

The Cool Down: Health and Fitness

Zoom Webinar 5 June 2020

Written by Samantha Ford

THE COOL DOWN

FRIDAY 5TH JUNE 1-2PM ZOOM



Andy Tennant

Professional track and road racing cyclist

Ollie Armstrong

Physiologist, University of Birmingham and Birmingham Track Elite



Friday 5th June saw the second webinar in The Cool Down series. The Cool Down is a series of online panel discussions that will give audience members an opportunity to learn more about a range of topics related to health, fitness, and training in these unprecedented times. Big Cat Agency have partnered with ActionPact to feature some of the biggest names and brightest minds from across health, fitness, and wellness.

This week, host Anthony Tattum (Big Cat CEO), welcomed guests Andy Tennant, a professional track and road racing cyclist, and Ollie Armstrong, a psychologist at Birmingham Track Elite in Birmingham, to share their perspectives on training community resilience and adaptability in cycling and sports in general.

Inspiration

People are inspired for different reasons, but for Andy and Steve, enjoyment and passion were the ones that motivated them to pursue their chosen careers.

Dealing with injuries

Andy has had a number of physical injuries that have affected his performance in cycling: a broken wrist, shattered finger, and broken elbow are the result of multiple crashes. He hastened to add that the lows in his career were not necessarily the result of physical injuries, however, and talked of how it was difficult to train without a target, now that the sporting season had been cancelled due to COVID-19, making it easy to slip into demotivation. It's a mind game as well as a physical challenge to be a successful athlete.

Working in a team sport

Andy says it is all about the banter: "It's like being 'lads on tour' without the booze". Ollie followed with saying that each sport has its own culture, but the overall constructs are similar as many revolve around camaraderie and humour. He reflected on his experience supervising a rugby team: "You have to earn your stripes, earn the team's respect, and then it does not matter who you are or where you've come from, you are part of the team and are an equal".

Nature versus nurture

Was your ability natural or did it have to be developed through hard work and training? Andy believed that his success was brought about through nurture as opposed to talent. He berates people who have the raw talent but fail to seize the opportunity and apply it. Andy says his drive has come from his experience at school, where he didn't do very well but persevered by fighting against adversity, and that even now he likes a challenge and proving people wrong in their beliefs about what he can achieve.

Ollie, on the other hand, states that natural ability makes a difference if you lined everyone up and told them to do the same training programme. However, the nurture approach – the training programmes – varies considerably; different training methods work for different people and play on different strengths. He adds that other factors may also play a part in athletic success, such as networking. Networking with professional contacts as well as with those in the same exercise class

as you can help to increase your accountability and motivate you to push harder and improve your adaptability. Team sports in particular rely on training and nurture.

The lockdown effect

Andy has nothing in the calendar until September and admits that he is currently lacking the motivation to do any hardcore training right now, but would love to keep cycling competitively when everything starts up again. Strength and conditioning has come to the forefront of his workouts during lockdown. Ollie agrees that the lack of a goal makes work difficult, but he recommends using the current situation as an opportunity to look deeper into the specifics of training for your sport. He suggests that those looking to progress should give time to working on the fundamentals and their robustness (rather than polishing their effort as they would in preparation for a competition). He adds that everyone has dips in motivation, though, including athletes, “so you can take time off too, mentally or physically, or both”.

Open to the floor

Audience members asked a number of questions during the webinar that teased out useful tips from the two professionals.

What aspects of elite sport can be applied to life in the everyday workplace?

Being an athlete is like being a manager. You need to make you – the company – the best you can be by managing your commitment, motivation, and effort. Sport also offers the development of strong communication skills, especially in team sports where you support fellow athletes in your joint endeavours: “You all know that your team mate has worked to be there and we all try our best and that is all you can do. We all know this and accept each other whatever the result.” Andy stresses that “commitment is the key” and that this should perhaps even be prioritised over motivation. If you’re not committed, you’re going nowhere.

What would you recommend to aspiring athletes trying to make the teams for future competitions?

Andy imparts his ethos: “A happy bike rider is the best bike rider. Try your best and that’s all you can do. Try and enjoy the experience as much as possible.”

What training would you focus on for fast track?

Threshold training – essentially, what you’re looking for in your effort level. Consider your rep endurance, aiming not to be completely KO-ed (knocked out) upon completing your set reps. “You should feel like you could do another one after you’ve finished,” says Ollie. It is also important to make sure you’re fuelling well. Finally, to remember that threshold training actually increases other thresholds so it is a good investment of time and effort.

Do you have any advice around routines/workouts for cyclists?

In the webinar, Andy reports his personal routine in the gym. Watch the video for the full description: <https://bit.ly/2UwPrpg>

He stresses that one must take care and that form is important. Strength and Conditioning (S&C) done wrong is a game changer for the worse, so “I would recommend prioritising investment in a good S&C coach over new equipment to reap more rewards.”

What is the psychological impact on people’s training that has been caused by the Coronavirus lockdown?

Wellbeing and holistic wellbeing are two key aspects. Holistic wellbeing is an approach to health that considers the whole person and their interaction with the environment, aiming to connect mind, body, and soul. Ollie recommends to make sure you do the preparation work when you come back into sport after a break, and do so before you return to what you used to do in your training, otherwise it will have a negative impact. Ollie suggests trying different things as a motivator but says to ensure you ease yourself into them. “Be careful doing new exercises and make sure you condition yourself for these new training regimes.” Virtual racing is also a good way to stay motivated and competitive. However, Andy warns to be wary that there are discrepancies between equipment, tech, and brands so to take comparisons between online competitors with a pinch of salt, and use it as a motivation tool as opposed to a measure of strength.

What brand/technology would you recommend?

Data is good; it provides feedback and is part of the puzzle for optimising athletic performance. However, data is useless unless you know what you’re doing with it, so make sure you do your research or that you have someone who can make sense of the numbers and formulate a training plan for you.

Ollie recommends heart rate monitors as the number one, go-to piece of tech. In particular, the ones with the rate strap around the chest as opposed to one on your wrist; the former tech is much more accurate. Garmin and Polar are particularly good brands.

“Power cranks really brought on cycling training for me”, says Andy. Steer clear of one-sided cranks as they increase the likelihood for damage. InfoCrank and SRM are great cranks to buy, and riding shorter cranks, contrary to belief, are faster aerodynamically and more biologically beneficial.

If you want to know more detail about what was talked about at the first Cool Down webinar, it is now up on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/2UwPrrg>

The Cool Down will be back for a third webinar on Friday 19th June at 1-2pm.