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Triathlon Transitions – They're not a time-out!

Transition - defined in Webster's dictionary as "passage from one state, stage, or place to another: CHANGE: a movement . . . from one form, stage, or style to another" - a great word chosen for this important part of every triathlon race.

In a triathlon, there are 2 transitions, known as T1 and T2. T1 is the transition from swim to bike and T2 is the transition from bike to run. The transition area is the place where the bikes wait on racks and an athlete's gear is arranged and accessed during the race.

There are many different types of triathlons from super sprint races with short distances covered to IronMan races with long distances covered. These different races have different requirements. This article deals primarily with triathlons of less than a ½ Ironman distance.

During the T1 and T2 transitions, there are:

1. Tasks the athlete must accomplish

In a nutshell, the athlete must move from one sports zone to another exchanging whatever gear is required.

2. Items the athlete requires

There is a wide vary of items each athlete may require, folks have unique needs, but we all need several items at least.

3. A specific order and location for the items to accomplish the transition tasks in the most efficient manner.

Tasks the athlete must accomplish (a simplified list – some races may vary)

T1 - What you need to do between swimming and cycling (here is an example)

- Run from water's edge to the transition area through the appropriate "swim in" entrance taking off the wetsuit as far as possible
- Once at the transition area, find your own bike and gear
- Set your swim cap and goggles down
- Take wetsuit off the rest of the way (you took it off as much as possible while running to your area)
- Put on sun glasses (or have them tucked into helmet or on bike somewhere so you can don after starting to ride)

- Put on helmet and fasten (if helmet is not fastened you will get a penalty!)
- Grab bike and run to “bike out” (your bike shoes are already on bike)
- Mount bike BEYOND mount line (to avoid penalty!) with feet on top of shoes. Put shoes on after reaching 15 mph (you must practice this before the race!)

T2 - What you need to do between cycling and running (here is an example)

- Remove shoes while still cycling just prior to dismount area (you must practice this before race)
- Dismount bike BEFORE specified line near “bike in” entrance to transition area
- Run with bike to your own gear and assigned spot
- Rack your bike (your bike shoes are on bike)
- Take off your helmet
- Put on your running shoes
- Grab your race belt
- Run to run out

Items the athlete requires (a simplified list – some races may vary)

T1

Wetsuit (if wearing one)

Goggles

Swim cap

Bike – with filled water/fluid bottles attached

Sunglasses

Helmet

Bike Shoes

Nutrition in addition to fluids (taped to bike or ready to grab)

T2

Bike

Helmet

Sunglasses

Running Shoes

Race number

A specific order and location for items in personal area

T1

Set down goggles and swim cap in your personal transition area

Set down wetsuit (if using) and lay in personal transition area

Put on sunglasses which are in your helmet or somewhere on your bike

Put on your helmet, which should be upside-down on your handlebars

Grab your bike and go (assuming bike shoes are already attached to your pedals)

T2

Rack Bike

Remove helmet and set down while wiping bottoms of feet on towel

Put on racing flats

Grab race belt with number already attached and go

We all spend lots of time swimming, biking and running and most of us don't spend enough time working on our transitions. *Think about how much effort is required to take 15 seconds off a 400M swim or 20 seconds off a 5K run!* Hopefully, that puts it in perspective. There is not much physical effort required to take 15 seconds off a transition time – plan and practice it so it happens quickly and smoothly. Transition time is included in your overall time. The clock doesn't stop so we want to make them as fast as we can.

The most important way to prepare for fast transitions is to PRACTICE TRANSITIONS!

A huge part of fast transition is determined before the race starts. There are quite a few things you need to do and prepare in the transition area before the race begins.

What you need to prepare in your transition area before the race?

Put your bike in the correct gear. When you leave the transition area will you be going uphill or downhill or flat? Usually you want to be in an easy gear so you can spin your legs quickly as you get started.

Make sure your bike is hung correctly from the transition rack. The wheel that is touching the ground MUST be in your transition area. This means if you hang your bike by the handlebars your bike must be facing forwards towards the bar. If you hang your bike by the seat, your bike must be facing away from the bar. (hanging your bike incorrectly is grounds for a 2 min. penalty)

Did you reset your bike computer? You may want to do this to get your own cycling data.

Are your water bottles filled and in place? Once I left my water bottle in my transition bag instead of on my bike. I didn't realize this UNTIL I rehearsed the transition prior to the race.

Besides fluids, are your other nutritional needs ready? Do you plan to eat something during the race? Is it on your bike? Will you grab it and stuff it in a pocket on your race suit?

Do you have a towel laid flat so you can step on it to wipe off the bottoms of your feet before putting on your shoes? This helps remove little stones that might have stuck to the bottom of your feet as you ran to your transition area.

Bike shoes

Are they attached to your pedals and rubber banded in place appropriately?

If you are starting with your shoes attached to your bike you MUST practice this many times before the race. It will only help you if you don't mess it up.

If your shoes are not on your pedals, are your bike shoes open and ready to put on quickly.

Where are your sunglasses? Placing them inside your helmet is convenient. Put them on before you put on your helmet. If you practice, you can stick your sunglasses through the gaps on the top outside of your helmet and put them on after you have started riding your bike.

Where is your helmet? Placing it on the handlebars is convenient, plus, it prevents you from forgetting it because when you move your bike it will fall if you haven't put it on and that will remind you. Check that the straps are adjusted correctly. Remember, in most races, you will be disqualified if your helmet is not on your head and fastened when you get on your bike.

Are your running shoes ready to put on quickly? This might mean you need to loosen or tighten the laces. Some folks put powder or some kind of lotion in their shoes to help prevent blisters. Do this prior to the start of the race.

Is your number secured to your race belt and ready for you to grab quickly after you put on your running shoes. Make sure the belt is adjusted for comfort. Put it on as you run – don't put it on standing still!

Now that you have everything, just before you leave the transition area prior to the race, check that everything you need is where you want it. T1 items should be together and T2 items together.

A great way to make sure everything is in its place, is to pretend you have arrived at your area after the swim – mentally (or actually) rehearse what you will do and see if you have everything in place - step away – come back to your area pretending you have finished the bike – mentally (or actually) rehearse what you will do. You should do this before every race. Even experienced athletes can forget important items.

You may certainly vary these steps individually (maybe you wear a hat while running?). Of course, races of different lengths have different requirements. The important thing is that you know what you're going to do and can do it quickly.

Good luck on your transitions. Webster's dictionary also defines transitions as "an abrupt change in energy state or level accompanied by a loss or gain of a single quantum of energy". WOW, Practiced and fast transition = quantum gain in energy – SOUNDS GOOD TO ME!

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