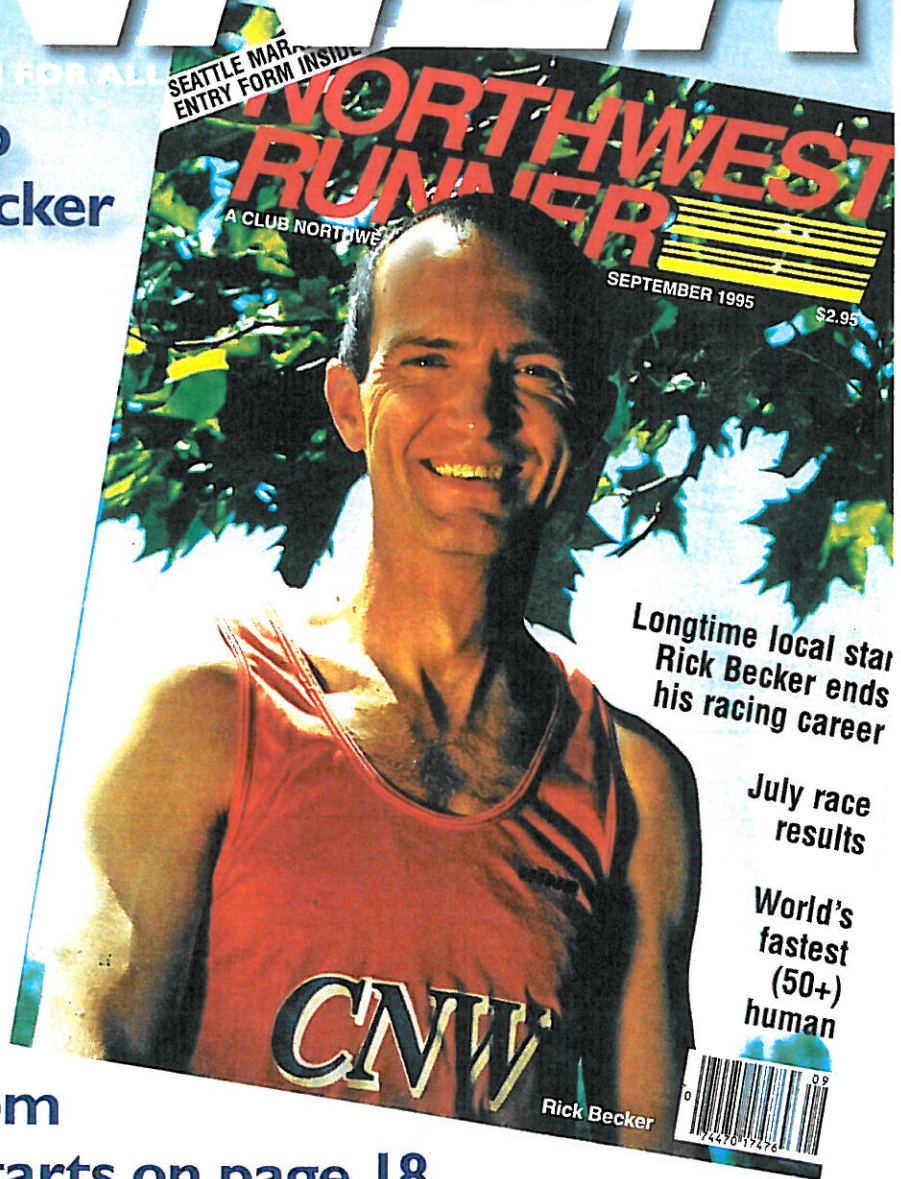


First 2011 Race Results • Race Schedule Through April

NORTHWEST RUNNER

INFORMATION AND INSPIRATION FOR ALL

Fifteen years ago top local runner Rick Becker publicly announced his retirement. Since then he's won individual national championships, set age group records, and led his CNW team to club titles all while coaching high school and raising a big family. Retirement is now the farthest thing from his mind. His story starts on page 18



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Profile of a hard trainer and coach: Ben Bigglestone

Ben Bigglestone has been a triathlon coach for over ten years and has been competing for over 20 dating back to his days in Leeds, U.K. He is a true tri-geek in the best possible way. He coaches, he runs the VO2 max tri team, he owns the VO2 Performance Center in Bellevue (with his triathlon competing wife Cindy) and he's worked in the industry for Blue Seventy and TYR. Bigglestone has participated in countless triathlons from po-dunk little sprints to a couple appearances in the World Ironman Championships in Kona. His 9:43 time at Ironman Canada in 2005 was a highlight of his long career, but he's just as proud of his win at the Troika Half that same year.

Rembrandt or Picasso

When talking to Bigglestone about his triathlon coaching one gets the impression that he is less a former jock and more of a painter. He can talk "x's" and "o's" until your head spins, but when he starts talking about how different personalities approach the sport and how as a coach he can help an athlete visualize their success and bring their goals into focus, one begins to appreciate the art of good coaching.

"When I am working with a client," says Bigglestone "my job is to help them paint a picture of their training" By this he means that the training has to be balanced, proportional, inspiring and hopefully, in the end, beautiful.

The painting process starts from the first consultation with a new client. Like a painter preparing the canvas, Bigglestone insists that his athletes don't "pick up a brush" until they are ready. That means a strong core and also a functional evaluation from a physical therapist.

