“Twenty-five years of active multisport coaching has proven that Joe Friel has an unprecedented understanding of endurance sports. As a multiple triathlon world champion, I would consider Joe as one of the leading figures in triathlon coaching today. Joe’s professional approach and practical understanding of sports physiology have helped many endurance athletes of all abilities reach their full athletic potential.”

—Simon Lessing, five-time triathlon world champion

“Joe Friel has spent most of his life in devotion to the understanding and teaching of sport. Joe has managed to focus on the key components to athletic success while weeding out the noise.”

—Justin Daerr, professional triathlete

“Whether you’re a beginning triathlete or a seasoned pro, Joe Friel is the leading authority on triathlon training.”

—Ryan Bolton, 2000 USA Olympic Team member

“Joe Friel’s wealth of knowledge in triathlon is astounding, and he has a wonderful way of sharing that knowledge with all athletes from beginners to elite professionals.”

—Siri Lindley, triathlon world champion

“Joe Friel is among the deans of triathlon coaching, and the newest edition of The Triathlete’s Training Bible will be of great benefit to all triathletes interested in performance improvement.”

—George M. Dallam, PhD, former USA Triathlon National Teams Coach and coauthor of Championship Triathlon Training

“Joe Friel’s training books have made the once ‘crazy’ sport of triathlon accessible to the public while also guiding seasoned athletes to their full potential.”

—Barb Lindquist, 2004 USA Olympic Team member
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Preface

I HOPE YOU’VE READ THE TRIATHLETE’S TRAINING BIBLE. If you have, you may be wondering why I’d write another book about triathlon training. After all, it’s been the best-selling book on the subject of triathlon training since 1997, when it first hit the bookshelves. I’ve revised it twice since then. More than 300,000 copies have been sold worldwide, and it’s been translated into German, Chinese, and other languages. The book has been used by the national triathlon federations of many countries to train their coaches. Amateur and elite triathletes around the world tell me they learned how to train from my book. It has been very gratifying to make such a contribution to so many lives and to the sport.

So if that book has been so successful, why not just revise it again? Why is a whole new book on the subject needed? Well, there are lots of reasons. I’ll explain.

As I’ve traveled around the world talking with triathletes at seminars, camps, and races, or communicated with them via e-mail, I’ve found that their comments often begin the same way: Something in the book was hard to understand. Some athletes have never implemented my principles into their training because they just weren’t sure how to do it. After I answered their questions, there was an “aha” moment. They now understood. In this book I explain some of these misunderstood or perhaps complicated concepts from The Triathlete’s Training Bible in a new way, using the same explanations that help people understand them when I am talking with them in person.

Here you will also find race-specific training plans for each period, with each of the workouts described in detail. That wasn’t done in The Triathlete’s Training Bible. The focus here is less on pedagogy and more on application. I’ll tell you exactly what to do and how to do it.

In Your Best Triathlon, rather than just explaining how to train as a disinterested author, I’ll write it from the perspective of your coach. The triathletes I’ve coached over the years have always come to understand the methods I use better than anyone else—with the exception of the coaches I’ve trained. I’ll talk to you here just as I do with the athletes I coach during my weekly telephone conversations with them. This is when we get into the details of how to do a certain workout and why we’re doing it this particular way. You will learn a lot about triathlon training and will be able to apply it right away.
In Part I, I’ll describe some of the important principles from the first book from a new perspective while also introducing you to some new methods. Then in Parts II, III, and IV the serious training begins. Using a periodization format based on the seasonal timing and distance of your next important race, I’ll walk you through the step-by-step process that goes into the preparation for an important triathlon.

Even if you didn’t have any trouble getting it the first time around, a new perspective may reinforce the original ideas, resulting in greater mastery. Repetition is the key to full understanding and accurate implementation. Exposure to similar information, especially from a different point of view, may give you a greater depth of comprehension. After all, it may have been many years since you first read The Triathlete’s Training Bible.

