

Reflective review

Reflecting on the last year is quite a challenge as it has been such a blur. However, even though the workload has felt overwhelming at times, I now feel that the hard work is paying off and once again everything is falling into place. So where am I now compared to then?

Well, my aspirations have not changed. I still want to be the best possible version of myself in regard to my academic, professional and most of all personal life. As such, maybe I am a little more realistic now, in that I realise that too much of one of these versions of myself will possibly have a negative effect on the other. In light of my recent state of mind, I am now debating whether to rethink my options going forward, in that, where I was sure I wanted to further my education through an enrolment into a master's degree, studying exercise physiology or strength and conditioning at Cardiff Metropolitan University, I now feel that taking a year out to concentrate on my business and my family may be a better option. Having said this, reflecting on my previous needs analysis in regard to my primary job/role of endurance coaching, it is quite remarkable how accurately I have met my goals without actually thinking too much about them, perhaps sub-consciously they are always in the fore-front of my mind.

Needless to say, my knowledge and understanding of exercise physiology has no doubt improved significantly as a result mainly of the research I have carried out over the last year. The research has also given me the opportunity to achieve additional goals such as gaining competency in the coaching application Training peaks, which in-turn subsequently led to the achievement of the goal of enlisting 10 clients to coach using the platform. However, at this point I should mention that after retaining two participants from the research for full time coaching, whilst also gaining a further five clients from word of mouth, my total is still three short, not a bad effort though. As for the goals I set myself in regard to working within elite sport and my aspirations of possibly travelling the world or studying abroad, upon reflection, I now feel more content with what I have, not in that I am ready to give up on these but more so that I need to enjoy the relative success I have already achieved.

Experiential hours

Physiological testing

I feel proud and honoured to have firstly been given the opportunity and secondly to have completed 14 maximal exercise tests to exhaustion on local triathletes who were personally recruited by myself for participation in my research project. In addition to the actual testing which took approximately 1 hour for each participant, the real work started in the recruitment phase through the communication and organisation required to get each participant firstly signed up, then subsequently to the test on time. With this said, through the guidance of my peers I feel each step was performed professionally from the informed consent, right up to the point where I delivered pre-test instructions to each participant. I must say the actual physiological testing itself was more enjoyable to me than actual work, however from the experience I have gained an understanding not only of the physiological thresholds involved in endurance sports but also the methods used to effectively determine an athletes values at each of these thresholds. In addition to the testing the research also required an observation of the participants training characteristics. As a result, approximately 40+ hours of quantifying training intensity distribution was performed by myself as to describe and potentially find any relationships with the values already obtained from the physiological tests of each participant. Finally, once all testing and analysis was performed, I had the task of explaining the findings of the research to each of the participants through scheduled Teams meetings. This was extremely beneficial for myself as it gave me the chance to take the findings and

then apply them to a real world setting, in that I was then advising and giving recommendations to potential clients on training and nutritional strategies.

Taken together, the numerous hours I have accumulated through physiological testing, training analysis and the communication with participants has allowed me to witness first-hand the realisation that due to a lack of time, discipline and most of all knowledge, recreational endurance athletes are not structuring their training intensity distribution correctly and as a result they are not as equipped for ultra-endurance sports such as triathlon as they possibly should be.

Para athlete

When the opportunity to work with a para athlete and Welsh triathlon arose, I knew I wanted to do it. However, before I had a chance to put my name in the hat, I was personally asked which made it all the more rewarding and also gave me an even greater desire to do a professional job. My first role was to meet the athlete for a general chat and to acquire some information regarding his condition and what he wanted from the strength and conditioning sessions. Subsequently, I designed a training programme that was focused on two areas (1) improving shoulder health, as triathlon for a para athlete is predominantly all shoulders, therefore shoulders are prone to injury; and (2) trunk stability, as this is not only paramount to para triathletes but to all athletes, of all sports.

Details of the training programme are presented in **Appendix 1**. As the main objective of the sessions were to decrease the risk of injury, no emphasis was placed on progressive overload. However, throughout the programme when ready the athlete did progress through the manipulation of load, reps, and sets.

Working with a para athlete was everything I hoped, in that it made me think outside the box in regard to exercise selection, whilst also forcing me to improvise during certain sessions. I learnt that when working with a para athlete sometimes you are the coach, whilst other times you may be an anchor point, or a forklift truck, just part of the job. Finally, I feel it is important to mention that working with a para athlete puts things into perspective and teaches you empathy, something that I am still working on. However, in contrast what I additionally took from working with a para athlete is that other certain populations who are considered to be vulnerable, or perhaps should be treated differently as a result of a medical condition, may need to take a good look at themselves as relatively speaking life and physical activity when compared to a paraplegic really is not that difficult; or perhaps this is just another example of my ignorance and lack of empathy.

