



Will Usher,
Andy Dixon and
Andy Brodziak

Reach for it

Last month we introduced four triathletes who'll be tackling the London Triathlon in August. Each will receive coaching tailored to their triathlon goal. A month into the training schedule (which you too can follow at www.triathletesworld.co.uk/schedules), we caught up with them to find out how they're preparing for race day

NAME: Andy Dixon
AGE: 37
JOB: Editor of *Runner's World*
TARGET: Master two new sports

This month Andy worked with his swim coaches from www.one-element.co.uk. Here's how he fared:

"I recently had my first coached swim session and it was really quite hard. I felt a bit self-conscious, too. It was me and my two coaches, Andy Brodziak and Will Usher, and we were in a public pool at lunchtime, so it was pretty busy.

They had a look at me swimming front crawl for four lengths of the pool. Their verdict was that my technique was all right, for a runner. They seem to think that runners don't swim very well. When you

run you're basically bending your legs a lot from the knee and one of the things they told me was that you keep your legs straighter when swimming and that the kick comes from the hip flexors. They thought my knee action wasn't excessive.

Then they had me doing lengths with a kickboard, on my back and then on my front. It was hard and felt counterintuitive to be kicking at the hip. It was quite a revelation to be just as out of breath after doing a length of the pool as I'd be after running 400m during speed work.

We did a lot of drills. It was nerve-racking and tiring. You can stand at the end of the pool and talk through the drills but as soon as you push off it's hard to keep everything in mind. That's something the coaches said: you can't master it by thinking about it. This is a three-month training plan and the first month is just

getting these movements memorised in the muscle memory. After that I'll be working on distance and perfecting the moves.

That said, I did feel even in that hour that I was slipping through the water in a more streamlined fashion and that I was just a little more efficient.

As for the rest of the training, I haven't done a lot of running since the London Marathon, but I think my cardiovascular fitness is in pretty decent shape. When it comes to the bike, however, I suspect I'm playing catch-up with my fellow guinea pigs.

I'm still a little intimidated by the tactics, kit and transition side of things because I don't really know about it. There's a massive knowledge gap. I'm going to look properly into getting kit and I'm going to read a lot about the sport. I want to go into the training and the event confident I know what I'm doing." »

NAME: Simon Griffiths
AGE: 43
JOB: Freelance journalist and blogger
TARGET: Beat last year's time

This month Simon worked on the mental side of training with Mental Performance coach Midgie Thompson: "In the past I have been sceptical about tapping into the power of the mind to improve triathlon performance. There is something in the idea that reminds me of books about thinking yourself rich or achieving four-hour working weeks.

But I've heard that mental strength is what separates the best triathletes from the rest. Top athletes increasingly work with psychologists and testify to their importance. Perhaps there are ways to improve performance beyond physical training, rest and good nutrition. So when *Triathlete's World* offered me a course of mental preparation coaching with Midgie Thompson of Bright Futures Coaching, I decided to, well, keep an open mind. In the coming months, I will follow Midgie's programme and see how it affects my preparation and race. I've read about some of the techniques – visualisation, self-hypnosis, positive self-

talk – but I've never really had any success in applying them by myself. I was ready to dive straight in but Midgie suggested a different approach.

Before applying more advanced mental skills, you should build a foundation, she said. She asked me to think about where triathlon fits into my life. She suggested drawing up a 'wheel of life' where I rated my satisfaction with the constituents of my life and plotted them on a radial graph.

It's a useful exercise. You choose your categories. I picked family, career, friends, health, fitness, finances, relaxation and music. I thought the exercise became most interesting and helpful when Midgie asked me to rank these categories.

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This prompted me to ask questions about my life. Do I rank health or family first? If I didn't have my health, I'd struggle to care for the children. But I'd take risks with my health – for example, staying up all night – if the family needed it.

Keeping fit is important to me. I probably wouldn't do triathlon if it wasn't. But how fit do I need to be? I realised I should probably split fitness into sub-categories. Basic fitness (being able to enjoy a family bike ride or an active holiday) is more important than competition fitness (say, qualifying for the age-group World Championships). Friends and career probably come somewhere between the two.

Tell me about it: Simon and Midgie



THE THEORY

"I am sure we have all seen an athlete appear to simply give up, uninjured but seemingly unable to continue," says mental performance coach Midgie Thompson. "And I am equally sure you have been in a tough race that just seemed to get tougher with every stroke or step, or you felt nervous before an event and then did not perform as well as you had hoped."

