

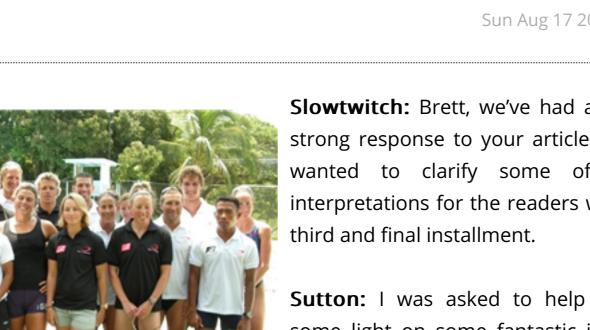
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Brett Sutton Interview: Part 3

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Sun Aug 17 2008 Slowtwitch: Brett, we've had a very strong response to your articles and wanted to clarify some of the

moment and give readers an experts



interpretations for the readers with a **Sutton:** I was asked to help shed some light on some fantastic issues happening in the sport at the

PRODUCTS LOCAL LISTING ARTICLES GRAVEL INDOOR RACES COACHING TRAINING BIKE FIT

eye on the developments, and of course what we do differently in preparing a team of top-class athletes all at the forefront of the sport. There's a standing joke throughout out my group, it dates back to prehistoric times. It's

my strangling of the English language—it has a name among us—they call it Suttolish—so I will clarify some of the stuff that was maybe seen out of context. But after reading your e-mail on the posts, it would seem very clear to me that again many readers can't see the forest for the trees, others want to turn it into a tech debate of what I know and don't. What I do know is—and it's seen as arrogant by some, but it's

just standard truth to me—that I have the confidence that I know what I am doing, that I know about real performance and how to achieve it. My results prove it. For those that are serious and trying to honestly plot their way through the mountain of bullshit out there I will do the last installment for you. So long as I get to print a rebuttal for my very wounded warrior. Not Belinda Granger, but Justin.

Slowtwitch: I reckon that can be arranged. Let's first address the tech questions.

Sutton: No, the first thing, is, like in coaching, you put things in perspective for the individual you are dealing with: me and the readers. A first distortion or assumption that is wrong then leads others to misinterpretations, that I'm looking for shock value or something.

The reason I have such a strong bond with the group is because they know I don't say anything I don't mean. And sometimes when I want to say some thing, I don't. Because a wise old coach once told me, the difference between the good coach and the great ones is good ones want to tell you how much knowledge they have, but the great ones know what to say, but know when not to say it. That has served me well. With no disrespect, I have zero reasons to want to do any impressing, here or any forum.

I work for the respect of who walks thru my training door. And my biggest weapon is that they know I tell them the truth. The second is to be a great coach, you have an opinion. That's what they come to you for;

they're looking for someone with more expertise than they already have. They don't want to hear "well, maybe this will work for you," or "it could be this or could be that that's causing the problem." They want clear answers. They want a leader when they are under extreme pressure.

That pressure comes in not just races, but with injuries, down times, dealing with their own personality, of who they are. And they want a rock, someone that can and does make decisions. I've had success for a long time now. I was not out to say "look at me." The difference

here was I went into a new sport (Ironman-ed), with athletes of differing levels, and turned it on its head. People want to know why and how. Those that listen I tell there is no secrets, and average Joes can make good gains too with out going full-time or getting a divorce.

Now, regarding tech, it's a crutch. And the first thing I do with my athletes is kick the crutches out. I already said that if there is a piece of technology out there that I think will improve Chrissie one second, I will use it. It's there, somewhere. But, nobody picks up on that, because I didn't put it out of context. But really, it's a small part of the performance debate, a very minor part. Rebecca Preston

won her first three Ironman races on training wheels. Chrissie won her first one on them. Sorry, people, but that's the truth. Some people pick up on that inference, and I am happy for that. Slowtwitch: You can't be that indifferent about the technology. To wit, you have the

consider to sponsor the team, and that if you had them on the top of the list of three bikes you'd ever consider, and heard that if you couldn't get one of the three, you'd simply not have a bike sponsor? Sutton: I take every advantage I can get. I do measure things, but if it's something that can improve you two minutes, but the down side is that it costs you 10 minutes, I say

team on Cervelos. I understand they reside at the top of a short list of bikes you'd even

the P3 Carbon after this season. She'll have more skill by then. The fastest tool is at our disposal, and she's ready for it. **Slowtwitch:** What are the other two brands you'd consider?

