



The A, B, C's of Racing

Well, there are LOTS of A's, B's, and C's of racing – this article is about assigning a priority of A, B, or C to a particular race. What does that mean and why would you want to do it?

You may hear folks throw around the term “A Race”, “B Race”, or “C Race”. That is part of our triathlon language. However, many folks don't really assign these ratings to their races and training and race accordingly. If you really want to improve and get better you need to prioritize your races.

Before we start, let's define the terms in general:

- A race. This is a race that you train specifically for and complete a full peak and taper (peak and taper described more below).
- B Race. This is a race that is usually a similar type of race as an A race, however you will not peak for this race and only perform a short taper.
- C Race. Any type of race and no peaking or taper; you simply train through this race.

A Race

An A race should be more important to you than a C race and consequently result in a better performance. An A race is what the whole season is all about. You should expect and want your personal best performance at an A race. An A race requires a larger commitment in your training and planning. C and B races are fun and valuable learning experiences, but they don't drive your training like the A races do. **An A race is a rehearsed event for which you are completely prepared and at which you will most certainly excel.** The athletes I coach (and you should too) expect to excel at an A race if the training plan has been built, followed by the athlete and the race is well planned and rehearsed by the athlete.

When I talk to triathletes I ask them what their A race is. I am always surprised how many times I hear “Well I don't really have an A race.” Is it possible you are not designating specific races as A races because you don't want to lay it all on the line? Some folks always have an excuse for not doing well at a race. *Tell your friend, mom, spouse, write on the refrigerator what your A race is. Lay it on the line. Commit to it.*

A good training plan is designed to train, peak and taper us most specifically for A races.

Peaking for a race is achieving the best combination of freshness, fitness and with the least amount of fatigue on race day. Peak workouts are close to the A race and are very specific to the A race; we often call them race simulations.

It is smart to limit A races to 2 per season because the time spent peaking (very race specific intense training) and tapering (lessening of training) involves lost training time for other races. ***If you have too many A races, you will not see as much improvement over the course of a season as you will be missing too much training.***

B and C Races

B races involve some tapering and C races do not involve a taper at all (although it is smart to arrange the week leading up to the race as logically as possible).



A B race is typically of the same style/duration as your A race. If your A race is an Olympic distance your B race probably is too. As you do ease off your training a bit for a B race, the B race will give you a better indication of your preparedness for an A race than a C race will. It is great to have at least one B race and one C race before your A race, if your schedule permits. It helps you get the kinks out of your race plan and preparation before the A race.

At every race we want to have fun and try our very best, following our race plans for that particular race. We may be trying a new pacing method or new nutritional options or just practicing our tried and true strategy. Whatever the plan, our goal is to race to our highest ability. This is true if the race is a “C” race or an “A” race.

Don't Dog the C races! They are INVALUABLE experiences. “C” does not mean you're not trying as hard as you can. Of course we always try to do our very best at every race. At any particular race you may not be going full out the whole race – you are following your race plan - you are practicing something new, but what you are practicing represents your very best effort for that day.

Maybe you have always done sprint or Olympic distance races in which you operate at higher heart rate efforts while racing, the lower heart rate pace of a ½ or full IronMan will be hard for you, in order to follow your race plan with the lower heart rate zones you will have to be VERY disciplined – this is still trying your best. This would be a good thing to practice at a B or C ½ IM race before your A ½ IM or IM race.

I have had some fabulous “C” races which have come at the end of some very hard training weeks. I have had some not so good C or B races, as predictably I was kind of worn out. A races have always been good or great performances.

You will be successful at your A, B, and C races if you:

- select your races ahead of time,
- prioritize them (A, B, or C),
- build your training to fit the races you've selected,
- follow the training plan,
- create race plans for you races and follow your race plans and enjoy!

We learn a lot from racing, thus the importance of our B and C races – these races involve trying more newer strategies – A races are more rehearsed and are not the time to experiment – An “A” race should not be full of surprises if we plan ahead.

So, don't feel like you're supposed to hold back on your efforts at B or C races – what's the point? – otherwise you might just as well do a workout and save the race fee.

If you're looking for your A, B, or C races for this season, check out the regional calendar on swimbikerunstlouis.com. We have lots of great races in our area. If you want to travel farther that can be fun too. There are so many good choices it can be hard to decide – good luck out there!

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