

4 for 4 : Thoughts on my Success in the 1990 World Cup

By Andy Bridge

At the suggestion of several people, I am writing this to pass along my ideas and thoughts on my victories this summer. I had hoped to place in all of the races but never thought I would win 4 out of 4. I was the only person in all of the classes to do this and I think I have some good reasons why.

After the 1989 season in which I had a 5th, 4th, 3rd and a 1st in the World Cup circuit, I knew I was fast enough to beat the Europeans but needed to race more consistently. Everyone in the top group of each class is fast enough to win but the key is **pacing**. Over a 5-6 minute course the top group is very similar but in the 15-20 minute range it can be very different.

The concept of pacing is difficult to describe and the only way to learn it is to drill it into your system by constant work over a Time Trial course with splits every few minutes. Most people tend to pace a race according to how tired their system is. This sounds safe and reliable but you are tired the second half and tend to go slower the closer you get to the finish. My pacing strategy involves conscientiously holding back and staying relaxed the first half and then gradually increasing over the second half. This allows one to exert all of their energy right to the finish line, which is much more efficient.

The following table from the Pre-Worlds (World Cup #3) is a good example:

	8 mins.	14 mins.	Finish	
Bridge USA	0	0	19:04.9	0
Libuda FRG	0	-8	19:19.5	-15
Wells GBR	-5	-9	19:19.8	-15
Halko FRA	-1	-6	19:20.22	-15
Crnkovic YUG	+5	-6	19:20.29	-15
Benamrouche FRA	+2	-7	19:21.6	-16
Vala TCH	+1	-6	19:24.9	-20
Rossier FRA	-1	-9	19:27.5	-23

The top half of the course in Yugoslavia is very easy water and the temptation to go hard is difficult to ignore. However, the second half is difficult and demands a lot of energy for boat control. This type of course fits in perfect with my pacing strategy.

Another observation I have after close study of videos is a powerful stroke in big water. My stroke on flatwater is similar to many others but in big difficult water I tend to have a slower stroke rate with much more power. I think varying your stroke for different types of water is very important. In general, a relatively high stroke rate is good for flat and easy water. In big water stroking with the waves and crosscurrents will use your power most efficiently.

Implementing the above two principles - pacing and variable stroke rates - takes much time and practice. A training plan should emphasize these until they become second nature. There are many successful training plans and I will briefly list my basic workouts and principles.

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FALL – WINTER (Sept. – Feb.)

In this six month period I do a large volume of training - Paddling 5-6 times per week, weight training 2-3 times per week, and running 2-4 times per week. Paddling workouts consisted of:

- 2-3 AE aerobic distance 60-90 mins.
- 1 MSE long interval 12 mins. on, 2 mins. off X 4
- 1 SSE short interval 5 mins. on, 2 mins. off X 8
- 1 WW distance or intervals

Every two weeks I did a Time Trial on a canal with Bill Endicott timing me on a bike. We have seven split stations on a 25 minute course. After doing many of these it is possible to compare results with pacing. On my fastest times I have always been slightly slower the first half. All of the above workouts are done on the Hard-Harder-Hardest strategy from the Fishburns. Each on piece you exert maximum effort in the last third to exhaust yourself right at the end. All workouts are done point to point on courses.

Weight training – After much conflicting advice, I began a weight program in October 1988. I have since become a strong proponent of weight training in the off season. A strong stroke is important. The paddling motion is so easy that it is difficult to get stronger just by paddling. I lift 2-3 times a week about an hour total concentrating entirely on upper body muscles. Any exercises that duplicate the paddling motion are useful.

Running – I started running as a way to train my cardiovascular system more when I was tired from paddling. An added benefit I have noted is controlled breathing. Running teaches you to breathe efficiently and to relax. I think 30-60 minutes is best and should be done at a fairly high intensity. Last winter I ran 2-4 times a week.

SPRING (March-May)

In these 3 months you want to think about speed and racing. I phased out the weights in mid-March but kept running until the end of April. A large volume is not very important in this time period but high quality is. The goal is to keep endurance and pacing but add speed.

March: 6-7 paddling workouts a week. Similar to previous schedule but I added two new workouts:

- 1 Sprint session 2 mins. on, 1 min. off X 10
- 1 “Burny” 12/25/12 with 4 mins. off between pieces. I did this on my Time Trial course to compare pacing.

April: 6-8 paddling workouts a week. Similar to March but added another short interval session (4-5 min. pieces). This month contained my first two-a-days. I also shortened many of my old workouts to try and raise the intensity level.

- 12 mins. on, 3 mins. off X 3
- 5 mins. on, 2 mins. off X 5
- 40-60 mins. continuous

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May: 7-9 paddling workouts a week. Similar to April but added another sprint session (2 min. pieces) and a Time Trial every week. During this month I did virtually no running and usually did a two-a-day every other day. Very important to watch your resting pulse and eat properly. I departed for Europe May 30 and was 20 seconds faster on my Time Trial course than the end of April.

Mental Training: I have read several books on this in the past couple of years and have become a strong believer in developing mental skills. I can recommend some books to anyone wishing to pursue this further.

Practice hard-harder-hardest pacing on flatwater and whitewater until it becomes a second nature.

A powerful variable stroke rate is very important.

Practice paddling difficult tricky moves when tired.

Train with other people half the time to push yourself, the other half on your own. You have to be able to go hard on your own.

Good Luck!