That said, we have the number one bike available off the rack. And are glad we do.

Cervelo is a step ahead, full stop. And while the P2 has served Chrissie, she will move to

Sutton: Well, I'll tell you number two, as he has helped an number of my old athletes—

don't go there.

wheels?

and I always appreciated that—and of course love his design in the sport. And that's Felt. Slowtwitch: So what about the rest of equipment? I spoke with some helmet

cooling as a vented one—whether it's even possible. **Sutton:** Yeah, I said already that it's a nice piece of equipment but there's just no ventilation—yet. Bella wears one that is getting there, from her sunglass people, Rudy

Slowtwitch: Can you elaborate on your resistance to your female athletes using disc

Sutton: Easy. Girls can't get the bike over 40 kilometers an hour over 180 kilometers. The

negative to them is it takes a lot of power to keep discs going. Discs aren't allowed in

Hawaii, so why don't we ride with them outside of Hawaii? We train as we race.

Project. Overall, though the head just doesn't lose the heat it needs to.

manufacturers about your thoughts of whether an aero helmet could provide as much

of all time—Karen Smyers—rode one. It's a great innovation, but the market has killed it.

Back in 1993 a very smart guy, a boyfriend to one of my athletes, did a fantastic disc cover on spokes. I was told they did something like that is the states. One of the greatest For most age grouper guys, it's similar. But for those front of pack guys that ride it, the micro jarring is amazing. That's why if we have a stress fracture, we don't ride to get it better like the doctors and physios say. They don't know. An athlete has a much quicker downtime if you get off the road, for the same reason: the vibrations are being sent up the leg. Softride took some of that out. Which was ironic, because Cannondale at the time tried to bring shock into race bikes. But Softride was a very good innovation that died. Slowtwitch: Ill paint a broad brush stroke: aerobars, and again regarding your advice for many of the women on the team to run road drops with clip-ons instead of pursuit bars

with bar-end shifters. I'd be curious for a detailed reason for that view. Sutton: Tri girls have the worst handling skill you have ever seen. They brake too soon, and when you have those aerobars and no drops, guess what: they break another five

meters earlier than even that. Then they try to fire up out of the corners. It pitiful. And sorry, but most age group men are not much better. So yes, in a wind tunnel it's all very impressive, but on the road in a 90-degree turn, are you kidding? Changing gear up a hill, again, you gotta be kidding. Just take a look at the

footage at a race. Sometimes you don't see it that much, because they are off the bike trying to put their chains back on. **Slowtwitch:** But isn't that something that can be trained as a skill?

Sutton: Well, yes and no, depending again on the athlete. But I see many coaches out there trying to go technical with skills, but come race day with a descent, well, it ain't

technique, its fear. And if you've ever tried training an animal with fear in their eye, the good trainer tells you the best response is keep them away from the fear until it's absolutely critical to face it. Then over time they will get some confidence. But go at the fear day in and day out and you get Neurosis. I'm a coach, not a research scientist. Slowtwitch: Footwear choice is always a big question, particularly run form in concert

athlete doing long-course racing. Sutton: The most important thing running in Ironman it's that it's more efficient to land with mid-foot strike. Not on the ball of the foot. So, I like the shoes to be low in the heel,

with it. What's your take on shoe design advancement, and whether it helps or hinders an

not built up and with stability plate. That's injury city. But don't worry, no one listens to my thoughts there. **Slowtwitch:** Granted, there are some companies that are creating shoes in that vein. But it goes against a large majority of the running shoe market, with beefed-up heels, lots of

cushioning, so could be seen as an against-the-grain look. **Sutton:** Well, it's my study of near 20 years watching all types of runners, and another 15 dealing with animal movement. It's just a statement of fact. As I said, I don't think in terms

of right and wrong; I think in terms of what works. And from what I see, mid-foot stroke is

the safest, injury-preventative, economical running form, I spend half my running time with new people, getting their toes. **Slowtwitch:** Let's continue with the coaching.

