

The Triathlon Summit - Have your best race ever at your biggest race of the year

CLIFF: I can't complain. Although today I'd say is probably the coldest day and probably the most miserable. We've had pretty much rain all day. It's about maybe 40, 42 or something. But it's been really nice. Usually pretty much low to mid 60s, so pretty good.

KERRY: Cool. Cool, cool, cool.

CLIFF: Yeah, can't complain with that. How about you guys, a lot of snow?

KERRY: I'm actually in Florida. It's been really good. These past two weeks have been like 70s, so I've been enjoying it, for sure.

CLIFF: No kidding.

KERRY: Yeah. So with that, I think we will get started this evening. Let me just put on the conference line here.

So everyone, you are all in the right place tonight for the call this evening with Cliff English. Cliff English has a pretty impressive coaching resume. In 2002 he was the development coach for the National Training Center in Victoria, Canada. He coached at the 2004 Olympics for Samantha McGlone. In 2004 he was also the Canadian elite coach of the year. He's been the elite national team coach for the US from 2006 to 2008. In 2005, 2006, 2007 he was USA ITU world champion elite team coach. His resume keeps going on and on.

Some of the athletes he's had the chance to coach have been Hunter Kemper, Sarah Haskins, Sara McLarty, Tim O'Donnell, Mark Fretta. The list keeps going on and on and on. He's basically the man and we're lucky enough to have him on the call with us tonight. So with that Cliff, I want to welcome you to the call.

CLIFF: Thanks very much. I'm happy to be here.

KERRY: Good deal, good deal. All right, so let's start with our first question here. You've got a knack for cranking out a lot of guys that win some impressive races at the world championship level, 70.3, Ironman, ITU. My question for you is, how do you get athletes to peak at the right time for the big race?

CLIFF: In my mind there's obviously a lot of components to peaking. With that in mind, obviously working with various athletes, whether different disciplines, that kind of thing, it really comes down to the individual and getting to know that athlete extremely well is key. It's one of those things

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if you actually develop an athlete say from a pretty early age then you really kind of get to know the athlete. With a lot of coaches and the way careers go you sometimes end up getting an athlete that's already had a pretty successful career and then you start working with them and you have to kind of fast track yourself a little bit as to how or what works for that particular athlete

In general I'm a big fan of planning. I like planning, but like all plans things need to be flexible. I definitely get pretty good with the Excel spreadsheet. I've got it all mapped out. You always have to kind of touch base with that plan as you go and obviously based on the goals of the athlete you can kind of figure out where you're going to peak, whether it's a couple times in the year, if it's just... Usually athletes want to do well in more than just one race or extremely well at one race. The old single [indecipherable], which is pretty easy to do, is kind of out. You're looking at multiple peaks in a year.

Like I said, it really makes a big difference when you map it out to begin with. That's kind of what you're doing around this time of year when you're working with an athlete. You just reviewed how the year went and you're looking towards future goals and you start mapping a plan and marking it all down. That kind of helps you keep track.

For me, as well, with tapering, I like to do some trial tapers. You usually chose a B or C priority race and you can kind of figure out what works with the athlete. Obviously when you have the luxury of working with the athlete for multiple years you do have a pretty good idea what works. But things are always changing. Even as athletes progress and get a little older things do change and they don't absorb the training as well a drop-down taper doesn't quite work the way it used to the way it did when you were working with them seven or eight years ago, which for me was the case with Sam.

It's interesting because I've worked solely with her since 1999. It's really fun to have that kind of period of time with an athlete and you get to see how their body responds over that period of time

The trial taper is really key. You can kind of figure out whether some athletes need to come in with a lot of intensity or sometimes maybe a lot less intensity, sometimes a little more volume or a little less. Having worked with pretty much hundreds of athletes and having seen athletes who for the last couple of decades, it is amazing. Everyone does taper differently. It's a pretty in-exact science. It's something that's always evolving. Like I said, the timing is pretty key and that trial is always key. And then I guess coming at interval, like I said too it's also figuring out what works for the athletes but I do like cutting back pretty big on the

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volume, especially in that final week, for short-course athletes. You know, you can cut down maybe 50 percent of volume but keep some pretty good sharpening.

The other things that I like to do too for athletes in a taper and especially even sometimes say two weeks or three weeks out, especially if it's a really key race like a world championship, a lot of my philosophy on coaching triathlon is about running fatigue because that's basically what we need to get used to is always being cree [?] loaded with the run. What I kind of like to do two or three weeks out is to flip around some of the sessions and actually allow the athlete to maybe have a run first thing in the day or actually be fresh for a session and they can start getting some confidence in that.

I pay a lot of attention to that psychological component as well when you start getting closer to a race. Obviously you don't want the athlete to be just getting absolutely trashed and feeling no confidence and they're only four days out. You kind of do some sets that you know they're going to get a hold of and feel pretty good about. There's definitely that aspect that I take into account as well.

