

Raising the bar and keeping it up

By Mathew Tippett
Photography by Delly Carr

While reflecting on my training something funny came to mind. My long time training partner and good friend Dennis Neal said something amusing. We were climbing Mt Macedon and he turned to me and asked, "is something wrong with my chain?" I looked down and replied, "no" and he asked again, "are you sure?" I foolishly answered saying, "no, nothings wrong, why?" He laughed at me and said, "because it feels so easy I thought my chain was missing."

Obviously Dennis wasn't the first to make this comment; he plagiarised it from the great man Lance Armstrong. But the statement is important, because it introduces techniques that can be used to improve performance. This article explores the themes of 'Performance References' and 'Performance Visualisation'. The three disciplines of triathlon will be analysed individually with working examples of the above techniques provided for each. If this is the first article you have read in the Motivation Series, you will need to familiarise yourself with the previous article titled 'Controlling Your Emotions' (TMSM 8#2, page 42). It is essential that you understand the process of setting up symbols for emotional states, as you will be required to utilise this technique at a later stage.

What are Performance References?

A Performance Reference is a reference you have for good performance. You will have internal and external references, and neither is more powerful than the other, they play an equally important role in understanding what good performance is. An internal reference for performance may be a feeling associated with good technique or movement, whereas an external reference may be footage of the Olympic Games or a scene from a movie.

What is Performance Visualisation?

The premise of visualisation is that your subconscious is unable to determine the difference between reality and vivid imagination. Therefore, we are able to facilitate change and create an environment inside our mind that has an actual effect on our activities, in this case, your performance. Performance Visualisation creates an ideal performance outcome, enabling you to perform with a higher level of skill and success.

Two common methods exist for the implementation of visualisation into your training program.

1. During racing and training

- In training, use visualisation the same as you would drills or technique work.
- When racing, you may use visualisation to reinforce good performance and direct your conscious mind away from pain.

2. During down time, similar to the concept of meditation

- Before you go to bed spend some time reinforcing your visual references. Spend five-to-10 minutes on each discipline.
- During your lunch break spend 15-to-20 minutes on each discipline.

For this exercise you will need three A4 sheets of paper, a pen and a good imagination. Label each piece with one leg of the race. Follow the framework set out below for each of the three disciplines.



SWIM

Symbol selection

- Think of a symbol that reflects fast swimming for you. That is, something with meaning, something you already have references for. When I first did this a dolphin came to mind. For you it may be a number of things, a fast moving shark, submarine, speedboat, or Aquaman from the old TV show.
- Draw a picture of the symbol on your A4 sheet of paper and make a mental picture of it as well.

Reference selection

We are going to build four references into your swimming allowing you to manipulate your conscious state and replicate fast swimming. The examples below are ones I use - you may have different ones that fit with your understanding.

Performance References

1. Speedboat pulling you along in the water.
2. Having a big dolphin fin attached to your feet.
3. Swimming next to Ian Thorp.
4. Swimming with a strong current and

everyone else is swimming against a current.

Performance Visualisation

- For each Performance Reference you will need to develop a Performance Visualisation technique. Refer to the 'What is Performance Visualisation' section earlier.
- Document the references on your A4 sheet of paper and detail the characteristics of each visual technique.

Practical Application

Performance Reference 1

Speedboat pulling you along in the water.

Visual Technique

Visualise yourself being pulled through the water by the speedboat, look for detail such as the bow wave you are creating, the feeling of the water under your body as you start to aquaplane across the top.

Performance Reference 2

Having a big dolphin fin attached to your feet.

Visual Technique

Visualise yourself with a large powerful fin. Feel the water as each kick becomes a massive explosion of power.

Performance Reference 3

Swimming next to Ian Thorp.

Visual Technique

See Ian Thorp swimming beside you, swim off his wash and match his stroke for stroke.

Performance Reference 4

Swimming with a strong current and everyone else is swimming against a current.

Visual Technique

See and feel the water pushing you from behind, feel it on your feet. See yourself passing other swimmers as they flounder in the head on current.

