

Winter Preparation: What to Do this Year

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BGN **INT** **XTP** **MSR** **G**etting started on Winter Preparation is sort of like getting going on the first sentence or two of an article or school paper; one just hates to let go of status quo and get going. Some of the racers who have to be on top of their form in June have already done their planning calendars and are in the gym, while others are hanging on to the cross season and enjoying it. Track sprinters probably have been working on strength all year long and are keying in on preparation for their major races. Those new to the sport will be looking to their mentors and spending most of their time riding the bike.

Top quality Winter Preparation certainly makes good use of the “Overload Principle.” This goes with my belief that nothing beats muscle at the finish line. It’s a rare athlete who can continue to enjoy their sport if they have no success and their personal progress is nil. Progress in the muscle department helps personal satisfaction greatly; as in, training becomes fun! The ingredients in the recipe are a pinch of socializing, a pound of rollers, a quart of weights, a spot of testing, a dash of sauna, season with stretching and cook for 4 months. If this recipe is not over- or under-cooked the result is a cyclist who wants to go fast.

Long, long ago when I was a parent of a teenager, I worked out with our club under the coaching of a former Pentathlete member of the US Olympic Team. We prepared for our weight workouts with a running warm-up. The routine was simple—run for 20 minutes and then do three sets of selected weights followed by shower and sauna. Later the coach put us on rollers with track bikes followed by weights. After a warm-up on rollers, we did top speed sprints of 10 to 30 seconds. This was followed by our weight circuit. As the coach moved to other activities, I coached and followed his pattern. The benefits were apparent to all—leg speed went up—right along with strength and agility.

This training pattern has evolved but still retains its form. The riders were going into the weight portion of their workouts thoroughly warm and the time in the weight room assisted in the recovery from the intervals. Enthusiasm remained high. When we put heart monitors on the riders, it was discovered that heart rates went down and recovery was faster and more consistent. We also discovered that extra long

intense intervals had a negative effect. Riders reported being tired and sore the next day and they had a drop in top speed on the next workout. Writing a chart on these kinds of workouts could be very complex, so it’s my belief that fartlek is the magic word.

Lots of other coaching benefits appeared. We could see riders eager to come to workout because they felt successful and they enjoyed the competition and camaraderie. We could work on efficiency and style improvement and direct encouragement. We could also do more diagnosis around where to improve each rider. After an event or a personal success everybody wants to talk to their friends and coach.

The devil certainly lurks in the details of this roller warm-up and conditioning series. We begin with 10-second sprints and 50 seconds easy. This is usually a pair of efforts and is followed by 15-second sprints and 45 seconds easy. Next we usually do a pair of 20-second sprints with 40 to 60 seconds easy and may follow this with a single 30-second sprint. This is done for about 4 months. This sounds boring, but it is not unless it is done only as a repetitive drill.

It's easy to start winter weight sessions with a simple plan.


The sequence and pattern should be tailored to the plan and the rider. Some of the intervals are done at race tempo, e.g., 100–120 rpm with random sprints, and some intervals are done at top speed as on and offs, e.g., 10-second sprint with 10 seconds easy. Tailor the session even to the day of the week—don’t load up before or after a race. There are lots of ways to progress as the improvements come. Vary the sequence from 10–10–20–20–30 seconds to 10–20–10–20–30 seconds. Vary the rest periods. Do a minute at race tempo (90–120 RPM) with random 7-second sprints at top speed. After serious progress has been made then intervals consisting of on-offs at equal time are appropriate. An example would be a 10-second sprint with 10 seconds easy repeated up to 6 times.

There is no end to the combinations that can be used to increase the volume of intensity as the training evolves. Experience has shown that sessions will usually run 45 minutes to 1 hour. Time allocation has been about 20 plus minutes of warm-up with 20 minutes of intervals and a short warm-

down before going to weight sessions. Some riders will feel a need for some stretching and will stop before intervals to do that.

The vital pieces of equipment are a notebook and pencil for weight sessions. Experienced riders have been heard to say that “I know what I need to do, I’ve done it for years.” The rebuttal to that is: If you want last year’s performance, then do last year’s workout. It takes a person with an excellent memory to handle 15 exercises with three or more sets of each at differing weights and repetitions while changing items with progress. That’s 60 pieces of information to remember for each session, which should be remembered for the next session.

It’s easy to start winter weight sessions with a simple plan of 15 exercises with fifteen reps for two of three sets at about 75% of capacity. Safe weight loading is easy to establish by starting at near failure for the 15 repetitions. Progress comes by increasing the weight on the second and third set. Progress will be apparent when the athlete goes to failure at 12, 10 and even lower repetitions. It is typical for the athlete to underestimate their capacity and they must either question the progress in their notebooks or be challenged by the coach. It helps if a simple spreadsheet pattern is used in the notebook e.g., Exercise- WT/Rep Feeling. Under the Feeling column, a simple A,B,C, or even D will do. By Golly! (That’s just here to quash the “dry text syndrome”) one can even find when the blahs started and a snappy change of emphasis.

If you have read this far, you are probably looking for more “how to” on weights. Our typical list includes leg press, lat pulldown, hamstring curl, toe raises, leg lifts, Roman Chair, curl ups, back raises, squats, leg extension, bench press, lunges, good mornings and exaggerated bench row. In order not to make for long sessions, turn the time in the weight room into a circuit by not resting to do the full multiple sets each time at a station. Rest each muscle group and stay warm by going from legs to torso to arms etc. Its best to keep the weight room from becoming the “waiting room.” 

More Information Please!

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