KERRY: Cool, all right. Great. My next question for you then is, how do you get athletes to run faster off the bike?

CLIFF: Okay. I guess I'll get into some of the things from my coaching philosophy. Basically, a very simple principle we're training is specificity. It's one of my favorite words. It just makes sense. If there's ever a word that really is key, not only for training but for sport, whether you figure swim, bike, run. It's daunting to think of preparing for any one of those events but obviously putting all three together is extremely challenging. When you're looking to perform in those your training has to be extremely specific towards sport which is swim, bike and run. A pretty simple philosophy but it really comes down to what are you preparing for. Even how you plan the race.

If you're a 33 minute 10K runner and you're hoping to run within 30 to 60 seconds of your fresh 10K, how are you going to prepare to do that? And you definitely have a plan. So obviously for me it's very specific training sessions, combo sessions, bike/run, even some extremely challenging sessions such as using your compu-trainer with a treadmill right next to it. That's one of my favorite sessions. Not every athlete is into the treadmill but a lot of the athletes that I'm coaching at the National Training Center, Sarah Haskins, even Hunter is a huge treadmill fan. We've done lots of compu-trainer sessions and then just getting onto a nice-tempo run on the treadmill.

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I think the big thing is also getting that bike strength and that will enable you to run well off the bike and then like I said, the specific training. You just basically just have to do the work. Which also sounds simple too but basically one of my favorite sets for off the bike would be a 5K basically time trial, like a tempo at your 10K effort and then 3 to 4 times 1Ks, just about 75 to 90 seconds. There's not too much hiding in a session like that. That was a set that I remember Sam doing back in the summer of 2004 just maybe two weeks, three weeks out from when she made the Olympic team for Canada. She ran, off a really hard bike, she had some athletes out there just like attacking her, a bunch of guys keeping the pace really hard, she came right off and went right into it just with maybe a couple minutes stretching, and ran a 17-minute 5K and then went basically 4 by 1Ks the same to a 3:09 1K. So we kind of knew she was ready. I've definitely done that with a lot of my guys. I just think those are pretty good sets.

The other thing, for long-course athletes, the same thing is getting into... It's much easier for a coach to give the athlete this. A self-coached athlete would probably never want to give themselves these workouts. But like I said, the longer intervals at your race pace. There's no hiding. A lot of my long-course athletes have seen tempo runs that might be 12-minute, 15-minute, 25-minute blocks at a certain pace on a run and you can even quantify it with 5Ks, 10Ks. We basically, for Sam I built up to basically a 30K time-trial which she was running at 2:40 mile pace, so 6:30 per mile. She basically started with 3 by 40 minutes, 3 by 10K, and built it up to just, there you go. That obviously wasn't off the bike, that was the day after a long day.

A large part of it is in the training. Then once again, obviously when athletes sustain what they're doing in training then it does transfer over to the race day. Obviously there are some things that arise and you have to work a little bit with mental skills and confidence and that kind of thing, and of course pacing, that's a big thing too.

ITU style racing is definitely challenging for athletes to get out there and to actually get into their own run. A lot of those races we see 50, 60 men or 50 women jumping off the bike together and then it's a 10K race. That's hard because you want to go with the people who are leading, but not everyone can go with a Hunter or not everyone can go with a [indecipherable]. A lot of people do get kind of pulled into that. Their first kilometer will just be blazing and then they usually end up having a pretty solid positive split. So you definitely have to, when it comes to the race, really work with what is the game plan.

I did that a lot with Sarah Haskins. Obviously she's going to be an athlete for the future. The same thing with Julie, when I was working with her with the US team. This is your race plan. This is pace that you need to

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hold. They got really good at it. It's sometimes hard, ego-wise, to let someone get away from you, but they could always come back to you. I think until you're running 33 or 34 instead of going toe-to-toe you have to race smart.

KERRY: Yeah, yeah, definitely. All right. Obviously with the athletes they're going to have strengths and weaknesses within the disciplines of triathlon. So how do you judge calculating how much time someone should spend training within each discipline, according to their strengths and weaknesses?

CLIFF: Okay. That's a really big question. Obviously, once again, it comes down to the individual. A lot of times too, if you did have say like a process, like a male athlete wants to do ITU racing and they're a 19:30 swimmer then that's pretty straightforward. You're like, "What's the first race you're thinking of doing? Is it May? Is it April?" Then you look at how much time you have and then you might have a goal along the way you'd like to hit taking a minute of his 1500 time. So maybe if we're really lucky and I've never worked with this athlete before, hypothetically speaking here of course, and I'm able to pick out a few things from his swim stroke, maybe in eight weeks we've gotten a minute. Then you can continue on to see how much more you can achieve in that training macro-cycle or you can start going into the two other sports.

