



**Name of Article:** A Comprehensive Approach to Strength Training: The Off Season

**Author:** Jeb Stewart, MS, CSCS, PES, Coach

With the season winding down and winter rolling in, its time to shift gears and start preparing for a good off-season. With our beat up bodies and worn out minds, its time to take some time off and transition into a phase of rebuilding for next year. If we did things right, then we should only need a few weeks off before starting to work on our base, enjoying some cross-training and heading into the gym.

The focus of this column is going to be on proper strength & conditioning for the triathlete. It is no secret that proper strength and conditioning work can be what separates the winner from the runner up and a successful athletic career from one of disappointment or worse, pain and injury. Research supports this as does the experience of many a successful endurance athlete. In a sport that involves repetitive, cyclic movement, and 3 sports to boot, a scientifically designed conditioning program is the key to a successful season.

Most of us participate in some kind of strength & conditioning program in the off-season, but are we doing it for the right reasons? The answer is maybe. Many athletes think they are doing the right things, but when asked why they are doing them, their reasoning starts to look a little flawed. The primary reasons for employing a conditioning program in the gym include:

- 1) Improving functional flexibility and sports specific range of motion
- 2) Stabilizing and strengthening of the core to prevent injury and create a solid foundation for biomechanical efficiency
- 3) Strengthening tendons, ligaments and stabilizing musculature to improve joint integrity
- 4) Strengthening the weakened, long muscles to rectify muscular imbalances that result from overuse, thus improving posture
- 5) Increasing movement-specific lean muscle mass that has been catabolized over the course of the season to improve force output, body composition, bone density, the hormonal profile and elevates the metabolism

The first of these, improving flexibility, is one that is often neglected in an athlete's hurry to move onto the more intense portions of the off-season program. This can be a major mistake, since improving one's flexibility with a comprehensive approach is the foundation for which their performance pyramid will be built. In sports where your limbs are moving repetitively on a fixed axis thousands of time each workout, it is no surprise that many muscles and joints end up

overused and out of whack. Add the fact that the rest of the body is holding itself in a fixed position while all of this is going on, and the result is some scary imbalances in the form of overused, tight musculature and underused, weak musculature. Stretching these tight areas using a variety of approaches is the key to correcting these postural anomalies. Stretching only what's tight is the first step in eliminating aches and pains, correcting our posture and improving performance enhancing ROM.

The next step, addressing the Core, is another often neglected or poorly addressed part of the performance and injury prevention equation. Too many athletes skip this step entirely, instead moving onto to more traditional weight lifting programs that only work the prime movers only increasing muscle imbalances and leaving out the more critical links of the chain. Our Core musculature is what our performance house will be built upon and by training it to be stable and strong we are able to offset faulty movement patterns, increase movement efficiency and reduce pain, discomfort and ultimately injury.

The strengthening of our tendons, ligaments and stabilizing musculature, is also key to preventing injury and in getting the body prepared for the heavier workloads to come down the road. People get very confused as to how strength training prevents injury and one of the reasons is that many of the exercises people choose don't help in this aim. Additionally, many skip this part of the process, which eliminates the injury prevention aspect of a proper off-season program. By strengthening the weak links in the kinetic chain that is our body by incorporating multi-joint, multi-planar movements using lighter loads and higher repetitions, we train the stabilizers of the joints and prepare the body for the rigors of our training and competition.

The next part of the process, strengthening what's weak, is also key to injury prevention and starts building performance-enhancing muscle. The key here is to examine the body and take note of what muscles have been underused and start there. There's no need to strengthen what's already tight and overused, muscles and muscle groups that don't contribute to performance in our sports, so starting with the weak links is an important part of the performance enhancement program. The result? Improved posture, which translates to more effective breathing and increased longevity, due to increased comfort and reduced incidence of chronic injury.

Last, but certainly not least, come all of the reasons most people recite when asked why they should strength train. And just because these reasons are overused, does not mean they are any less valid. After a long season, our lean muscle has been all but eaten away from the high volume and intensity of our training and racing which can slow the metabolism, leaving our endocrine systems a little beat up and in need of some recovery and rebuilding. Not to mention the increased force output that we get from increasing the cross-sectional area the lean muscle mass we use to drive us through the water and air when training and racing. An intelligent dose of strength & flexibility training and rest can be just what the doctor ordered and will improve all of these areas across the board.

So now that we know why we should employ a solid off-season strength & conditioning program, what exactly is this program going to constitute? For the answer to that question, you are going to have to tune in next month when I will start to lay out a program for the season and a course of action that will help you address the entire training continuum en route to your best season

ever! For sample exercises or a complete strength training program for endurance athletes, please check out Jeb's DVD, The Next Level, at [www.endurofit.com](http://www.endurofit.com).



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**Contact Us:**

[www.peakscoaching.com](http://www.peakscoaching.com)

[info@peascoachinggroup.com](mailto:info@peascoachinggroup.com)

Address: 414 Jackson St. Bedford, VA 24523

Phone: 540-587-9025 fax: 540-586-5715