Sutton: About time. **Slowtwitch:** You say you don't look at the bike, that it's merely a tool. Do you train your

athletes and give it only as much attention as you think it deserves, and not a minute more? Sutton: Triathlon is triathlon. It's not swimming, biking and running to me. I just don't

me in my mind, is a two-wheeled apparatus to deliver us to the run.

help toward optimizing the bike as it relates to the rest of the race?

But people think I mean it the cloud, that I don't care about it. I care about the bike in far more detail than anybody here. Because it's triathlon, it's the link in the chain. If your swim is dead, your bike will be terrible. If your bike is weak, I don't care how fast you run, you won't go well after a 180-kilometer bike. **Slowtwitch:** I understand you do the fit of the athletes in the team, but have many in

less aggressive positions. Would optimizing them with a more aerodynamics position

look at it like that. It's what it takes to get to the end first with what you got. The bike, to

Sutton: Absolute rubbish. With the exception of Bjorn Andersson, my guys are set up more extreme than anyone in the sport, and have been from day one. I've seen Dan Empfield take heat for his "extreme" position. I make him look like a lounge chair cyclist. Look at any of my guys. The ITU brought a rule in against my guys, because they were so

far forward. That's why the third bike among my favorites was Quintana Roo. They had it right a long time ago. Those who think I am bullshitting, look at what Jackie Gallagher first rode when I had her—and that was like in '93. You've got to get forward. Now the degrees, that depends on the athlete. But the bike fit of Dan is closer to us than any other. **Slowtwitch:** Looking at your run training, you seem to go toward volume.

Sutton: That is always something that can often be taken out of context, and might

require a little insight into TeamTBB. The general rule for the Ironchicks is run only every

Slowtwitch: What's the reasoning?

you're an advocate of high volume.

second day.

athlete.

and we train that way.

Sutton: Since I started this, we have had—touch wood—no stress fracture from the girls. That's a fact. Slowtwitch: From what I have seen—and without giving too much of your training

specifics away—your swim training isn't insanely massive, despite popular legend saying

Sutton: I know swimming, and when I came into the sport of triathlon, I swam their asses off and made a lot of swimmers that couldn't be good, better. But in hindsight, I slowed their bike and run. So again, I measured my science; a one-minute improvement

on an athlete's swim is great for a coach's ego. Then they rode three minute slower. So

did I improve them or slow them down? Now, I also know how hard swimming is, and how bad most swimmers in triathlon are. So I see no value in taking a technically challenged swimmer and practicing bad habits over and over so they get tired and worse. We don't count meters, we count good strokes. And sometimes in a 2,500-meter session, there are more good strokes than 6 kilometers of bad habits.

progression, there must be some key workout that can help the athletes break through, particularly in the swim. Are there any sets that are meant to shock the system, and at the same time give the athletes confidence that they can churn it out? (That 10k swim set, Hills B-day—after she ran a broken 26 miles the day before—comes to mind). Band and

Slowtwitch: Most would subscribe to the understanding that consistency is the key to

paddles seem to be a key part of your workouts as well. Sutton: This is where it gets in to expertise and experience. I'm disappointed that in this sport, every man and his dog call themselves coaches, and have got reams of printouts to prove it. But the big bullet workouts? Well the birthday present to Hillary, improves nothing physically. Just like the 60 km run she did improves nothing physically and doesn't help with technique. But it's a workout for a specific problem with a specific

I have succumbed to people wanting the workouts—that's what we have done with

ironguides. They will be allowed to monitor all our workouts and produce them for

people to buy and use. There will be no tricks, won't be any "no, don't give this one away."