I like to also kind of always be very mindful of the big picture and not just what's happening in each annual plan. Especially, this is what's exciting for a lot of coaches that are probably working with athletes that are eyeing 2012 Olympics, that obviously you have each year and a goal they have and the races they want to do. But at the same time if you have someone who is that 19:30 swimmer but you want to get them down to 17:00 or 17:30, you do have four years. You have to sort of work it into that quad, long-term athlete development model that you put together. So that does take a lot of thought and you have to strategize and look at it.

Obviously it is important to have a lot of communication with the athlete and get their goals. You can use that and figure out, to a certain degree, what you need to focus on and how. Athletes are going to kind of always be a little bit impatient and want it all now. That's just the way it goes. It really depends on that individual and on the sport. It is obviously more important for an ITU athlete to really nail that swim. So I would definitely emphasize that. You can definitely keep those other two sports going to a certain degree but it wouldn't be as large a percent of the focus on time. I would probably only look at a three, four month block, if I was developing an ITU athlete. I've done that over the years

One luxury of our sport is we can maintain the others, drop them down a

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little bit. We're still working energy systems. So while you're focusing on the bike you're still developing a huge aerobic capacity so you're not going to lose that.

I definitely over the years have tried a lot of different things, even when I was an athlete quite a few years ago. I used to try to get my swim up to another level and not touch my bike for an entire two months. You can definitely make some gains. You're always going to be able to retain a certain bit of those gains.

What complicates things is athletes do have to race, especially professionals if they need to make a living. So they always have to keep races in mind. They can't take too much time. It almost seems like you're on this treadmill all the time. It's definitely something that when I worked for federations I'll always hope that can kind of change so athletes don't always have to make a national team every year that we can actually have a program and be like, "Hey you know, you just develop. You just do what you've got to do to become a world-class runner like Hunter or a McLarty-style swimmer. We're behind you. We believe you've got the ability to be one of how many people that can go to the Olympics in four years. We're behind you." I think that kind of forward thinking isn't really there in too many federations yet. It's slowly coming. From that perspective of high performance that would make things a lot easier instead of trying to make all the gains in one three or four month block without missing out on a season. Does that make sense?

KERRY: Yeah, it does. That was good.

CLIFF: It's one of the challenges.

KERRY: Yeah, it's complex.

CLIFF: Exactly. With age-groupers it definitely is easier. You just have to make those short-term goals and set out and figure out the strategy to achieve them and then you piece it all together for their try.

KERRY: Sure. So the next question I have for you is, how do you regulate athletes and know if they're training too much or too little, that kind of line right there? That can be kind of tricky as well, as you know.

CLIFF: Oh, absolutely. I guess I've done all styles of coaching. I've been pretty fortunate for pretty much all my career. I've always been a hands-on, on the pool deck kind of coach. I've always coached either a university club, a squad, a national team. It really enables you to get to know your athletes on a daily basis. At one point I could tell the foot strikes of all my runners. I'd be like, "Hey, you're a little tired there today," to Brian Fleischman.

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He'd be like, "Yeah, I didn't sleep so well." I could tell how he lands on the ground or on the mountain bike. You can hear those things, whether it's fatigue from the micro-cycle, that kind of thing. You get to see even how the athlete carries themselves on a pool deck. Are they dragging? You can see those things a little bit and once you get to really know athletes it's good. It's one thing that I think has been really helpful, even for the relationship I've had with Sam. I'm probably extremely annoying at times. I remember one of my friends, Joel Filio, we used to always talk about that at times. Your wife sneezes and you're like, "Hey, you're getting sick." You can always be a little too on top of your athletes. Keep an eye and if you do have the opportunity to see them every day it does give you that opportunity to see how they look and you can read a lot from that when you get to know an athlete.

The more challenging side is the online coaching, obviously. With that we have great tools such as things like training peaks and there are some great logs that athletes can fill in. For me, I always try to either talk to the athlete a couple of times a week or once a week or definitely email a lot and get that information from them.

I think the big thing is sometimes as a coach you start suspecting that maybe someone's doing some extra work. If you get any kind of hints of that it's definitely a conversation you have to have. I've been coaching long enough that I know that I'm not doing the athlete any favors if I let things like that go by or if I can't actually be brutally honest. It's a hard thing to do but sometimes you need to. Just be like, "Hey, I'm going to call you on this. I think you're either loaded too much or you're doing something else. So what's going on here?" You don't want to do it too confrontationally. The way I always do it is explain it that, "We're a team. We're working together. If we're not connected, if we are not on the same page, then it's not going to work. We're essentially working towards the same thing." A lot of it, it does take time to build that relationship with an athlete, you need the trust and communication. It's not going to happen in a week or two. It's going to take some time. That's basically it.