If you are a student of training who has read The Triathlete’s Training Bible very closely, you may find some differences in what you read here. That’s because the world of training is not static. It is constantly evolving. New technology often results in different ways of viewing old methods, and I continue to be a student of training who is always looking for better ways. This often results in change and even contradictions from what I have previously written.

I like it when triathletes ask me to sign their well-worn, dog-eared, thoroughly highlighted and tabbed books, whether it is The Triathlete’s Training Bible, The Cyclist’s Training Bible, or one of the other books I’ve written over the years that they are holding in their hands. It’s apparent that these athletes have been deeply involved in the process of learning and not just reading to finish a book. You’ll get a lot more from this book—and ultimately race better—if you do that also. The more tattered this book becomes, the more you will learn. Mark it up!

What else can you do to make this book—and me—your coach? You could read a chapter at the same time as your training partner and discuss what you are learning whenever you get together for a workout. But realize that talk and good intentions are not enough. It takes action to become a better athlete. Apply what you are learning. Try out some of the methods the very first chance you get. Start following the training plans at the ends of Chapters 4 through 12 based on where you are in the season right now.

What should you do if you come across something you don’t understand, or something you are reluctant to try because you are unsure what to do? Go to my blog (joefrielsblog.com) and do a search for the topic. There’s a good chance you will find what you are looking for, as there are years of information stored there on a wide variety of subjects. If that doesn’t help, then send an email to support@trainingbible.com. Briefly describe your quandary, and one of our TrainingBible
coaches will get back to you with an answer. If your question is simple and does not require a lot of time to research or address, there is no charge for this service. I do need to warn you that if your question is complex, we may suggest a consultation with one of our coaches, and there’s a fee for that. Keep your question brief and to the point to avoid that cost.

I do a few weekend seminars, one-day clinics, and multiday camps around the world on training for triathlon. These are listed on our Web site (TrainingBible.com). Consider attending one to learn about triathlon firsthand and to get your questions answered.

The ultimate way to become a better triathlete is to hire a coach. If you have high goals and are pressed for time, this is the best way to not only race better, but also grow as an athlete. There are thousands of great coaches around the world. You can find one through your national triathlon federation or at TrainingPeaks (trainingpeaks.com), a Web site devoted to the enhancement of training and performance of endurance athletes.

One final point: This book is not meant to be read cover to cover. Treat it as a reference guide. After Part I, start reading with the chapter that corresponds to where you are in your season. Chapter 3 will help you to figure out where to begin based on how many weeks remain until your most important race of the season. Consult the training plan at the end of the first chapter you read, modifying it as needed to fit your lifestyle. As you are about to finish a 3- or 4-week training block, read the next chapter to begin preparing for the following block. If you are now at the start of your training for a new season, continue straight on through and go to Chapter 4, which describes how to train as your season begins. Then follow the training plans at the end of each chapter as you progress through the season.

The training plans at the ends of Chapters 4 through 12 are just like the ones I write for the athletes I coach. At the start of the season, the Prep and early Base blocks, the workouts are quite simple. As the season progresses the workouts become increasingly complex. By Base 3 (Chapter 7), you may well be scratching your head as you look at the training plan tables. Don’t worry: Each training session listed in the plan is explained in great detail earlier in the chapter.

So let’s get on with it. For the next several hundred pages I’ll be your coach. We will work as a team as you get ready for the best triathlon you’ve ever had.

—Joe Friel
Boulder, Colorado
Part I

YOUR BEST TRIATHLON

The first three chapters lay the foundation for your best triathlon by developing an understanding of what it takes to race to your potential. I will tell you the same things I talk about with the athletes I coach. I will also explain the qualities I look for in athletes who have high goals. This will provide focus for your training, which is described in Parts II through V.

In Chapter 1 you will set a seasonal goal that will put you on the path to training as you’ve never trained before. I’ll also tell you what to look for in a race to maximize your potential for success. Then we’ll try to predict how you will do in that race.

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to develop a deeper understanding of what it takes to be the best triathlete possible. We will delve into what fitness really is, what’s holding you back, the many nuances of power, and the characteristics of good triathletes.

