



# Avoiding the off-season slump

*with WSC Sports Psychologist Matti Clements*



For many athletes, the off-season is used as a time to recharge and prepare mentally and physically for the next season. It's a time when athletes will often go away on holiday, spend time with family and friends, or schedule in necessary surgery in preparation for the upcoming pre-season. However, although the off-season is time away from the normal training environment, typically athletes are still required to maintain a level of fitness in order to make it easier for their return to pre-season training. For many, the motivation required to maintain this prerequisite can be poor, resulting in decreased fitness levels, increased skin folds and subsequently a difficult return to the pre-season!

## What is Motivation?

Motivation is the energy and direction that an athlete puts into an activity. Motivation exists on a continuum ranging from extrinsic to intrinsic.

1. Extrinsic motivation is experienced when an athlete loses the drive to perform for personal satisfaction and fulfilment.
2. Intrinsic motivational state is described as one of intense enjoyment, whereby a sense of personal accomplishment is felt when performing a certain task

For athletes that are predominantly motivated extrinsically, the off-season can be an extremely difficult period to maintain the required fitness levels. Without others (ie. coach, fitness staff) there to encourage and direct training, these athletes are often unlikely to initiate fitness activities on their own.

Conversely, athletes with intrinsic motivation are likely to enjoy the feeling of 'choice' that they have during the off-season. These athletes benefit from the opportunity to have control over their training time and activity, and often set their own process goals in order to maximise their sense of personal gain.

## Tips to Help Athletes Stay Motivated

- On the Sunday night, organise several times and places for the upcoming week to meet another athlete(s) so as to train together.
- Timetable the required number of sessions into your week so as to ensure you have time to do the training and other activities don't take priority. Sometimes athletes benefit from doing the fitness session before they allow themselves to do the many social activities planned for the day.
- Frequently remind yourself of how off-season fitness assists your outcome goals for the upcoming season.
- Have a goal or target for each session rather than just going through the motions.
- Be inventive! Find training environments and fitness activities that are new. For example, why not find a cross-country running course to try out or go for a ride with mates.
- Reward yourself for having completed the week's training plan by doing something you really enjoy.



*Matti is the Sports Psychologist for the Australian Olympic Triathlon and Beach Volleyball Teams, the AFL Players Association and the SA Golf College. For more tips on staying motivated, please call Wakefield Sports Clinic to arrange an appointment on 8232 5833.*