What made the difference on such occasions is what went on in the mind. The level of mental preparation and mental control has been shown to have a significant bearing on final Olympic ranking, according to leading sports psychologists Terry Orlick and John Partington.

As part of his training for the London Triathlon, I will be working with Simon on his mental preparation. Before the first coaching

session, Simon completed a questionnaire to assess what he is currently doing when he races. We can see what he does, and does not do, from a mental-preparation perspective, and how he can make improvements. We wanted to identify the goals he can achieve and build strong lifestyle foundations of time management and self management that can support him to train, prepare and race to the best of his abilities.

The big picture

Simon completed a questionnaire designed to explore his goals and motivation, and the 'Wheel of Life' exercise to provide a snapshot of the important areas in his life. Our initial focus was on his triathlon goals and where they fit into his life. We discussed the difference between performance (or process) goals, which he can determine and influence, and outcome goals, over

which he has no control. By setting performance goals, Simon can say he achieved them and feel pleased with his efforts, regardless of the results.

Priorities, please

We also explored how triathlon fits into Simon's life and what his priorities are. This exercise, can be challenging but it provides guidance when there are decision-making dilemmas. Although competing in triathlon is important for many athletes, knowing where it fits into the grand scheme of things can help when there are choices to make.

Take a picture

We then moved on to lifestyle areas that influence an individual's ability to train and prepare for big events. Many of us struggle to fit the training into a weekly schedule. Simon conducted a time audit

Should I work late to meet a deadline or go swimming? Should I train or sleep? Doing this exercise hasn't answered all my questions but it's given me a framework to help me choose when there is a conflict.

Midgie then asked me to look at goal setting, both in triathlon and across the other areas of my life, which makes sense given that triathlon really is a lifestyle choice. I learnt from this exercise that it's better to have lots of small goals rather than one big one. If you take that approach you could be setting yourself up for massive disappointment. Goals should focus on processes rather than outcomes and they should be quantifiable.

An outcome goal might be to win the London Triathlon. For me, this would be rather pointless as it requires the other 14,000 people who turn up to have a really bad day. I need instead to pick process goals that are within my control. My goals leading up to the London Triathlon therefore include:

- Complete the training sessions that have been set by my coach, Jack Maitland, at TheTriathlonCoach.Com, unless there's a good reason not to (injury, illness, family occasion etc.)
- Maintain a healthy diet and avoid overindulgence in chocolate, which is one of my biggest weaknesses
- Focus on recovery after training, including stretching, resting and eating
- Have an injury-prevention programme
- Try to sleep at least seven hours a night. Eight would be better

In the weeks to come we will move on from building the foundations to look at specific techniques that will improve triathlon performance. The next step is race-day planning."

for a routine week to provide a snapshot of where he spends his time. This activity log provided a picture of what was going on and helped Simon identify small shifts he could make to streamline his activities and increase his efficiency. This was coupled with making a rough schedule of when he would focus on which activity, including his triathlon training.

Take a picture

Simon also completed an 'energy audit' of the people, places and things that drain him and that fuel him. Most of us know at least one person whose company is draining, and others who give off an energy that affects everyone in the room. This audit identified those areas in which changes could be made to minimise the negatives and maximise the positives, particularly before a race."



Claire's bike fitting at Tri & Run

NAME: Claire Matthews
AGE: 37
JOB: Marketing director
TARGET: Stick to the schedule

This month Claire wanted to become one with her bike, so she went for a professional bike fitting:

"The highlight of this month's London Triathlon preparation was being fitted for my new Look bike at Tri & Run in Canary Wharf. The variety of measurements they took will ensure that the bike fits me perfectly, so I can concentrate on learning to ride it faster.

I've been commuting to work several times a week but I need to stop being such a fair-weather cyclist and stick with it, even in bad weather. I've also found it a little demoralising to be overtaken by people who look like they're carrying quite a few extra pounds, but I'm getting to grips with cadence and gearing so maybe I'll manage to catch a few of them as the triathlon approaches.

I haven't splashed out on any other kit because I'm trying to avoid my usual approach. In the past I've bought everything I could possibly need, but I now realise I should concentrate on training rather than shopping. For the

next few weeks, that means spending time in the pool and on my bike.

Like many novice triathletes, I'm nervous about the swim. When I was at school my teacher pushed me into the pool, saying it was the only way I'd learn. I've hated the water ever since so I've signed up for swimming lessons with Bruno from Blue Action (www.blueaction.co.uk). After just one lesson I'm already feeling more positive about it.