We’ll review the main concepts of seasonal planning in Chapter 3. Even if you read about this in The Triathlete’s Training Bible, it’s important to refresh your memory before you begin to lay out your Annual Training Plan. You’ll soon be on your way to swimming, biking, and running with more confidence and putting your skills together for your best possible performance on race day.

Let’s get started!
Your Race

YOUR BEST TRIATHLON. It’s a daunting task. If you are like most of the triathletes I coach, you’ve been racing for a few years and have had some success. Now you’ve decided it’s time to see how good you can be if you get focused. I’m certain that by working together with a common goal, we can pull it off. It won’t be easy, but that is what makes the challenge so much fun. Just thinking about becoming the best triathlete possible is motivating. Imagine what it will feel like to cross the finish line having achieved your goal. Getting from where you are now to that point several weeks from now will place many demands on you. I’ll be there with you each step of the way as you follow the race preparation training detailed in Chapters 4 through 11.

The starting point for this journey is deciding what “best triathlon” means for you. This decision involves goal-setting. Next you’ll need to choose a race. Just as I do with the triathletes whom I personally coach, I will help you with both tasks. This chapter is designed to help you set a precise goal, choose the race that’s right for you, and consider what it will take to be successful on race day.

GOAL SETTING

I know you’ve heard it before, but I’m going to say it again: You must have well-defined and measurable goals if you want to excel at anything in life, and that includes your best triathlon. Vague and open-ended goals are cop-outs, a way of avoiding a
decision that needs to be made. The higher your goal is relative to what you have achieved in the past, the more important it is that you be precise about that goal and have a plan for achieving it. An undefined goal without a plan is just a wish.

Creating and planning for a well-defined, ambitious goal can be a bit scary. These tasks demand action. They require hard and long training sessions wedged in between other activities in your life and accompanied by hard work, fatigue, soreness, and the possibility of failure. But, most of all, higher goals within the sport of triathlon are intimidating because they require you to balance everything in your life—family, career, friends, household responsibilities, community involvement, other interests, and training. If your goal is ambitious, you can expect it to have a significant impact on your life.

I once went to a talk given by a successful ultradistance runner. He described a relentless training regimen during which he spent every spare minute running on trails. He ran before work, during his lunch break, after work well into the night, and for entire weekends. He had won the Western States 100-Mile Ultramarathon that year and was obviously pleased with this accomplishment. During the question-and-answer session after the race, someone asked how all of that training had affected the rest of his life. He answered that he’d lost his job, his wife had divorced him, and he had no friends. “But,” he said, as he held up the belt buckle that is awarded to the winner, “it was all worth it!” I’m not sure I agree with that, but to each his own. He had accomplished his goal, albeit at a high price.

I doubt that reaching your goal will be quite so costly, but there will be a cost. I wouldn’t recommend giving up family, friends, and career for it. The higher your goal, however, the greater the sacrifice. And it will likely be a sacrifice for others, too. Those around you, especially your family, will have to change their lives somewhat to accommodate your passion. They will endure late meals and huge blocks of time when you aren’t available. They’ll take over your household chores, deal with your occasional overtraining grumpiness, bend their activities to fit your training schedule, and much more. Before you start down this path to triathlon excellence, it’s best to discuss it with the people who will be affected. If they don’t enthusiastically support your pursuit of this goal, your chances of success are slim, and you should reconsider.

Don’t take this important step lightly. Excellence isn’t easy. If it were, everyone would be excellent.

From this point forward, I’m going to assume, just as I do with all of the athletes I coach, that you have the full support and blessing of your family and friends for your ambitious goal. So let’s get on with understanding your goal.
Refining Your Goal

If you hired me to be your coach, I would need to know more about you. This is a long process where I ask lots of specific questions. You would start by telling me your goals, which I would help you define. This part requires some introspection on your part, and in order to create a similar process, your responses need to be honest and thoughtful. In the end, you’ll have a more specific, achievable goal to strive for.

