

Hammering vs. Periodization

by: Peter Cummings

Recently, while reading and reviewing training articles I came across one of Chris Carmichael's latest articles. Coach Carmichael writes "there is no off-season." After racing for 10 plus years and aging 10 plus years simultaneously, I couldn't agree more. Studies show as little as three weeks off of the bike and cyclists lose up to 12% of their vo2max. This is fitness you must regain before you can make progress and that means it could take up to six weeks or more just to break even. Take off more than three weeks and the results are worse! This is why it is suggested that competitive athletes use this time to transition. The long season has taken a toll, your stroke is probably off, your achy, and the blues of winter are getting ready to set in. It is time to rekindle excitement not drop off.

Steps to rekindling your energy and the phases for the next season:

1. Transition/testing – Active recovery, Cross-training with running or aerobics classes etc., and possibly starting a very light weight training program should begin. Tests such as Lactate Threshold, body composition, maximum wattage and others should be performed at the start of this tapering progress, before fitness is lost. Start prioritizing next years' goals.
2. Preparation – This is time to get ready to build your base. It is time to start a high volume, low intensity weight training program and start biking at very low intensity with the concentration on form and recovery.
3. Base – The biking starts with medium volume and builds to high volume near the end of base, intensity starts low and builds only to medium. Your weight programs' intensity builds throughout this phase.
4. Build – You need to start adding short race-like efforts to your program. Your strength gains need to be maintained in the weight room. Low priority racing may start.
5. Peaking – It is now time to taper the volume while keeping the short race-like efforts, tapering will help you to recover fully just as your priority race approaches.
6. Build/Peak – You will be going back and forth in the Build and Peak phases throughout the season. You will need to back off peak slightly to accomplish your next Peak.

The amount of time you will spend in each phase depends on when you get started, your personal ability to develop the specific physiological goal of each phase and when your first big race is scheduled. Typically each phase is between 6 and 12 weeks long.

I see many people do nothing but hammer week in (see "Periodization – What is it..."), week out at full intensity. This will definitely limit their results. I believe Lance Armstrong and other pros have shown that to be your ultimate best you must prioritize

your goals. Lance races all season with good results but he knows his number one priority and his entire program is designed around his priority race. Finishing behind the top ten in a Spring Classic is not a cause for alarm. Now I have heard people say “I am not Lance”, granted, but results with periodization can be the same. Why not find out how FAST you really can be rather than just hammering every time you ride all year long?

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