What was funny about the US team was there were some athletes that were always getting in a little extra. After the thing with that, that sometimes helped. Some of their teammates were pretty good spies. That was never good but there was always a couple athletes that always loved to come tell me, "Hey, you know who I saw going out for a second run..." And you're like, "Oh, no." That always happens every once in a while.

Like I said, it's a relationship that's really important, between athlete and coach. It really needs to work. I think having that conversation, especially with an athlete if they're hiring you then you're like, "Let's get the most out of this. Let's make sure you perform. So we need to know exactly

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what's going on." I almost feel like I need to know that athlete better than they know themselves. I'll just be like, "What are you eating? What did you try?" Like always having to run and take a potty break before every track session, let's examine when your last meal was. Are you eating a little too close for the key runs? Maybe you need to adjust that compared to when you do your long easy runs where it doesn't matter because the intensity is high and you can eat right in front. Just little things were you kind of have to get into it and get to the nitty-gritty stuff with the athlete.

KERRY: Yeah, all right. Good stuff. Cliff, you've got some camps that you're coaching. Why don't you tell us how people can get to one of those camps you're going to be holding out there in Arizona, right?

CLIFF: Yeah, exactly. In spring of 2009 I have three camps in Tucson, Arizona. It's an awesome place to train. It's probably one of the best places, in my mind, for biking. There's just so much variety. You can do flats. You can do sharps, steep hills, long hills. You have the infamous Mt. Lemon down here, 26 miles in a national park and beautiful black top with a nice, steady 3 percent grade. I basically put together three camps. I really wanted to add some variety with these.

My first one is February 28th to March 5th. It's kind of like a mileage madness. So it's Ironman-gear, getting in big bike miles. We're going to hit some pretty amazing rides. We're also going to hit another one called Kitt Peak, which is going to be probably about a good 100 to 110-mile ride. It has a 12-mile climb in the middle that goes up to an observatory. That's a great climb. And of course Lemon. So in that camp we're going to have myself, Sam McGlone and another great coach, Paul Croft. We should also have Matt Reed and we might even have a few other guests that we're going to bring in.

Then the second camp is a women-specific camp. We wanted to do something just for women. We'll be staying at a pretty cool upscale resort, JW Marriot here in Tucson. This one is going to be pretty neat because I brought in Sharon Donnely who is a good friend of mine. She was a former athlete herself, 1999 Pan Am Triathlete Champion. She was also a US coach with me and she was the assistant Olympic coach. Of course we're going to have Sam. Also a close friend of mine, Bobby McGee, one of the best running coaches that I know, Olympic gold-medalist coach. So it's going to be a really nice camp. It should have a whole different feel, very women-specific with the female coach and also Sam. We really want to get into some of the training-specific needs of females.

Then the third camp is Olympic-distance based camp. So it's good for anyone that's Olympic distance, Ironman, half Ironman. The same thing, we're going to have Bobby McGee, Matt Reed, Sam, myself, Sharon

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Donnelly, Paul Croft. So we're just really trying to bring in a lot of great pro-athletes so that the camper can get to know them, learn from them. Great coaches.

We also have some demos. Zip is going to be present at all three camps. We also have specialized argon 18. So it's going to be some pretty fun stuff. We have Zoot as well involved. Yeah, I'm really excited about these camps. You can go to my website.

KERRY: Yes, yes, yes. What's your website?

CLIFF: www.cliffenglishcoaching.com.

KERRY: All right, good deal. You guys can definitely check that out. It sounds pretty sweet, for sure. Let me ask you this question. You've had a lot of massive success in training a lot of the top athletes out there in the world. What are the common principles that you've found, if anything, or strategies that you've used with all these athletes to kind of help them get to their peak and do well?

CLIFF: This is another really big one. I'll break it into I guess two categories. One, when you're say developing an athlete you get at a young training age, like a junior triathlete or something. Then I'll also talk a little more shortly about when you get someone who's already pretty well developed and what you can do with them. So basically starting off with developing an athlete, once again it kind of comes into the planning thing. You do have to kind of step back, look at the big picture. There's a lot of writing, developing these annual plans and quads and just looking at a long-term development plan. Just getting an idea of where this athlete is planning or wants to go and whether they're just a junior or an age-group, that kind of thing. Obviously the long-term thing would probably be more applicable to an elite athlete if they're a junior and they have aspirations of being an Olympian. For most age-groupers that may not totally apply.

What is pretty fun when you do develop an athlete which is quite young in training age, there's a few things I like to look at. You're basically trying to develop that complete athlete. You're trying to develop a lot of different, I like to call them competencies or characteristics. You're not only developing the energy systems, the physical and the strength, like structural but over a period of time that's why you kind of need to make a little bit of a plan. There's so much I feel you can impart to an athlete at a certain rate.