Why this goal? Is it really something you want, or is it something someone else wants you to do—or perhaps something you think someone else wants you to do? (I see this issue occasionally, for example, with women athletes who want to achieve the same goals that their husbands have set for themselves.)

How can you be more specific? What do you mean by “faster”? Faster at which race? How much faster? What does “place higher in your age group” mean? Five places higher? Top 10? On the podium?

Are you being realistic? A common goal of the athletes I coach is to qualify for a major event such as a national championship, a world championship, or Ironman Hawaii. Have you qualified before? What kind of race performance did it take to qualify? Have you researched the time commitment you will need to make in order to qualify? Perhaps you want to win a special race. What is the course like? What is the typical weather? How have you done in the past in this race? Who is your competition, and how good are they?

Accommodating Your Goal

Now we can consider what is standing between you and success. Immediately you might think of improving your muscular endurance on the bike or swimming with more power. We’ll tackle your “limiters” later in this chapter. First let’s talk about the changes you’ll need to make. More than likely you will have to shift your priorities and rearrange your life to achieve your goal. How will you do that? This is the hard part. Dreaming about goals is fun and exciting, but figuring out how to achieve them is difficult.

If I could just tell you what to do with your training without concern for the rest of your life, it would be easy. Based on what I’d discovered about you and your goal, I could create a training plan for you to follow over several weeks that could practically guarantee triathlon success. In fact, that’s what I’ve done in this book, leaving the hard part—how to make it happen—up to you. Just train both long and intensely and you’ll achieve very high performance goals. But will the multitude of changes in your day-to-day life be worth it? Only you can answer that question.
Everyone wants to be successful; few have the will to make it happen. Once you have a clear, precise goal, write it on a slip of paper and place it where you will see it every day.

**RACE SELECTION**

Your goal may have already determined what race will be your focus. If so, you are pretty much set to start training. Perhaps it’s your goal to qualify for Ironman® Hawaii, a national championship, or some other event with multiple qualifiers. Or perhaps your goal is to produce a fast time for a given distance, and the particular race doesn’t matter much. Regardless, you will need to choose a race to make your goal viable.

This focus race is called the “A-priority” race, which means it’s the most important. You may even have one or two more A-priority races planned for this season. Three is the maximum. But in this book we will focus on one of them—the most important one. The A race. For this one you will build to a high level of fitness and then taper your training so that you come into great form on race day. If everything goes right, you will have race fitness like you have never experienced before. The buildup to this race-readiness is a long and complex process that I will take you through, step by step, in Chapters 4 through 11.

There will also likely be B- and C-priority races on your schedule. In Chapter 3 we will develop an annual training plan that includes all of these races. The B-priority races are not quite as important to you as the A races; they are stepping-stones along the path. You want to do well in them, so we’ll schedule a few days of rest prior to each B race. But we won’t peak your fitness for them. And as soon as they are over, you will return to training for the A race. The C races are not very important. Essentially, they are hard workouts. There is no rest before these, and your results are of little consequence. You will still give them your best effort because you do these as tune-ups for more important races, as learning experiences if you are new to triathlon, or perhaps even as social events if friends are doing them. The more experienced you are and the longer your A (or A-priority) race is, the fewer C-priority races you should do.

**Timing**

The first consideration is how much time you have to train and where you currently are in the season. If you’ve recently finished the previous season, it’s early winter, and you’ve been rather laid back with your training, then we need at least 24 weeks to get ready. If it’s late winter or early spring and you have just completed your Base period so that you have good aerobic fitness, then you’ll need 11 to 12 weeks to get ready. If it’s summer and you’ve already started racing, allow a minimum of 6 to 7
An athlete once wrote to me to ask for advice about whether to do an early-season marathon as a short-term goal to stay motivated. He was planning on doing the Ironman later in the season and wondered whether doing a marathon in March would help him build toward the Ironman. His question is a common one among competitive athletes, and it takes on new importance when you are training for your best triathlon. The problem is that a significant recovery is needed after a marathon. If you approach the marathon with a specific goal beyond the goals of your A-priority race, you could jeopardize your greater goals.

