

Top Form - My journey to high-end performance



Spain 2012

San Pedro del Pinatar, Murcia

Introduction

My name is Paul Pio O'Callaghan, I am writing about my triathlon training camp and communication experiences. Whenever I hear of the term "triathlon" I get a shiver down my spine with the memory of great pain and torture. My first experience of triathlon came two years ago when I was looking for a new challenge for myself. After spending decades of my life involved in a wide range of different sports such as basketball, soccer, squash, etc. I joined a new club - "Pulse Triathlon Club". I enjoyed meeting new people during race events, cycling outings and special training camp weekends that helped me meet even more new people. I have difficulty communicating with new people because I am deaf but I am determined to get involved with new faces because they are so helpful and friendly. People in general are accommodating of my communication needs using lip-reading and body language, which makes communication very easy.



Late March – Joining

Training camp

Around late March this year, I received a text message from a friend. Darren Hughes is a member of the same triathlon club I am in. He asked me whether I was interested in joining a training camp abroad, somewhere in a warm climate in southern Europe with his other friends. I replied straightway “Why not? I’m up for it and I’m also willing to take a gamble because I must find the money”. At the time I was unemployed and searched for ways to get the money. I eventually got support from my family (I thank them). Within the next few days we had to discuss the training venue, accommodation and flight with the making sure the villa and swimming pool were near the venue.



Get out of Ireland

A few weeks before booking the flights, there was a debate over guys who had withdrawn from the training camp plans as it was too close to their triathlon races abroad, clashing with their specific training and logistical requirements. So it was just Darren and I that booked flights to go. There was another issue just two weeks before flying out of Ireland; Darren received advice from his doctor that he must stay at home. It was a set back but it didn't bother me as I still went ahead by myself because I couldn't afford to lose the money after having booked the flights and everything already. I was also dying to get out of Ireland as I had enough of seeing the depressing 'Irish' recession around me.

Brick programs - eight pages

Darren 'the boss' made eight pages of brick programs for my challenge in San Pedro del Pinatar, Murcia, Spain where it consisted of swimming 22 km, cycling 800 km, running 69 km all to be completed within twelve days.



Thursday, May 10 – Day one

Flight

Day One on 10th May: My flight was in the late afternoon which gave me plenty of time, I was set and ready to go but got sad news as my friend's father passed away so I went to the funeral in the morning before catching the flight thanks to a lift from my sister who dropped me at Dublin airport. In terminal 1, as I waited for the plane, I bumped into a girl who went to the same funeral earlier on, we were amazed we did not know we were going on to the same plane. I couldn't sit beside her because I was shy moreover I was dying for a nap before landing, as my boss Darren said I needed proper preparation in Spain to make sure it was all good. I received a few messages from family and friends to wish me luck during training camp. They were puzzled and worried about how I would handle the difficult situation of traveling and training on my own abroad. I got an email from the boss who said "Good Luck on the camp you bum boy! Enjoy!"

Murcia - Arrived

I arrived at Murcia airport, collected my rucksack and bike case from baggage then went straight for a taxi which dropped me in San Pedro del Pinatar, about 15 minutes drive from the airport. It was beautiful and so quiet but the place felt a bit like a 'ghost town'. I quickly emptied the rucksack and bike case then built my bike and went straight out for a light jog in the late evening. I did 5 km to get my bearings in the town so that I would have time to search nearby pubs, restaurants, supers markets etc. I went to bed early at 12am (11pm Irish time) for day 1 of training the next day!

Garmin Forerunner 910XT

Darren wanted me to keep him in the loop on how I was get on each day so that if he needed to change the programme, it would be possible. Or if I was not tired, we would make the programme harder. I used a Garmin Forerunner 910XT. Forerunner series watches are designed to accurately measure distance, speed, heart rate, time, altitude, and pace, all of which can be important to athletes in training. When my workout's done, the 910XT is still working. Through the magic of wireless technology, my workout data automatically transfers to my laptop when in range. When I'm good and ready, I can analyze every detail at our free online community, where Darren can see my activity on a map and view detailed metrics.