When I was working with Jasmine, Jasmine Oeinck, who is a two-time silver-medalist athlete, a really great athlete, what I noticed with her is she had a little window. And when you're talking about tactics and mental

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skills, psychology, but then you just hit a point where it's too much. Sometimes us coaches get a little too excited. We want to give everything right away. It's a bit of the camp-fire theory where you're kind of out there in the woods and you get a little fire going, you get a little spark. Then you get excited and you throw on all the wood and it goes out. It's pretty much the same thing. You can burn an athlete out or give them too much and they look like a deer in headlights after a few minutes and they're just like they've got so much floating in their head. They don't know what's going on and they can't think for themselves anymore.

So I always kind of look at it like you have to look at the individual. Some people have a great capacity for learning and just take it in. Others are a little slower and it takes time. They really learn through going through some of the states. I kind of look at all those components as a coach to develop life skills. So they can actually be out there in Japan and not freak out if a shuttle didn't pick them up and they're the only person and find a way to the hotel. There's definitely a lot to be learned if you're traveling as a national team member on the World Cup circuit. You definitely want to prepare your athletes for that.

I know there's definitely quite a few coaches that have kind of a similar philosophy. When I started coaching I wasn't able to travel to every race with my athletes, it just didn't work. So I wanted to make sure they were fine when they were there. I remember eight years ago Sam had duplicate parts for all her bikes. She had flown all around the world and she just had everything she needed and knew how to use it. You definitely look at those skills, especially when you're working with the younger athlete that you're developing. You look at all those components of being a complete athlete. That's one thing that's pretty exciting that I look at when I'm developing an athlete.

Obviously someone later in their career has quite a few of those things there. Sometimes there's some challenges because you might have to re-wire them a little bit. Maybe there are some bad habits. That brings me to my next point. When I do work with athletes I do like to instill some good habits. Some of my philosophy is I like my athletes to be conscious of what they're doing. Kind of go away from that mindset of just hammering and getting in a workout. This can be applied to age-groupers all the way through elite athletes. If you only have 15 hours in a week, as an age-grouper to train, I'd say you're probably better off spending 12 hours training and the other few hours taking the time to maybe prepare food for recovery so if you're rushing off to work you've got a smoothie ready. Or that you take a little more time to get a good cool-down or a good warm-up and you don't just jump into it.

Be conscious of what you're doing, actually think about the run. What are

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you preparing for for the key track session? Those kind of little things. I think those are obviously things that as a coach of many elites they're things that I've kind of brought in to my philosophy.

When you're doing repetition, obviously all our sports are very repetitive, very cyclical. Think of how many times in a 5K swim set you're repeating a bad stroke. A lot of what you prepare your athletes for through the training, it should be deliberate practice. Always running a run with good run form. Maybe reinforcing that swim stroke or run form at the end of a session, when they're fatigued, with some drills. Those kind of things. You can definitely purize it a little bit too, maybe in the off season say you're trying to iron out that swim skill or a certain component of your stroke. That's when that philosophy of deliberate practice, being conscious of what you're doing comes in.

Some of the other things I like to do too is it really is about the details. It goes all the way down into the training, everything you do. The other thing I do too is getting my athletes and teaching them to have a good pre-session routine. That works into them having a pre-race routine. They know if they had a time trial, they come onto deck a little earlier what they need to do, they've kind of found out the stretches, the dynamic stretching that works for them and they have this routine that they've sorted out for themselves, with my help. That kind of thing. That's a little bit of how I have come up with some of the principles.

With some of the other athletes I've gotten along the years that I've helped out or even seen with consulting... Back a few years ago I used to coach Peter Reed for a few years with the swim. I helped him a little bit with his planning and organization and that. It's always a good use for a coach, an outside set of eyes that can take a look at what they're doing and give them the low down of what we see. We can be very beneficial for that.

Sometimes with an athlete that's been doing it a long time... I've definitely had with Matt Reed when I worked with him and Laura Bennet and Hunter Camper and all these guys when I was with the US team, some of them were very set in their ways. At the same time you don't have to always reinvent the wheel and go new. What I always kind of looked at was, how can I improve their game. They're already at this level, maybe there's something in a little detail, that kind of thing. I also looked at it sometimes as maybe there's something I spot. That can actually get a little buy-in for me. You can't just kind of come up, these guys that are obviously some of the best athletes in the world and be like, "Hey, you're doing that all wrong." There's a certain way to approach them with it. I just kind of like observe something. It's interesting over the years that you became someone that they trusted.