There is no compelling reason to do a marathon when training for an Ironman. But there are many reasons why you shouldn’t. The athlete mentioned one—the necessary recovery afterward, which may last a month if you set a new personal best. During this time you’d be losing running fitness. There’s also an increased risk of injury and a loss of focus on swimming and cycling. Trying to set a personal best in a marathon makes it an A-priority race. Too many of your resources (time and energy) will be shifted to running as a result. And, besides, the pace you run in an Ironman is nowhere near the pace you run in a marathon personal-record attempt.

You’d be much better served by training for a half-marathon in the months leading up to an A-priority Ironman. One of the many upsides of this, one that I really like, is that you train faster than when training for a marathon. The key to training is not how much training you do, but how much quality there is in your training. This generally equates to the intensity of your training. Faster training means faster running. I sometimes have sub-10-hour Ironman triathletes run fast in the late Base period, because in the Build period the running becomes much slower and is done at the goal Ironman pace in order to become more racelike. This is a pace that you could do all day if you hadn’t just finished a 4 km swim and 112 mile ride.

If your A-priority race will be an Iron-distance race, there is nothing wrong with wanting to run a marathon—especially if you’ve never done one before. But you need to plan that so it doesn’t interrupt your Ironman training, since that is your greater goal. When it comes time to run, keep your effort and ego in check so your best triathlon is still within reach.
weeks. These estimates are minimums. Generally, the more time you have until the race the better, so long as it’s not more than about 30 weeks. If the A race is more than seven months off, then it’s a good idea to schedule another A race about 12 weeks before. We’ll peak for the first A race and then return to training for the second. The details of scheduling and planning are discussed in Chapter 3.

**Location**

There are some real advantages to choosing a race that’s close to home. Long-distance travel is often disruptive to final race preparation because of jet lag, exposure to illness on airplanes, fatigue, strange food, mental stress, and more. Typically, the closer to home the race is—in your home town or a short drive away—the better your race performance. In the days and hours before the race, you can sleep in your own bed and eat your own food while keeping extra stress in your life low. This ideal location is seldom an option, however.

**Terrain**

The terrain profile of the A race should also be considered relative to where you train. If you pick a race that is very hilly but you live someplace flat, you’re at a distinct disadvantage. Although you can simulate hills in training (a tactic I’ll explain in later chapters), it’s never the same as running or riding up a steep or long hill. Hills often determine the outcome of races. A few years ago when I was coaching a pro triathlete who was especially good on hills, I compared how course profiles related to the outcomes of races. What I found was that the hillier the course, the closer the bike performance was to overall race placement. The flatter the course, the more closely the run split time was related to race outcome. In other words, if it is a hilly course, the advantage goes to strong cyclists over strong runners. But a flat course puts the strong runner at an advantage. Of course, there are always athletes who are exceptions, and you may be one of them. Select a course based both on the terrain where you train and on your strength as a cyclist or runner.

**Altitude**

Altitude can significantly impact race performance. If you live near sea level or up to about 2,000 feet, it’s generally not a good idea to pick an A race in Colorado or another high-altitude location such as Albuquerque, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Arizona; or Laramie, Wyoming. This warning is especially true if your goal is a fast time. You will be 2 to 20 percent slower, depending on how high the race is, than you are on your low-altitude training course. Of course, everyone will be at least
a little slower than they would be at sea level. If your goal is a high placement, realize that those who live at high altitude have a definite advantage if their fitness is the same as yours coming into the race.

If you correctly time your arrival at a high-altitude destination, there are a few ways to curb your losses. One effective strategy is to arrive at the race site less than 24 hours before the start, because the body begins to experience the negative effects of high altitude in the second day of exposure. These effects include changes in heart rate, hydration status, body acidity and alkalinity, carbohydrate utilization, blood iron levels, and immune system function. Some people experience nausea and shortness of breath with initial exposure. It takes about 4 weeks at high altitude for your body to fully recalibrate. Within just 2 weeks, your body should undergo significant adaptation. So if you can go to the high-altitude race venue at least 2 weeks early, you have a second option. But during this 2-week block your training is likely to suffer, and fitness may be lost. A third option is to rent or buy an altitude tent for your home and sleep in it every night for at least 4 weeks prior to the race. In the first week to 10 days, steadily take the simulated altitude up to about 7,000 feet (2,100 meters). Get a minimum of 8 hours per day in the tent. Realize that you may not sleep as well as normal. Some athletes also experience claustrophobia. The benefits from high-altitude exposure last about 3 weeks, but there is a lot of individual variation.