JTM personal fitness

As the owner of JTM personal fitness, I was fortunate enough to be able to accumulate some of my hours training personal clients. As a personal trainer of over 7-years, I have built up an excellent reputation and felt reasonably confident in my knowledge and skills. However, over the last year modules such as evidenced based practise, professional practise in sport and specific populations have given me a better understanding of how to train individuals specific to their needs through the development of training interventions rather than a generic, one size fits all approach that I had been previously implementing. More so, what I have learnt is that taking a little more time gathering pre-intervention data through an initial consultation and testing session I am able to design evidenced based programmes that deliver results. As such my client list and reputation continues to grow and although I spend a little more time with each client over the course of the intervention, the professionalism comes at a cost. As in the words of David Ginola "I am worth it".

In addition, I have been able to use equipment from UWTSD which I will go on to personally purchase, that included the Tanita body composition analyser and the gym aware velocity based trainer to perform pre and post intervention testing on clients, thus allowing me to provide accurate objective measures of results rather than subjective analysis or even worse, before and after pictures. Having said this, in contrast I have also learnt from working with specific populations that sometimes it is best to forget about all the measures and results as certain populations just need to improve adherence to exercise. Considering this, I have altered my approach to some clients that I have been training for years, to one that involves no pressure and allows them to change their goals to something more valuable and realistic. An example of this might be changing the goal of weight loss to improving functional capacity and/or health related quality of life, which subsequently provides weight loss/management as a bi-product. As a result, over the last year I have seen some of my clients have further success in weight loss and/or management, rehabilitation, functional capacity, hypertrophy and strength development and also through strength and conditioning interventions designed to increase performance in their chosen sport. Furthermore, the programmes I have designed as a result of my learning over the last year and also the results obtained from each one of the interventions completed, have subsequently been stored online, thus providing me with a portfolio of templates for future clients as well as a log of results for each client to monitor progression. Therefore, I now feel prepared every minute working as a trainer, as the strategies I prescribe are proven and evidenced based, thus allowing me to trust the process.

Website

In preparation of my first year as a qualified sport and exercise scientist I have recently embarked on the creation of a website for JTM personal fitness. Through this I will be able to showcase all that I have learnt during this last year. Firstly, although a little premature I am hoping for the website to bridge a gap between myself and the public through an about me page that reveals my qualifications from UWTSD, plus my passion for everything that is health and performance related. From there, potential clients will have the option to choose whatever mode of training they require, be that endurance training via Training peaks or various resistance training packages, that will include small group interventions for specific populations. More so, as I have learnt during the last year that communication and the collection of relevant data from the offset is crucial to success. All potential clients will be directed to and required to complete online forms that include, terms and conditions, PAR-Q+ and maybe even a subjective health questionnaire, although I have not made my mind up on this last part yet. Once completed, potential clients will then be directed to payment options which will provide the business with a more professional approach than the one currently employed, whilst also reducing the stress of money collection and cancellation fees. Furthermore, the website will be live and constantly updated by myself to continually advertise the services and opportunities that JTM personal fitness offers, plus being linked to search engines and review sites such as Google and trust pilot will allow for constructive feedback whilst giving potential clients valuable insight and information including directions to the training facility. I feel it is important to mention, that the website has been a goal of mine for many years but only now through my learning and experiences over the last year am I confident enough in my ability to structure and manage the business in a way that satisfies me, whilst also giving the business the platform that it deserves.

Needs analysis

My previous needs analysis was very much based on learning and gathering the knowledge and skills that would allow me to operate as a competent trainer/coach, thus it was more flexible with more than one scenario. However, my present needs are now more focused on success in the real world. Therefore, my current needs analysis is specific to planning and executing goals that develop the business, rather than myself.

JOB/ROLE	SKILLS REQUIRED	CURRENT SKILLS	NEEDS
OWNER/TRAINER AT JTM PERSONAL FITNESS	• Business management	6	9
	• Digital literacy	7	9
	• Online marketing	5	9
	• Communication	6	8
	• Empathy and likeability	5	8
	• Life balance	5	8

Strengths

As the owner/trainer of JTM personal fitness, which is a reputable business with a loyal and consistent clientele, I already possess the confidence and general understanding of how to operate and be relatively successful. However, as I continue to evolve in my own personal development as a sport scientist/trainer/coach, the quality and experience I can offer to my clients will be significantly enhanced. As such, being able to offer services such as metabolic testing, rather than estimating thresholds that may potentially lead to incorrect training decisions will give me a competitive advantage over other endurance coaches. Furthermore, in regard to the strength and conditioning side of the business being able to implement evidence-based training strategies and testing protocols using relatively novel methods like velocity-based training will further provide potential clients with a level of accuracy and professionalism that is unrivaled in this part of West Wales. Finally, in light of my recent research project I have become a self-confessed expert in the metabolic and physiological factors that effect ultra-endurance performance and with West Wales being an area where these types of sports/events are extremely popular I feel my knowledge in this space could offer me opportunities.