Linking Visual Technique to Symbol

Critical to the success of this technique is your ability to link the visualisation to your specific symbol and bring back the feeling instantly. Revisit the previous article in this series titled 'Controlling Your Emotions' and follow the drill provided in the linking emotional Ostate to symbol section of the report. Every time you use a visual technique, whether it is during racing and training or in down time, link it with the symbol.

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Practical Application

Performance Reference 1

Riding behind a truck or bus catching the draft.

Visual Technique

Visualise yourself being sucked along behind a bus or truck.

Visualise yourself riding at 70 or even 80 kilometres an hour.

What does the road look like as it flashes past?

How strong do you feel as you gear out?

Does the truck or bus have any advertising on the back of it? Search for detail.

Performance Reference 2

Riding downhill with a tail wind.

Visual Technique

Imagine feeling the wind on your back, look for detail in the landscape, see the trees blowing in the wind.

Imagine you are on a downhill section of the road as you start to pedal faster and faster.

What is your body position like on the bike, are you more aerodynamic than normal?

Performance Reference 3

Imagine your pedals being attached to levers similar to the wheels on a steam train, imagine the sound of the steam engine as it chugs along.

Visual Technique

Feel your legs being pulled through the pedal stroke. Your feet don't have control over their actions, they are being driven by a steam engine.

Listen to the sound of the engine.

When you want to increase speed, increase the tempo of the sound and let your legs follow.

Performance Reference 4

Remember a time when you were riding and feeling fantastic, powerful or strong.

Visual Technique

Visualise yourself in the exact way you remember. If the day was hot and you were riding in a group, that's what you should visualise. Visualise key aspects of the day including the landscape, what you were wearing, if anyone else was riding with you, etc. Try to recapture the moment where you felt your best and hold onto it.

Linking Visual Technique to Symbol

Follow the framework set out in the swim section of this report.

RUN

Symbol selection

• Select a symbol for running as per swim and ride section of report.

Performance References

1. Running with a tailwind but everyone else is running into a headwind.

2. Imagine your running movement is as fluid and relaxed as the fight scenes in the *Matrix* movies.

3. Imagine you are running downhill.

4. Imagine you have springs attached to the bottom of your shoes.

Performance Visualisation

• Follow the framework set out in the swim and ride section.

Practical Application

Performance Reference 1

Running with a tailwind but everyone else is running into a headwind.

Visual Technique

Feel the wind on your back.

Visualise the other runners being pushed back against the wind needing to work much harder than yourself.

Performance Reference 2

Imagine your running movement is as fluid and relaxed as the fight scenes in the *Matrix* movies.

Visual Technique

Visualise fast, quick fluent movement.

All movements are linked and they just seem to happen in perfect synchronisation.

Performance Reference 3

Imagine you are running downhill.

Visual Technique

Visualise gravity pulling you into the run course.

Increase your leg speed to suit running downhill.

Feel how much easier it is running downhill.

Performance Reference 4

Imagine you have springs attached to the bottom of your shoes.

Visual Technique

Feel your feet being pushed off the ground by the springs.

Visualise yourself bounding along the running track like a gazelle.

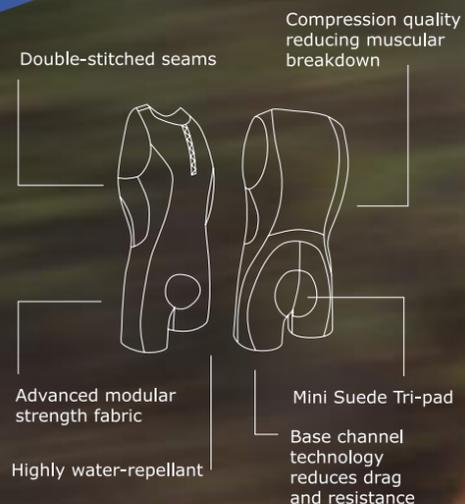
Linking Visual Technique to Symbol

Follow the framework set out in the swim section of this report. **TMSM**



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