High-altitude races—those higher than about 5,000 feet (1,500 meters)—are seldom a good choice for the low-altitude athlete seeking a peak performance. If you have a choice, avoid these for your A race.

**Climate**

Another race condition that requires adaptation is heat. Cities such as Phoenix, Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Miami can be extremely hot in the summer. If you are from a northern city where it’s relatively cool, such conditions will present even greater difficulties for you than changes in altitude. As with altitude, it takes about 2 weeks to adapt to heat, and during those 2 weeks your training, especially running, will suffer. Other than stiff competition, heat is the biggest challenge you will face in racing. I once coached a pro who wanted to qualify for the U.S. Olympic triathlon team at a race in Dallas in May. At start time the temperature was 93°F (34°C) with high humidity. Everyone struggled in the muggy heat that day. He qualified because he’d spent 2 weeks in the Dallas area prior to the race, training in the heat of the day. He was better adapted than most. Don’t plan on a fast time if you are racing someplace hot.
You may not have a choice in many of these race-venue considerations. Kona is always hot and humid in early October, so if you are to race well at the Ironman World Championship, or in any other hot climate, you need to do all you can to get ready for the heat. You could go to the race site 2 weeks before race day and do most of your runs and all of your rides in the late morning and early afternoon. If you have to stay home, another option is to ride an indoor trainer in a sauna or on the deck of an indoor-pool facility for an hour or longer every day for 2 weeks. (Be sure to clean your bike after a humid, sweaty ride.) If there is a treadmill available for use in the sauna or at the pool (although this is unlikely), include some running as well.

Air quality is another concern at some race venues. The extreme air pollution in some cities will definitely have an impact on your performance. In the Americas, Mexico City stands out as such a location. Many big cities in India, Africa, and Asia also fall into this category. Adaptation is not an option. In fact, if there are no other concerns (such as altitude and heat, which are both issues in the case of Mexico City), avoid going to such a race location until the latest possible time.

**Competition**

Who among your competitors is likely to be at the race? You may want to compare several race options with this question in mind. If your goal is winning, earning a podium position, achieving a top-10 finish, or qualifying for another race based on age-group placement, then you should know who your competition is likely to be. You can find out by asking the best athletes, talking with the person in your age group who always knows what the others are doing (every category has such a person), checking the blogs of known competitors, finding results from previous years to see who frequently races in a given event and what their times were, and schmoozing at races.

**Picking and Knowing a Race**

All or some of these variables may already have been decided for you. Your A race may be a national or world championship. Do what you can to play to your strengths, but don’t panic about the elements that are beyond your control. Once you make a decision, we can begin equipping you for the challenges you anticipate.

Once you’ve decided on a race, you need to learn all you can about it. There may be subtle course nuances such as off-camber corners, craggy running trails, a shallow swim, prevailing winds, ocean currents, rough pavement, or a poorly organized packet pickup. The better you know the race, the better you can prepare for it. While training, you want to visualize the course whenever possible. So how can
you find out the details? Do you have previous experience with this race? Do you know anyone else who has done it? Check the race Web site for details. A video of the course may be available online or through a vendor. Do an Internet search. Use Google Earth to check out course details. Don’t leave your knowledge of the course to chance—you don’t want any surprises when you arrive at the race venue.

**PREDICTING A GREAT RACE**

I believe it is possible to predict with a high degree of confidence how you’ll do in your most important race once the training is done. Of course, from where you sit now, it’s difficult to say how it will all play out. I believe there are four factors that determine success, assuming you have the potential to achieve a realistic but challenging goal.