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I remember in 2005 at the World Championships Nora Bennet afterwards was like, "Man, I really owe a large part of that race to you. I came to you before and I was like, 'Hey, what do you think with the swim?'" She was like, "This is a really technical bike course. It has something like 19 turns per lap," and it was like 6 or 7 laps. "I'm a little longer, a little lankier. I don't accelerate well." I had taken a look at the pontoon start and I had an idea where was a good place to start. She was like, "I had the best run of my life. I was right there with Sheila and Barb." That was perfect for her, great position. The same thing on the bike. I was like, "Well, you know, you can control the pace through the turns. If you have a hard time getting up hill and accelerating when someone's at the front accelerating, instead if you kind of come through then you can control the speed of what they come through and then you can get up to speed at your own pace because it's such a narrow, technical course." She did that to a T. She just kind of led through most of the turns and no one got away from her. She had a brilliant run. It was a podium performance for her.

Then when you do come up with some good things then they really see the value. Always make sure that you come up with things that are helpful and valuable, say if you are working with an athlete that's been in it for a long time.

KERRY: Cool, cool. All right, that was great. This next question I've got for you is a little more specific than the other ones. Basically it has to do with cadence. Is there an ideal cadence in cycling and in running? How do those translate into one another? Do they affect each other? What are your thoughts on that?

CLIFF: All right. Well, it should be pretty simple. Unfortunately I think sometimes it's like the more you know and the more people you work with sometimes things become almost more complicated. Like I was just saying previously, if you are working with someone who has been doing it for say 12, 15 years, is a top professional, you're like, "Well you know, maybe your 85 cadence is 85 cadence and that's it." I've definitely seen that with some of the swim strokes I've worked with too. You're like, "It's working. You're swimming on an [indecipherable]. We'll just maybe overlook the fact that it could probably use a little work."

When it comes to the run and the bike I guess there definitely has been some research. I'm more of a higher RPM kind of advocate. I definitely believe in that window of 85 to 105 RPMs, for both sports. I mean, obviously there's going to be a lot of variances depending on the discipline. So long-course people a little lower. It also depends a lot on your stature, how tall you are, how short you are, that kind of thing.

Although it's interesting because I think for a short-course athlete, I know

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a lot of people say off the top of their heads, okay, Hunter Camper is 6'2, 6'3. What would you think his cadence is if he's 6'2, an easy jog, 8-minute mile pace? What would you say?

KERRY: Uh, 90?

CLIFF: Good guess, good guess. Yeah, he's about a 94 to 96 cadence at the slowest pace you've ever seen, just jogging around a park.

KERRY: Yeah. I know a lot of Kenyans are like that too actually.

CLIFF: Exactly. In my mind I was always like that cadence is low. A lot of people just think, "I'm 6'2 and I run an 80 and that's the way it is." But I think that really, really... The cadence on a bike and the cadence on a bike in a triathlon makes so much more sense. You're much more efficient with higher cadence. In the run you just have to look at a 10K time and as the cadence slows in the later stages of the race and you start over-striding and then your heel is striking more and you're just getting more resistance and it slows you down. It really, in my mind, everything points towards finding that nice little window and what's possible for that athlete. I Dina Caster runs at around 108 to 110 cadence, but not everyone's going to coming off doing that. Though Emma Souso is pretty darn close. It's definitely good for each athlete and coaches to take a look at cadence.

And if you are doing time trials or key tempo runs off the bike, take a look or five to ten minutes, how much is that cadence changing? Do they come off and they're running 6-minute mile pace for the first mile in a 5K time trial and they're holding 96 cadence and then that second mile drops to 90 and then the third mile it drops to 85? Then it's definitely something to work on and to improve.

In my mind, like I said, a higher cadence is good but obviously there's definitely times to build strength, especially on the bike. I do like low cadence, the gear work, that kind of thing. Pretty much on a year-round basis I always like to do strides or a set of rations and a bike/run. I think it's really good to stay in touch with that higher turnover. It's very key.

KERRY: All right, great. Another question we got here has to do with weight training. A lot of people have a lot of opinions on this. Weight training, what's the deal? Do triathletes need it? Will they bulk up too much? Is it just for weight-lifters? What are your thoughts on that?

CLIFF: I think it's very important for sport, to what we do, depending on the program. In some cases athletes will bulk up. Once again there's going to be individual variances. Some athletes might be very prone to gaining some muscle mass. Sometimes an athlete will warn you about that. I've

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had a few who over the years who are like, “Looking at a pushup or looking at a squat rack I’ll gain muscle mass.” So you can work around it, monitor the program, do higher reps. That kind of thing is really key.

I definitely like using it. I definitely add it to my annual plan. There are some coaches that might be a little more into strength training. I know there are some that are probably a lot less. I’m not a huge advocate of say some really big Olympic lifts. Especially if you have a group sometimes you have to be really careful of that.

But I like my athletes to work closely with a physio so they can kind of look at the body, see if there’s imbalances. I like my strength training for that. I like my strength training to kind of make sure the core is strong. I think it’s important for the work in swim, bike and run that we put the body through that athletes are strong physically and do have a strong core, a strong back. This will obviously really transfer nicely to the race. I really believe it does limit breakdown in your form. Obviously it does help prevent injury in the later stages of races where having that foundation, having that strength is really key.

