

Testamomial– Jeffrey Glasbrenner

Triathlon transition areas can be challenging to navigate. The pressure to switch gears while catching a breath makes for an intense scene, and in the scramble to change clothing, it's not uncommon to misplace a shoe, a helmet, an energy bar. But a leg?

That was precisely the situation faced by Ironman competitor Jeff Glasbrenner when he transitioned from the bike to the run in Malaysia this past winter. You see Jeff has more than the usual assortment of triathlon components to deal with when he races. His gear includes two different prosthetic legs – one for biking and one for running. And when he jumped off his road bike and reached for his marathon equipment, his running leg was nowhere to be found.

Fortunately Jeff's leg was located in an adjacent tent and he was back out on the marathon course – in 110 degree conditions – about ten minutes later. His steely determination and competitive drive carried him through the challenge, and the 34-year-old finished Ironman Malaysia 2007 in good spirits and excellent form.

To fully appreciate the accomplishments of this athlete it helps to know a few things about him and his training regimen. For one thing, Jeff is an amputee, having lost his right leg just below the knee when he was only eight years old. He remembers the first few months as being very difficult following the traumatic injury when his pants leg became entangled in a hay cutter on his family farm in Wisconsin (“it ground my leg off like a pencil sharpener”). But after a short phase of self-pity and a few good lectures from his highly supportive parents, Jeff realized it was time to accept his disability. Since then he has not looked back. Nor has he stopped moving!



Memphis in May transition – Jeff prepares for the bike stage of a triathlon in Memphis, TN

Jeff first found the athletic outlet he was looking for in the sport of wheelchair basketball. A two-time World Champion and Paralympian, he is ranked as one of the top five players in the world. More recently however, triathlons caught his attention, and as a radically



Pre-race interview Kona – Jeff is interviewed before the start of the 2006 Ironman Championship in Kona

different form of competition than basketball, he was lured by the challenge. His first major event was the 2006 Ironman World Championship in Kona and a third place finish in the Physically Challenged division only whet his appetite for more. So Jeff made the decision to purposefully train for the following winter’s Ironman in Malaysia.

“Prior to this new training program, I did whatever I felt like with no regard for training zones or peaking for my big races,” says Jeff. But when his sister Jenelle, who is proud to be one of Jeff’s biggest inspirations and his number one fan, introduced him to a professional trainer, he realized the benefits of such a partnership. “After training myself for most of my career, I am now working with a great coach, Angie, and getting a huge boost in the area of technology.”

The technology is the Saris PowerTap SL. As for the trainer, Angie Sturtevant, she had her work cut out for her. With only 12 weeks until the competition, she had to design a training program for Jeff that would maximize his training time and best take advantage of the value of the PowerTap. While it was daunting, Angie knew after meeting Jeff in her Madison, Wisconsin facility that his goal was attainable.

“After evaluating Jeff I realized that this guy would do whatever it takes to get what he wants. He has so much determination and drive, and that is truly his strength,” she says. “Jeff’s ‘physical challenge’ is that he is an amputee, although once I met Jeff, I didn’t see

that as his physical challenge. I see it more as a physical *inconvenience* as Jeff has definitely overcome the challenge.”

The key to an effective training plan for Jeff was to focus his attention on his power, and with the PowerTap, he could do exactly that. Angie first conducted a VO₂ assessment to determine Jeff’s metabolic physiology and thresholds, as well as correlate his strengths and weaknesses to power, speed, and heart rate zones. Then she designed a plan that allowed Jeff to train his weaknesses through his knowledge of those key zones.

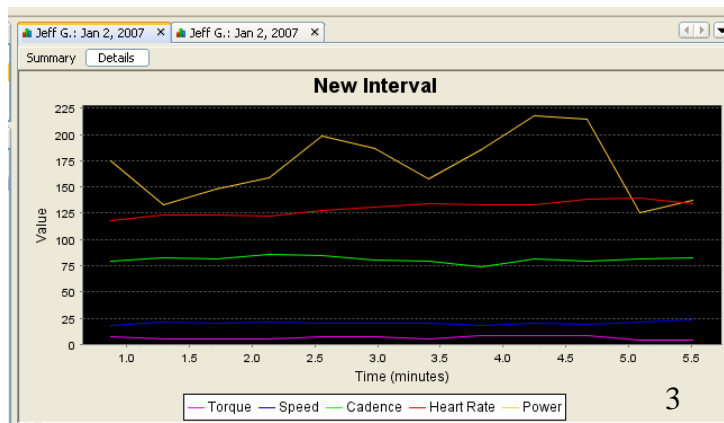
“Since the key to Ironman is sustaining energy release over a very long period of time, Jeff really needed to focus on boosting his lactate threshold and stamina,” says Angie. “By strengthening his aerobic endurance, he would be able to sustain efforts for longer durations of time.”

With these goals in mind, Jeff’s first few weeks of training were aimed at discovering how long he could sustain lactate threshold power/pace and determining his longest duration marker. His weekly assignment was to keep track of those numbers and work to progressively increase the duration and his power/pace. The pinnacle during each week of training was a brick training day to teach his body how to run after a long bike ride.

Yet how does an athlete living in Little Rock, Arkansas work with a trainer living in Madison, Wisconsin? Another key benefit of the PowerTap is its ability to transmit data through cyberspace. Jeff downloaded the data he recorded with the PowerTap and emailed it to Angie each week. After evaluating his numbers she made recommendations and provided specific goals for the following week’s regimen.

Here is an example of the data recorded by Jeff during this training which he then sent to Angie:

One of the components of Jeff’s training was to diminish the



discrepancy between his two legs. His right leg, the prosthetic, was significantly less powerful than his natural leg, as the PowerTap data clearly demonstrated. When Jeff performed power tests on each of his legs, the difference was 25 watts. Angie used these data to design workouts that helped Jeff strengthen his right sport leg's pedal stroke and increase its power output so that it better matched his other leg.

Seven weeks into his intense training regimen, with only five weeks until race day, Jeff had this to say about the benefits of the PowerTap: "Training with power has really opened my eyes. With the PowerTap technology just going through the motions in a workout is not an option. Angie knows by the numbers what my capabilities are and when I am not giving it a proper effort."

Race Day

It took Jeff 45 hours of traveling to get to Malaysia, but on February 24, 2007 he was there and ready for the Ironman competition. No matter that the heat was intense and the hills were huge. He powered through the course paying close attention to what he learned from his training regimen.

Stage one, the swim, was exhilarating and Jeff hopped out of the water with a new personal record of 1:14. The first third of the bike stage also went phenomenally – he averaged over 19 mph while staying within his zones, and he recalls feeling like Lance Armstrong. Unfortunately some bad luck then struck in the form of two flat tires. Despite the mechanical problems and the fiasco of the running leg that disappeared from the transition tent, Jeff kept a positive attitude. Once his leg was recovered and he hit the road for the run stage he never looked back. He recalls being "all smiles" in the final miles and truly enjoyed the feeling of crossing the finish line.

Jeff's final entry in his training log reads: "My journey and experience for the Ironman Malaysia was incredible. My 12 week training and learning process leading up to the event was both challenging and rewarding, and Angie prepared me both mentally and physically. There is no greater feeling than being on that start line with other great

athletes, knowing that you are truly prepared to take on that challenge. Ironman's slogan says it all: 'Anything is possible.' With lots of dedication and hard work you can do anything...which is true in sport *and* life."

Based on contents & training logs of Jeff Glasbrenner & Angie Sturtevant
Written By Nicole Resnick
Freelance Fitness Writer