1. **FINAL 12 WEEKS OF TRAINING**

Research suggests that the final 84 days are the most important in your preparation for an endurance event. In periodization talk, these weeks comprise the Build and Peak periods. This emphasis doesn’t lessen the importance of the Base period that precedes the last 84 days. In order to train well in Build, you must have a solid fitness base.

During the Build period, you must avoid gaps in training for any reason, including the most common ones: unusual commitments (your spouse and boss will love this one), injury, burnout, illness, and overtraining. Any of these complications will put your chances of success well below 50-50. It’s not simply great workouts during these 84 days that do the trick; it’s consistent training. You can’t miss workouts. Ever. The trick is moderation and the wise expenditure of energy. You must be smart enough to avoid illness and injury and keep from digging a deep hole of fatigue.

2. **RACELIKE WORKOUTS IN THE BUILD PERIOD**

During the Build period, your workouts must increasingly take on the demands of the race for which you are training. That concept seems simple enough, but I often learn of athletes violating this principle. They train for an Ironman by doing short, fast intervals, or they train for an Olympic-distance race by going increasingly longer distances at a slow pace.

A key to success is doing workouts that mimic the race in some way. The more racelike these workouts, the better your chances of success on race day. This is why, if you are doing an Ironman, I will have you do “Big Day” workouts twice in the last 84 days (as explained in Chapter 8). On the Big Day you will do 8 hours of
Ironman-paced training and eat the way you plan to eat on race day. There are 90 minutes for recovery between each of the disciplines. If these two workouts go well, you have a high chance of success.

3. THE IDEAL COURSE AND CONDITIONS

Some events, such as championships, are tied to given courses. You must train to do as well as you can on a particular course by improving your limiters and taking advantage of your strengths whenever possible. But if you have the option of choosing a course, be sure to pick one that matches your abilities. Important considerations, as described earlier, include course length, hills, turns, terrain, water conditions, altitude, and weather—especially rain, snow, heat, humidity, and wind.

Your other concern is competition. You have no control over who shows up in your race category, but with some research and previous experience, you can probably make an educated guess. Knowing who the other athletes are and how well they generally race may help you make a decision about which race to select.

If the course and conditions don’t match up well with your strengths, then your chances of success are diminished. If you have options, select a race that you feel confident about.

4. DESIRE

How badly do you want it? A peak race performance will take you to your limits. In other words, it will hurt. Are you willing to suffer to achieve your goal? Hard races have a way of showing what we are made of. When that time inevitably comes late in the race, do you have what it takes to hang on, or do you often crack? This kind of talk sounds like macho posturing, and maybe it is. But wanting it is a big part of what competition is about. It takes great motivation to continue when your body is screaming at you to stop. Some people seem to be very good at pushing through suffering, which may be as much a physical ability as a mental one. Others may
simply be better designed to tolerate pain. Then again, it may be something that their lives have prepared them to handle. Do you suffer well? If so, your chances of success are high.

As you start down the path to your A-priority goal race, keep these four keys to success in mind. Most of the variables that affect these four factors are in your control. If you can successfully plan for and execute all four, I’d be willing to place a bet on you in Las Vegas.

Now that you’ve set your goal and selected a race, let’s take a closer look at what it will take for you to succeed.
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JOE FRIEL is the founder and president of Training Bible Coaching, a company with endurance coaches around the world who learn and apply the coaching philosophy and methods described in this book. Training Bible Coaching’s athletes include recreational and elite triathletes, duathletes, cyclists, mountain bikers, runners, and swimmers.

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He conducts yearly seminars and camps on training and racing for endurance athletes and provides consulting services to corporations in the fitness industry and to national governing bodies.

As an age-group competitor, he is a former Colorado State Masters Triathlon Champion and a Rocky Mountain region and Southwest region duathlon age-group champion, has been named to several All-American teams, and has represented the United States at the world championships. He also competes in USA Cycling bike races.

Joe Friel may be contacted through his Web site at trainingbible.com.
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