Friday, May 11 – Day two

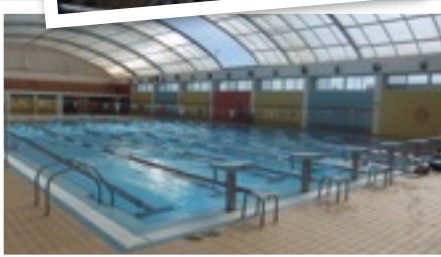
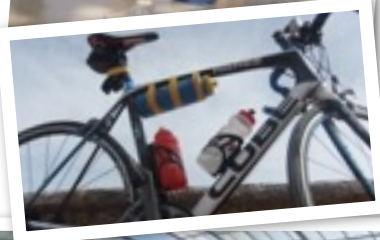
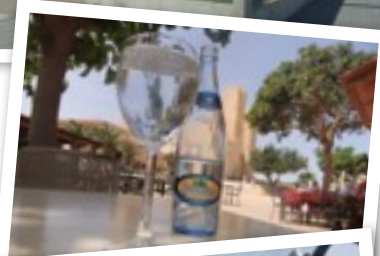
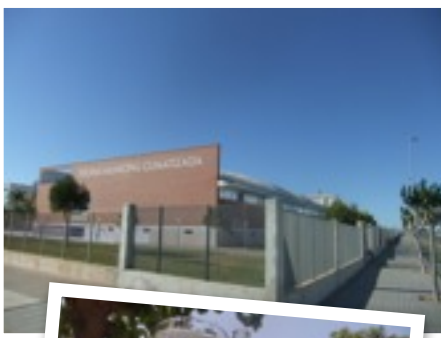
Day one of training

The next day, just before it was time to do my 1st programme of training, I went to the supermarket and I bought plenty of fruit, snacks, cereals and water. I carried two 5 litre bottles of water and food in a backpack for about 2 km. Afterwards I studied and planned a route using a Google map and went out on a 75 km cycle. I got lost for about 5 km until I found a canal and stayed beside it for about 20 km until I eventually got to know where I was going on the route. I had a great spin, there were a few hills but I didn't find it too difficult. About half way through the route, I found an Irish bar in the middle of nowhere and I had my lunch there. I took some photos and played records acting more like a tourist and less like someone in training! After I finished the route, which took me about 3 hours, I tried to get a sleep in before the run I was due to do that evening. Power naps are an essential part of the training my coach had said. After a light nap I searched and found a swimming pool in a nearby villa (about 3 km away). It was an amazing sports complex. I met a guy in reception that had no problems communication wise, as I communicated with him by body language because we didn't speak the same languages. Pool hours were 8am to 10pm so the times available gave me a chance to be flexible with my training and it was only 2.30euro for the use of the pool. Afterwards, I did a good light jog for 10 km before going out to a restaurant and pub with Wi-Fi access enabling me to contact my boss and also socialize with my friends on Facebook.

Saturday, May 12 – Day three

Swim - Bike - Run

After I got my bearings and knew where the town was I began to settle down. I continued to follow the full programme for the 12 days. The first time I trained in the swimming pool I found I struggled and realized that I would need to get used to heavy water and hot weather. I swam 2.8km for at least an hour and a half. After a short nap I cycled 65 km - half of this was the new route and I had added a good long climb. I ran out of water bottles about 7 km before I completed the cycle so I made sure I had extra bottles for the next session. After a long nap I jogged for 10 km, which is tough in hot weather before heading out to the restaurant and pub I had been in on the previous day. It was a classic day.



Hydrate man!

It was going well overall. It took me a few days to get used to the weather, as the heat was heavy on my body. Hydrate man! Water, water, and water! I took loads of water, especially in the heat, as I could not afford to get caught out. If I was tired on any of the days and couldn't do the distances, I would do a shorter / easier session instead. Sometimes I would even switch around the swim sessions depending on how I felt. I had to make sure I got at least 2 hours rest between swimming and bike sessions and take at least 3 hours between bike and run sessions unless it was a brick session. Coach said to eat like a horse and drink like a whale, I kept eating like a pig!