It will be what is witnessed day-in, day-out in all three disciplines. We decided to work with ironguides because you need some expertise, in implementing it as a program, to benefit the user to help him improve. And that's the name of my game. I am not interested in making athletes feel better, but to improve race times. Training is the only for that. I don't take a stopwatch to most workouts, so there doesn't need to be a lot of specific times. You can interview every athlete: there's no time trials for swim, bike or run in the program at all. And that is magic bullet. It's an aerobic sport,

We have the magic saying and do most of our workouts with this in mind: moderate, medium and mad. That is, we always do training moderate and medium. Each athlete is taught to understand their body when they get there. Then it comes to decision time for them. If they feel very tired and worse than when they started the call is moderate. If they feel ok but not frisky the call is medium. If they feel good, happy in their mind, then they go mad. It's possibly too simple for the triathlon fraternity. They ask, "there must be something

more, right?" But that's it. There isn't. That's the magic bullet.

Slowtwitch: You talk about the importance in the workouts—not in and of themselves, but of putting them in the right place within the cycle for any given athlete. And you have as many as, what, eight cycles? Can there possibly be that many? How many times can an athlete ebb and flow?

Sutton: There are possibly more cycles. But let's make it simple: you've got men and

women. Within each, you have some athletes whose strength is the swim. You have

others with the bike, and yet another strongest on the run. If you want to make them a good triathlete, that's eight different plans, because we try to maintain the strength while working on the weaknesses. Now if we take each discipline, then you have to figure in what system you train the athlete in that discipline that day. But to do that, you must know what system your going to train in the other two disciplines.

So if you have a short rest near tolerance, then you better bike slow at low heart rate for two or three days. Or getting that mixture wrong means your athlete is going to be crawling. It's no good doing long aerobic work in the pool, then running two hours of the same. You're killing the athlete, pure and simple. Put 10 people on the one program, and I see it everywhere; maybe two will be on fire,

and eight are going down the tubes. The magic bullet is how you get more bang for you energy buck. And for me, that depends on the individual I am doing the training plan for .

Slowtwitch: How do you respond to those who say you don't have the science to back what many would call just training theory? Sutton: I adapt and evolve to what I learn through trial and error, not by what someone

writes on a computer program. I am very suspicious of people that study what already is

working and asks for the reason why it works. Printouts are for accountants, not coaches. And that's why, I am in front. I am content in just knowing it works, and getting on with the job. I am too ignorant to want to know why. It just does. And that's good enough for me. hope this explains a little better. Like 0 Tweet

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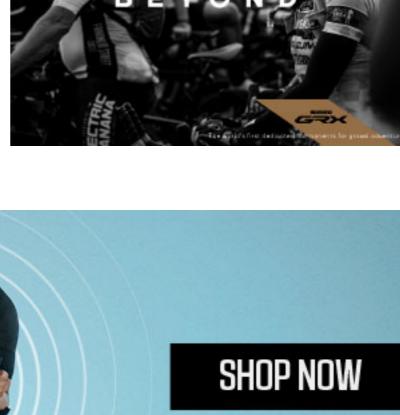


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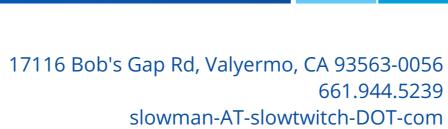


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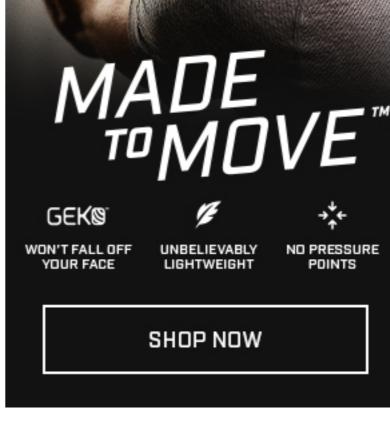
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