



GEARING UP

Remember when Rocky Balboa went on his famous run around Philadelphia before his rematch with Apollo Creed? It seemed like the Italian Stallion jogged forever around The City of Brotherly Love, passing landmarks that were dozens of miles away from each other. Distance running was a great endurance workout for America's favorite fictional pugilist, but had he actually done those miles, it would have cost him five hours of his day and the meniscus in both his knees. Truth is: running almost always hurts.

BY T.R. FOLEY



Fighters are becoming more sophisticated about their training, and for good reason. A training camp injury or poor performance can mean the difference between a skyrocketing career, or one headed for the archives. Most fighters prefer the bulk of their training to come from high intensity interval training HIIT – tabata sprints and other short burst workouts. While there is no doubt that anaerobic work pays dividends in the cage, especially for the average athlete, more fighters and trainers are starting to analyze the benefits of a solid aerobic base.

For centuries, combat athletes of all disciplines have incorporated long slow distance LSD training to help bolster their overall fitness. Trainers are finding that increasing the size of a fighter's aero-

bic base helps create a larger platform from which they can launch their anaerobic energy systems. Many fighters are starting to incorporate this type of training through cycling rather than running, which adds the benefits of aerobic exercise without adding undue stress to an already brutal workout regimen.

Cycling can provide one of the most effective ways to increase endurance, while limiting exposure to unnecessary wear and tear. Former UFC welterweight Frank Trigg cycles as way to prepare his body for the next phase of his fighting career. "I'm 39 years old, so I have to figure out ways to stay in shape, and a lot of that comes from paying attention to my heart rate." The real addition to his training has come from his awareness to the specifics of how to increase his VO2 max (the high-

est rate of oxygen consumption attainable during maximal or exhaustive exercise), while optimizing his recovery time.

Trigg's sensei for his foray into cycling has been Greg Choat, a former endurance racer who is now the Performance Director at EnduroCoach in Las Vegas. The 44-year-old Kiwi visited Xtreme Couture with Muay Thai champion Ray Sefo and noticed that "these fighters were the most insane athletes I'd ever seen." Soon, Choat started talking about Randy Couture, Gray Maynard, and Trigg at his conferences, but it wasn't until a group bike ride with Trigg that Choat got the introduction he needed to start helping fighters.

"Basically, fighters have the functionality and physicality to achieve what they want, but what most fighters lack is the foundation of good metabolic function,"



BIKING BULLY

For UFC lightweight contender Gray Maynard, his bike is the best remedy to a tough week of training camp. "I get out of the gym once a week in training camp to do my own thing, and I'm not really built for running," Maynard says. "On the bike, I can get on the road for a few hours and push myself hard without getting worn down."

Maynard was brought into cycling by an old boss who challenged him to a long ride after work. "I was like, 'I'm gonna smoke this guy,' but the dude blew me out of the water!" Maynard says he went out the next day and purchased his first bike. He's since purchased an Ellsworth mountain bike (www.ellsworthbikes.com) that he rides around his adopted hometown of Las Vegas.

THE SILVER BULLET

I have my fighters use the bike on rest days to help them recover because it's so low impact. I make sure they stay under a certain heart rate, usually less than 60% max, or if they're not using a monitor, they can just ride embarrassingly slowly, which is hard for most athletes to do. Not from a physical standpoint but from an ego standpoint. The bike can be great for relaxing the central nervous system while helping to keep the muscles and joints moving with no impact.

From what I've seen, most fighters spend a lot of time training and not a lot of time recovering. Recovery can be the 'silver bullet' and I think a lot of athletes are scared they might lose their conditioning if they don't train all the time as hard as they can.

- Greg Choat



Someone made fun of Nick for riding a bike once...once. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/diazbikefight> to hear the story.

says Choat. He noticed that fighters endured spikes in heart rate, not totally unlike a cyclist in a climb, and he wanted to control that spike, but more importantly, he wanted to teach fighters how to recover between periods—so they don't burn out in the middle rounds.

"One of the biggest misnomers is trying to monitor your active heart rate," says Choat. "That alone is off-base, because your active heart rate is susceptible to half-life, which is how long it takes your heart rate to start increasing once you've started working out and what are the external factors that could spike your heart rate like stress, adrenaline and dehydration. What we can measure accurately is a heart rate at rest and the impact of those stressors."

According to Trigg, cycling and understanding active rest will give him the ability to fight into his 40s. "I'm relaxed when I ride during camp, but I'm still getting a workout without risking injuries from the impact of running." With Choat as his performance coach, he feels confident that he can recover more efficiently between workouts and between rounds.

For the amateur fighter with limited time to train, HIIT produces the most return on your investment, but for the professional or exceptionally dedicated fighter, building a solid endurance base can be a compliment that adds extra horsepower on fight night. Interval train-

ing and endurance training are complimentary, and for fighters like Trigg, there are other less quantifiable benefits.

"Cycling is also giving Frank the option to relax, and that calms down his central nervous system," says Choat. "Fighters are always on edge. Everything is go-go-go, and that can negatively impact your recovery and thus your fight performance. For years, we've been told that working harder and longer means better results, but the truth is, sometimes more isn't better—it's just more."

Understanding VO2 max and how to attain it can be challenging at first glance. Accurate measurements are taken based on the content of inspired and expired breathes—what you take in versus what you put out. For his test, Trigg was given a NASA-like facemask and put on a treadmill and a bike (they give off different responses). Choat also put Trigg at complete rest, and from there, he was able to start creating baseline VO2 and estimating his necessary caloric intake—essential when trying to lose pounds for an upcoming fight. As a system, Choat believes that his performance studies will improve the shelf life and in-cage results of his athletes.

"You look at guys like Maynard, Couture, and Edgar—they can just go and go, and it's because their heart is working more efficiently than their opponent's," says Choat. "Think about it—if one guy is

working at 50 percent and the other guy is at 100 percent, who do you think is going to win? If I can find a way to maximize a fighter's output and performance on the bike, I can get them in the best shape of their life for fight night."

Cycling—more than most sports—provides an ideal environment to monitor your bodies progress. Unlike a sport like MMA where the unpredictable movements makes it difficult to assess energy usage, the bicycle provides an exacting platform from which a wealth of valuable metrics can be measured and analyzed. With the help of coaches like Choat, fighters like Trigg should start to see the in-the-ring performance benefits of the workouts based on those metrics. Most importantly, because endurance sports like cycling have such a large pool of high level, experienced coaches, performance gurus like Choat are becoming more accessible to fighters in the gym.

"I want to win more fights, and I know that cycling and working on my metabolic functions are going to get me to that point," says Trigg. "It's the best thing I've ever done for my training." 📌

A native New Zealander, Greg Choat is a certified USA Cycling Level II / Expert coach with over 30 years of competitive experience in cycling and multi-sport events. He is the performance director at endurocoach.com