"It's pointless to start training hard when you have imbalances in your strength," says Bigglestone in his authoritative English accent. "Injuries are

all too prevalent in healthy athletes, so when your body starts out with pronounced weaknesses, well, then everybody is just wasting their time."

Before a client starts riding hill repeats or perfecting their crawl stroke, Bigglestone sends them to Neil Chasan, a nearby physical therapist at the "Sports Reaction Center" who has many years experience in evaluating athletes and identifying the weak links in their physical makeup.

"It's a huge benefit to the athlete," says Bigglestone, "and a great help for me as the coach when putting together a quality training protocol."

I asked Bigglestone what some of the common mistakes athletes make in their

triathlon training.

"Other than not addressing muscle imbalances and alignment issues with their body," he answers, "it is not addressing balance and alignment in their training." Bigglestone bristles at the thought of athletes who focus on endurance, but not technique or the power meter freak who doesn't put in the long base miles in the off season. "Balance, balance, balance," says Bigglestone, sounding like a broken record.

Afraid of Pain

Bigglestone also admits that one of the difficulties in training an athlete for Ironman distance races is overcoming their fear of hard work. That's correct. You read that right. He says that many ultra distance athletes he encounters are afraid of the intensity of effort required to make real gains in their fitness. These lactate scaredy-cats gravitate to longer



Three triathlon riders who follow a harder training strategy: left to right, Damon Barnet, Bryan Urakawa and Hans Lund. WADE PRAEGER PHOTO.

and longer events where one's redline is a streak of blood on their shirt rather than a reflection of an uncomfortably high heart rate. This breed of triathlete likes the fact that no one will look twice if they walk some of the marathon and they feel no urgency on long bike climbs to get out of the saddle and make their quads burn a little.

"In my opinion, too many athletes jump too soon into long course racing and skip many important stages of athletic development along the way including fundamental aspects of technique and form," says Bigglestone. He adds that,

"Any natural speed these athletes might have had is often buried under a regimen of long over-distance work."

I like the fact that coach Bigglestone fills an athlete's canvas with shorter races, which test their transition skill and top-end speed as well as medium-distance races, which test their ability to hold a lactate threshold pace for long periods. A picture that does not have

some range of colors and shapes is just boring and ugly. A race schedule without a variety of race distances is similarly incomplete.

Prove It

At any one time, Bigglestone is coaching around 15 athletes as well as working with the more informal VO2 team and

on top of that he spends some of his time working with the VO2 elite squad of talented youngsters. At any race in the area you will see the blue, grey and black VO2 jerseys back in the pack, competing with the top age groupers or

sometimes winning overall.

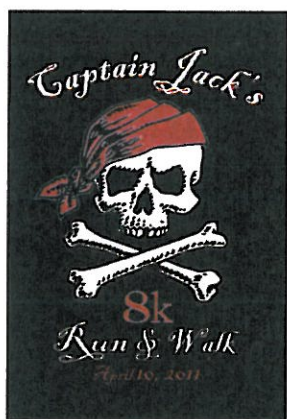
To get his athlete's motivated and ready for racing, he sets up brutal weekend team practices where he can simulate race-day stress. Bigglestone calls these stress tests "prove it" workouts; and the way he describes them they leave little doubt as to whether one is ready for the big day. If one of his athletes is training for a half ironman race and is trying

"... many ultra distance athletes (Bigglestone) encounters are afraid of the intensity of effort required to make real gains in their fitness ..."

to get under 5:30 then he maps out a course where they have to do each leg of the event at nearly the distance and exactly the pace required. (A mile swim in 30 minutes, 50-mile ride in 2:45 and a ten-mile run at 9:10 per mile pace. There may be extra time in transition and one of the legs may be a little shorter to ensure a reasonable period of recovery afterward, but for the most part, it's race distance and race pace. The beauty of a test workout like this is it leaves nothing to chance or speculation.

Bigglestone admits that the reason for the "prove it" workouts is equally physical and mental. An athlete that starts a race knowing that they have survived a "prove it" practice has a huge advantage over a typical racer who toes the line after a few long rides and wearing their lucky shoelaces. Bigglestone strives to send his athletes to an event with a jet-pack full of confidence rather than a duffel-bag full of doubt and fear.

For more information on Bigglestone, the other coaches at VO2, his performance center and the training camps he leads go to: www.vo2multisport.com. To check out Bigglestone's blog as he trains for the St. George's Ironman this spring go to: www.vo2multisport.blogspot.com.

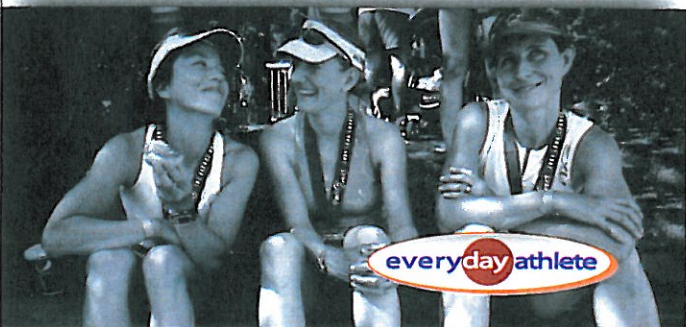


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