

Speed work is only for short course triathletes, because the long course people just need endurance

Any athlete who wants to perform faster needs speed work. Period.

Why do I say this? Every athlete has fairly predictable times along their individual fatigue curve. For example, if I want to run a 1:30 half marathon, I have to be able to run a 40:30 10k. In order to run the 40:30 10k, I need to be able to run a 19:28 5k. For that 5k, I need to be able to run a 5:37 mile. For that mile, I need to be able to run a 33 second 200 meters. If I am only running, say a 35 second 200 meter, but I can still run a 1:30 half marathon, this tells me I have more endurance relative to my speed. In essence, my endurance is not holding me back; my speed is. I have found this to be the scenario with the vast majority of triathletes, that their endurance outpaces their speed. This makes sense since most triathletes work almost exclusively on endurance in some form, and ignore speed work as I define it below.

The question becomes how much, what form and when to do speed work. First, let me define what I mean by speed work in a running context. Basically, speed work consists of almost all out efforts, ranging in distance from 30 to 200 meters with large amounts of rest (up to 4-5 minutes between efforts). I do not consider running 800 meter repeats with 90 seconds rest speed work.

I prescribe speed work almost all year round for my athletes, no matter what distance triathlon they focus on. The speed work does not have to be done at the track, as you can do pickups and fartleks anywhere. Start out doing 5 short repetitions of 50 yards almost all out, with 4 minutes rest. Do this once a week. You can build up to 10 repetitions and eventually add these reps to another workout, performing it for a total of twice a week.