in blue. They can not be relied upon as navigational aids, however--they swim too damned fast. To stay on course, your best bet is to keep your head out of water at all times. This will help you to see really well, and as an added bonus it keeps your feet low in the water, which I imagine must help you to swim faster.

What was with all the body condoms? I just moved up from south Alabama and even for me, the water temperature was fine. I can't for the life of me imagine why *every* other person in the race felt it necessary to wear a wet suit....

T1

Taking your time in the swim will really speed up your transition. I spent absolutely no time trying to figure out which bike was mine, as it was the only bike left on the rack. Good thing, too, as I wouldn't have been able to pick "my" bike out of a police line-up, not having been on a bike since 1985, and only just having met this particular model on Wednesday afternoon about 45 minutes before the race.

I hate to say I told you so, but not wearing a wetsuit can result in a lightning-fast transition. And it can be even faster if you remember to put your bike helmet on some time before heading out onto the bike course. Amazing how many volunteers will swarm around you to remind you of this. Just try to make sure the swarm stays around long enough to keep you from falling on your butt when you can't get your *##&#%* bike shoes out of their mounts. Oh, and make sure there's someone around who knows how to get a chain back on when you knock it off the gears--thanks, ladies!

Bike

Don't even think about training for cycling. It's *waaay* too dangerous! Have you seen those cars out there? Those hills? Take it from me, save your cycling for the race. You *may* want to get somebody to explain to you how to shift gears, though. It's not a bad idea to get them to explain *when* to shift as well. There's no bigger buzzkill than to scream down a hill at 35mph, only to hit the uphill and be on your keister in the gutter in nothing flat when the bike comes to a standstill because you picked that particular moment to figure out how to finally get the chain up onto the Big Ring. Oh, and you'll get the same result when you try to do a hard shift on an uphill and wind up mashing the brakes while trying to hit the gear shift. (Nice design, that. Couldn't somebody have foreseen that putting the shifter on the brake lever was a bad idea?)

T2

These insane lock-on bike shoes are a friggin' menace! Whatever happened to regular ol' Schwinn bike pedals? Get yourself some normal pedals and you can wear your running shoes on the bike. Boom, boom, boom: Jump off the bike and start running. Smooth transition! Why haven't any of these so-called pros and experts figured that one out? If for some reason you *do* decide to wear bike shoes, make sure you line up a "catcher" for your dismount. Otherwise you'll wind up on your butt again for the fourth time.

Run

Jonas Salk never did a triathlon. If he had, he would have come up with a cure for bike dismount polio legs. I thought for sure after such crappy swim and bike segments I'd be flying past people on the run, but instead of sprinting down the trail like a Kenyan, I wound up feeling like one of Jerry's kids. After about 1/2 mile I started feeling able-bodied again, but since I don't really do any run training either, I wasn't exactly setting the course on fire. My feet, on the other hand, *were* on fire. A little reconnaissance (or a heads-up from John) would have clued me in that it was a rocky trail run so the lightest, thinnest-soled racing flats might not have been the best choice of footwear.

All in all it was a fun event. I certainly don't plan on doing any specific training if ever decide to do another triathlon, but I do want to get faster. So like any seasoned triathlete, I know that gear is the answer. I'm already salivating over a brand-new Polar S625x heart monitor. Oh, and a nice pair of clear swim goggles....

Dave McGovern is a member of the United States National Racewalk Team and five-time Olympic Trials competitor. He is the author of The Complete Guide to Racewalking and The Complete Guide to Marathon Walking. He is not a triathlete. Visit his web site at www.racewalking.org.

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