I do periodize it. I like it to fit into my annual plan. Sometimes in heavier weeks I might back off a little in the strength training. Obviously when I am doing strength training in a weight room in the off-season, the general preparation phase, which we’re in basically January, February, March. I also like doing a lot of sport-specific strength too. That can be hill running, in the pool band work, paddle work, tether work. The same thing on the bike - hills, low gear, big gear work, low cadence stuff is also really good. Then as you get toward the race season then your weight program will take a different shape. It will be a little quicker. I like to keep my athletes in very short anyways. So 30 minutes 2 or 3 times a week. Then I’ve had athletes that are on the road for four to six weeks, having to race a race, so in race week we usually like to drop off, no weights, no strength. If they’re on a camp they might not have access to a strength facility. I make sure they have a program that can be done with stretch cords or something they can do in a hotel room.

I’m also a really big believer in stretch cords for sport-specific strength. So that becomes a little bit of a pre-swim routine with my athletes. They do a stretch cord-routine. It helps acclimate the muscles. At the same time you get really good strength endurance from those kind of exercises. So yeah, I’m all for it.

KERRY: Cool. Good stuff. We’ve got a little bit of time left here. We had a few people asking some questions online. Do you want to take a crack at a few questions.

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CLIFF: Sure.

KERRY: All right, good deal. We've got Dave from Cincinnati. He wants to know a little bit about training hard versus getting injured and setting realistic goals.

CLIFF: Okay, all right. Good question Dave. It is a fine balance. Progression I'd say is probably one of the biggest principles of training that you need to follow with that. Say you have a goal to run a certain 5K or 10K or half marathon, that kind of thing, then so many weeks out you're planning your training leading up to that. You want to start, whether intervals or tempo or hard training, you want to have a progression week to week or micro-cycle to micro-cycle. If you want to run a 38-minute 10K and you're currently a 40-minute 10K runner and you're giving yourself 16 weeks or that kind of time to do it, you may build up slowly with the intervals. Start with something manageable. Make sure you're at your 40-K pace and then you can start slowly getting into that 6:10 or 6:15 mile pace through smaller intervals up first. Some tempo runs that are maybe just a little easier than the pace. You build yourself up slowly.

I think the big thing is sometimes people just continuously build. Sometimes after a while you look back and you're like, "Wow, I just did six weeks. I just kept adding and adding and adding." Your body needs to adapt. That's the principle of overload. You progressively give yourself a load of that training and that intensity, you build up and then you have one load to recover and rejuvenate and adapt to that training load. There's different patterns that people will do. They'll do two weeks field, one week on load. Sometimes they'll do three weeks and one on load.

I find when you're doing a lot of intense work usually it's better to do a ten-day cycle with four days off or even two weeks and one week. I really prefer the two and one. Usually when you're doing aerobic base, longer, easier, less intense training you can do the three week build, one week load kind of thing. But I find that as an athlete myself, quite a few years ago, and athletes I've worked with, there is some breakdown that happens at two and a half weeks. You don't want to go over the edge and start getting those little signs of being overreached where you're irritable, you're not covering, you're not sleeping, that kind of thing. I think keeping good logs, keeping track of it, giving yourself systematic overload but definitely making sure you unload as well, is really key with that. Hopefully that helps.

KERRY: Yes. I think you did a good job with that one. Roger from Miami, Florida wants to know, other than heart rate monitors do you use power meters for coaching and training in racing?

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CLIFF: Good question. Sometimes it will vary per athlete for many different reasons. Sometimes financially an athlete just can't afford to have all those great tools. There's so many out there. They're definitely good. As a coach and especially working with an athlete online, the more information you can get, it definitely is helpful. It's all really good feedback. I like heart rate.

I'm a little old-school as well. I like perceived exertion. I like an athlete to get to know, "That's 10K effort." But be realistic with it. If they're running a 4:30 mile pace and they're telling me it's 10K effort, unless they're Gabriel Selesti [?], I don't think they've got a good feel for it. And I have seen that before. But between heart rate, either going out there and doing time trials and races, that's the thing that's so great about running. "Hey, where am I at?" Find a local 5 or 10K and we'll know exactly where you're at. Put a heart rate monitor on and you can get the numbers you need. It's pretty easy to figure out threshold and then you can figure out some numbers from there. Lower in the training zone and away you go. At the same time running the 10K you get a pretty good idea for the feel of what that perceived exertion is and correlate that to your threshold and to your heart rates for that. Running is pretty simple with that.

Biking, same thing. Having the lot, whether it's power tap, compu-trainer or SRM, is very helpful. I think it's good, definitely on the bike. Especially if the power meter is calibrated. It's quiet accurate. Heart rates as we all know can fluctuate a little bit. So if you're only using heart rate I like to use it with perceived exertion as well. Wattages, heart rate zone and perceived exertion really dials in a session. There's no hiding in it. It's really specific. It's a very key session. So I do like using that when the athlete has that available.