Coach - communication

The forerunner 910XT links were very helpful to coach and me. It assisted communication and it was good to show how I got on each day especially if I wasn't tired. Coach Darren made the training harder each day. The way coach kept in touch with me from day one to day twelve was by way of mobile texts and Facebook chats online which was really handy. It helped to keep me motivated and have the commitment and pride to follow the programme especially when I felt good and not tired, it encouraged me to push myself and go further.

Swimming drills

With the swimming drills, a lot of the communication with coach was through chat lines about it, but I am inexperienced in following the swim drills on a programme because it is easier for me to have visual communication and follow body language instructions from my coach. Every day had different swimming drills from session one to session eight; I was lucky Coach clarified the drills for me so I could understand them myself. Some drills hurt and tired me, I kept the time of the rest periods to the maximum so I would be doing on off and rest periods depending on the programme. When I followed it, it helped me even more, I pushed and tested myself and I knew that I was getting stronger. After the first few days we kept changing the sessions to keep it from getting boring. Darren said it might be boring for me and that if it was it was his fault because he was not there with me but I just stayed positive and thought of my next race when people would say 'Who the hell is this guy in the water?'. He kept a close eye on my swims as my sports watch even uses GPS to track how far I swam to keep an eye on me; he said I was savage and an animal in the water! "Your swim was awesome, even faster than I asked!! Good man I'd say that hurt" were the coach's words!





Brick sessions

Cycle routes

The cycle route has probably some of the nicest scenery around which is a lovely distraction from the burning lactates in the legs as I climbed the hardest part of the bike route. I needed to get up and over the last bit of a climb before the amazing switch back to descent just before the start of the steeper part of the climb. After every sweeping bend of the climb I would look out as far as I could along the road to see the awesome blue lake 'Embaise de la pedrera', but it eluded me until I gave up looking and there it was as I was approaching through the undergrowth of the mountain side. On entering the Forest I got a surreal feeling as the darkness crept in and the drops of water fell from the branches from leaves above before I could see the light at the other end, it was a memory of the bike course that will stay with me for many years to come, I really thought I was in heaven. After I got off the bike I went straight to have a power nap. I did it again many times, varying the distances everyday on the same route and even going anti-clockwise for variety. I studied the maps through Google maps every day to keep my eyes peeled for new routes to avoid boredom.

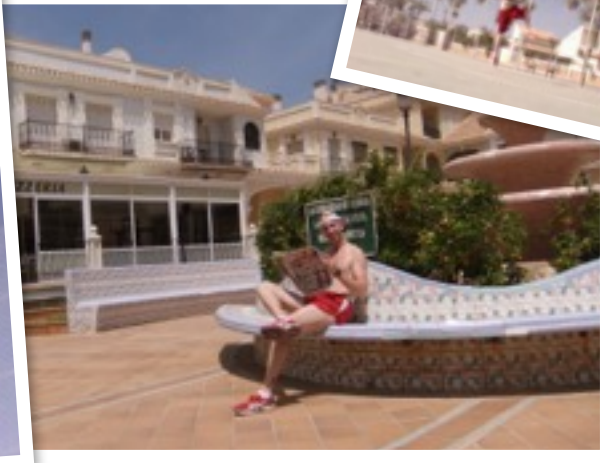
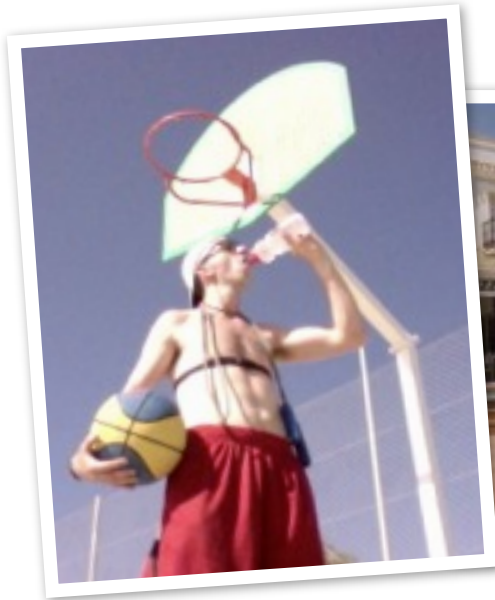