Weaknesses

Although I have over 7 years' experience training clients, I am still relatively new to endurance coaching, thus more experienced coaches may possibly have an advantage over myself in terms of network connections, reputation and also knowing what works at scale so that this side of the business is cost effective. In addition, as I am yet to gain accreditation to relevant organizations such as Training peaks, Ironman, and Welsh/British triathlon, perhaps there still remains a slight disconnect to the audience and potential clients I am trying to target.

Opportunities

The opportunity is in my own hands. The risk of setting up and building a cost-effective business is already done, all that remains is fulfilling my potential and that of JTM personal fitness. Additionally, in regard to the endurance coaching via Training peaks the opportunities are vast, in that I am able to train clients from any region of the world within reason. As such, to date I have already enlisted

two clients from Cheltenham, England and although they are family, I am hoping that their relative success in running events since working with myself will potentially lead to more clients from that part of the world.

Threats

Perhaps the biggest threat to myself is myself, in that taking my eye off the ball and not furthering my education will cause me to drift and possibly lose my passion for everything health and performance related. In addition, what I have found over the last few months is that the endurance coaching seems to be a heavily populated, cutthroat profession which may be problematic as there are only a relatively small pool of endurance athletes in Southwest Wales, thus gaining enough clients to make the endurance side of the business cost effective may be a concern.

Goal setting

Short (1 year)

- Complete undergraduate degree in sport and exercise science with a first-class honor.
- Gain accreditation with all relevant organizations.
- Ensure the website is fully functional.
- Enlist a further 10 clients to the endurance coaching side of the business.
- Deliver presentations to local endurance clubs and give recommendations based on the findings from my research project.
- Achieve personal endurance goals to gain respect and credibility within the endurance scene in South Wales.

Medium (3 year)

- Enrolling on a part-time master's degree at Cardiff Metropolitan university.
- Build a network of affiliations including therapists, nutritionists and event organizers that can liaise with the business to offer a higher quality experience to clients.
- Enlist 30-40 clients between both businesses.
- To support the workload my aim is to employ at least 1 other trainer/coach.
- Continue to raise awareness and credibility through the completion of personal endurance goals.

Long (10 year)

- At this point in my life, the business will be 17 years old and will have a fully established reputation for delivering results.
- Semi- retirement.

Summary

To summarise, I plan to take everything I have learnt in my time at UWTSD and apply these skills and knowledge to continue to grow JTM personal fitness. Although my goals and aspirations may have changed over the last year and undoubtedly will again, my overarching philosophy has not, in that I remain confident that as long as I continue to work hard and stay open minded to the opportunities that life presents, I will subsequently reach my goals and fulfil my aspirations, whatever they may be.

Appendix

Appendix 1.

Training programme (Jan 16th-May 7th)

Session 1

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Load		Recovery (s)
			RPE	RIR	
Hanging scap pull	3*	6-10	8	1-2	60
Unilateral KB shoulder press	3*	10-15	8	2	60
Tri-cep dips	3*	10-15	8	2	60
Band anti-rotation	2 P/S	5 x 5s	8		60
DB anti-trunk flexion	2 P/S	30s	8		60
DB shoulder external rotation	3	15-20		1	60

*Last set to failure

Session 2 (Home-based)

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Load		Recovery (s)
			RPE	RIR	
Seated machine row	3-4*	10-15	8	2	60-90
Close grip pull down	3*	10-15	8	2	60-90
Reverse pec-dec	3	30s	8	2	60
Band anti-rotation	2 P/S	5 x 5s	8		60
Band wood chop	2 P/S	10	8		60
DB or band shoulder external rotation	3	15-20			60

*Last set to failure

Additional session (Home-based)

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Recovery
Band reverse fly	3	15-20	60
Band face pull	3	15-20	60
DB or band shoulder external rotation	2-3	15-20	60
Band shoulder external rotation (Isometric)	1	4 x 30:60s	
Band anti-rotation	2 P/S	5 x 5s	60

Programme objectives

- Improve trunk stability
- Improve shoulder balance/health
- Build muscle mass and strength

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- Injury prevention