Racing with it really depends on the athlete. I think there's some athletes that probably shouldn't have. Sometimes you can tend to over-think. There's a little thing you sometimes say, "Paralysis by analysis." Sometimes there's just a little bit too much of that going on. You have to just trust in the training that you did and just race. A lot of the athletes that I coach will race without power, or you tape it up.

There's been a few times with Sam that we'll tape it up and just see. We use compu-trainer a lot for her training. We like that tool. But she's raced every single race, including Daytona last year, just off feeling. No nothing. No speedometer, nothing. But she's got an extremely innate ability to kind of know her pace. It's usually pretty much all out. [Laughs] No, not all the time. She's pretty good with that. A lot of athletes can learn that.

Sometimes for beginner athletes it's not bad to actually start a little bit with it and to get a feel to kind of pace yourself through. If it's your first

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half and you just don't know, it's not a bad guideline so you don't get caught up in the opening few miles and find yourself holding 500 watts or something. I think that can be a good tool. Like I said, it really depends on the athlete too.

KERRY: Yeah, great. We've got another question here. Mark from Madison, I guess that would be Madison, Wisconsin, says, "What dry land work, weights, bands, etc. are beneficial for someone developing a better swimming stroke?"

CLIFF: All right. So use the stretch cords. You can get different tensions of stretch cords. I like starting with a pretty lighter tension. Some of the ones, hopefully this description will be pretty universal, but what I do like is starting off with what I call monkey bars. They're basically alternating arm swings, so front and back. You'll stand, bend your knees slightly, hunch your back over, hold your core in, suck it in a little bit, engage your core and then you're just going to be going left arm up in front, almost to the point where if I'm looking maybe at the ground at a 30 degree angle I can't see my hand anymore, just kind of go front to back with that and just alternate with the right arm.

The thing that's really good about using the stretch cords for swimming is really make sure you hold the same kind of position that you would when you swim. So that would include, when you're swimming you have that little bit of internal rotation of the shoulder. People talk about popping your elbow up and your shoulders up as well. So you want to hold the same kind of arm position with the muscles. You're trying to engage a little bit of your back muscles as well with that. So the alternating arms is a good one.

I also like the double arm pull-throughs. Same thing, both arms out in front and pulling through kind of finishing with your hands, your thumb almost rubbing against your thigh, really getting a good finish. That's a nice one.

The lighter the tension you can do it at a good pace. You want to hold good form so using a super thick stretch cord isn't really too beneficial. You're not looking to only do eight repetitions. What I like doing with these is actually just going off a clock. So if you're on a pool deck just use a pace clock and do 30-second, 45-second or 60-second intervals and just kind of hold them. That really builds good strength endurance.

I'd say those are two of my favorite ones. There's a few others you can do like straight arms between your legs. That's not as swim-specific as the other two but it works a little bit of your back muscles. The other thing I like doing too a little bit, which is also nice, is to sometimes incorporate it

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into a free-swim routine or even a pre-race routine, is just having, you can do both arms or one arm at a time, out in front so you can step back so the stretch cord is really pretty tight and you just kind of activate. So you just do the initial catch. So you're just kind of moving it towards you as if you're catching, with your forearm as well and your elbow pops up and then just release. So you're just kind of scooping imaginary water towards you or towards your chest and you just kind of repeat that motion. What that does is activate even your back muscles, you'll feel it a little bit. It's a really nice drill I like to do and it's definitely one that I know a lot of my athletes, and Sam uses that one for every single race. She will go down with stretch cords and she'll just do that and just kind of one arm at a time just kind of activate, feel the muscle. "Don't forget, here's the swim." Feel it in the shoulder. Feel it in the lats, that kind of thing. She'll just do those little kind of engaging the muscle, if you will, with the forearm press down and then she'll go into the alternating arms and then the double arm one. Very good exercises.

KERRY: Cool. That's great. Thank you for the call tonight. Thank you to everyone else who is on the call this evening listening. We definitely enjoyed your talking here and loved having you here.

CLIFF: This was great. Thank you so much.

KERRY: All right, cool. Rock on. All right guys, we will talk to you later. The next live Triathlon Summit call we're going to have is actually going to be in two weeks. Next week we will not have a call but we will be two weeks out from today. We're going to have Danny Dryer from Chi Running. So with that, Cliff, where can they get some more information if they want to go to some of your camps or check you out for a coach?

CLIFF: www.cliffenglishcoaching.com

KERRY: All right, good deal. With that, that's all we've got for tonight. Everyone have a great night and again, thank you Cliff.

CLIFF: Thanks man, that was great.

KERRY: All right, peace. Bye.

CLIFF: Bye.