My biggest problem at the moment is rushing the stroke, so I need to try to slow things down and not waste energy. I'd never swum front crawl before so Bruno started off looking at my head-out-of-the-water breast stroke. I was surprised when he said that I wasn't too bad. We did a variety of drills – such as gliding like Superman and pushing a float out in front to practise breathing – and after only 90 minutes I managed 100m of front crawl.

I still can't imagine swimming 1500m, and I'm anxious about feeling crowded at the start, but if I can build up my swimming confidence and clock up some miles on the bike, I'll deal with the running as the race approaches. At some point I'll do my own short triathlon as a dress rehearsal. Having run four marathons, I'm not worried about the run, although I realise that one of the hard parts of triathlon is putting the three disciplines together." »

NAME: Andrea Sullivan
AGE: 33
JOB: Advertising director
TARGET: Lose the baby weight

This month Andrea spent some time with dietitian Gwen Fitzpatrick to find out what she should be eating:

“I was so determined to start training properly and lose the weight I’d put on in pregnancy, but I didn’t really know how to go about eating properly, given my busy job, two children – one aged two, one at six months – and hectic home life. I’d worked out a training plan. I am going to

stuff and less sugary foods. I know my training is massively important, and I have to make that time for me to get into shape. My PB is 2:27, before kids, and I’m aiming for 2:45 at London. I can’t do that by training alone. Eating right is going to get me across the finish line. And then I’m going to have a big ham and cheese pizza.”

Gwen says:

“I had lots of advice for Andrea – it’s more complicated than giving one answer because I didn’t want to put her on a fad diet. She should not count calories – they don’t take into account whether the food is a carbohydrate, fat or protein. It’s more important to make the right food choices.

I realised that I wouldn’t lose the weight I’d gained during my second pregnancy without a plan, because I was always eating on the go and at the wrong times

cycle to work and back twice a week, 12K each way. I will swim 2K twice a week and run twice a week, too.

But what to do about nutrition? I realised that I wouldn’t lose the weight I’d gained during my second pregnancy without a proper plan, because I was always eating on the go and at the wrong times. That’s where Gwen has helped me. We started by analysing my diet. I realised I was eating the wrong things: too much saturated fat from the likes of chocolate. So we tore up my diet and started again. Now I’m eating little and often, and although I’m not counting calories I’ve upped my protein intake from 12 to 15 per cent of my diet. I eat fish twice a week anyway but am also going for grilled white meat and more pulses and vegetables.

The diet ties in with my training because I need complex carbohydrates from foods such as wholemeal pasta and sweet potato for energy, and protein to repair my muscles. But it’s not just about making things better. It also has to be convenient. So I am having simple breakfasts like porridge or muesli with fruit or scrambled egg on toast, and snacking on healthy foods like avocado, nuts and frozen grapes.

I expect Gwen is going to be a hard taskmaster and she’s going to send me a weekly menu, with meals full of wholemeal

We did a full nutritional analysis and it turned out that her diet was high in bad saturated fats and low in good fats. Andrea also needs more complex carbohydrates to help maintain energy through her training programme. She wants to lose eight pounds, which equals 3.6kg, so she shouldn’t lose more than half

a kilogram per week. She has seven weeks to lose the weight while training, then she can up the carbs in the final two weeks before the race, for extra energy.

We put together a weekly plan that will help Andrea to eat regularly. It’s important to prepare snacks – you can do this by making big meals in the evening and saving the leftovers for lunch the next day. It’s about trying to make your diet fit in with your lifestyle.

Losing baby weight is no harder than losing any other weight. Most women gain weight because they overeat when they’re pregnant. And you lose the weight at the same rate at which you put it on, if you eat right. The extra weight may slow you down in the beginning but it will come off and you will become stronger.

I’ve told Andrea to snack on healthy foods rather than chocolate bars, or have a high-protein bar. I’ve also recommended that she try the Maxitone Sculptress shakes and bars. They’re healthy and contain 200 calories, which will power you through a 12-mile bike ride.

We’ve just had our first meeting and I’m devising a specific meal plan for her, but I suspect she will get on well. She knows what she needs to do. I’m just helping give her the determination to do it.” ■



Andrea (left) and Gwen check out healthy fruit and veg

GWEN'S TOP TIPS

- Don't count calories
- Have regular meals
- Eat plenty of complex carbs
- Include lots of healthy snacks