Run routes

The route for the run had probably some of the nicest sightseeing, it was superb viewing. There were lovely footpaths beside the coast that followed down to the sea. I ran the good part of the routes with various distances but the hardest part of the run was against the heat. On various days I ran shorter and easier distances, if I could go longer, I did. To see how my leg muscles were improving after bike intervals made me push myself the next day. It made me stronger and well relaxed after a long day. Only twice I trained on the running track in the sports complex beside the swimming pool. To avoid boredom I also skipped every second day, jumping 200 times. This was a good sign that my legs were in good condition and adapting well to the increasing demands of the training. After sessions, I did plenty of stretching and took plenty of food and water.

My own - training

Before day six, I had adapted to the good training, I trained so hard and pushed myself. Yes, it was very difficult training on my own, it is usually the same for everybody, but I had good communications with the coach every day, he kept me motivated, committed, and positive with the programme, which worked in the end. The GPS Forerunner watch played its part too in motivating me.



Wednesday, May 16 – Day six

Rest day

Coach said day six was my rest day and that it would bring me along nicely. I was instructed to have a relaxing and unstructured open water swim in the afternoon but in the early morning I swam 3.1 km in the swimming pool because, being the hard man I am, I didn't know what the 'rest day' idea meant, I much prefer to be doing something! Afterwards, for the first time I went out to a beach even though I had not seen it when I arrived on the first day (I did see the beach in the late evening earlier on during the week, while jogging). I went to the beach and spent my first few hours sunbathing. I massaged my legs after using the sun cream to work out the lactic acid. I found it strange to not have to cycle and run that day. After sunbathing, I went out for lunch and found a shop selling English newspapers and for first time treated myself to a lazy day. Before the open water swim, I had a good power nap. I wore my wetsuit for a swim in the open water but it was for a short time because I was uncomfortable on my own and I was not sure about the water, the currents and my surroundings, it felt like I was swimming to Morocco! I prefer have a partner in open water, which is much safer.



Updating news

Everyday I kept updating news of my warm weather training with photos on Facebook. I uploaded photos of the beautiful landscape, views, and historic buildings seen during the stay. I made a good clip video, which showed what my training camp was like (it is on YouTube). Darren said that it was hilarious and he felt he was obviously not going hard enough on me! Brilliant video though and everyone enjoyed it and read my latest status every day, posting good comments.

DON'T TELL ME WHAT I CAN'T DO!

Every late evening

Eating

Every late evening around 8-9pm after doing my regular jogging sessions, I went out to a different restaurant to ensure I was eating well, which helped me look and feel good during and after training so hard. In many restaurants I got on well with many waiters who were so very friendly and our communication was no problem. We had good chats about all sorts of stuff in general and what I did earlier on that day. They were interested to know why I was in Spain and what my goal was. I kept on eating like a pig. Every morning after a swimming session I used to go to the supermarket on my way back to the villa. I bought fresh fruit, snacks and carried 2.5 litres of water every day.

Saturday, May 22 – Day twelve

Back home

On the last day my flight was due out in the late afternoon, which gave me plenty of time so I had a light swim and jogged before catching the flight back home. I packed all of my clothes and training gear into a rucksack and put the swim, bike and run equipment into the bike case and then cleaned up the villa before leaving. I waited for a taxi, ordered by the owner of the pub that I used to regularly visit. The taxi dropped me to Murcia airport and when I arrived in Dublin, a friend collected and dropped me home. Later on, I headed down to Cork to visit my family home and my mother looked after me so well then. I mainly had a rest week, I spent the whole week doing light easy jogging and swam to get rid of the heavy legs and also did some easy cycling at the weekend.

IT'S ALL ABOUT HOW HARD YOU...

Achieved

Bang!

I achieved 22.5 km swimming, cycling was 800 km and running 100 km and all within 10 days. Darren, my inspiring coach, gave me great help. My totals achieved were bang on the programme and my running was awesome. Triathlon has given me a passion and an obsession. I'm now more hungry and addicted to this sport; I am improving and getting fitter than I've ever been before. I aim to achieve a lot with my triathlon club.

