

# CYCLOCROSS

MAGAZINE

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# Training for Cyclocross: How to Peak for the Big Race

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*Are the biggest races of your season yet to come? Whether you are peaking for the national championships, Belgium's Christmas Week, or the World Championships, you've got to peak just in time. How do you do this? It's not too late, and coach [Mike Birner](#) tells you how in the fourth installment of our series of training*

articles by the USAC Level 2 Coach from Mid-Maryland Coaching ([www.midmarylandcoaching.com](http://www.midmarylandcoaching.com)) to help guide your training through a successful cyclocross season.. The previous installment was in Issue 4 and can be found [online here](#).

Check back daily for additional articles related to our countdown to the National Championships in Kansas City.

## Sharpening the Point: December

You are now in the homestretch towards the final races of the season. You've got your sights set on your primary goals for the year and are now ready to finish off the season at your best. Your training in the last few weeks has steadily increased in intensity and, even possibly, volume while becoming specific to the demands of the events. You might even be feeling a bit overworked with the combined load of training and racing as we get to the end of the season. That's all right. It gets easier from here.

### Tapering and Peaking:

As we enter these final weeks you'll find that the workouts will become much shorter with longer recovery periods, however the intensity still remains. It is important to know that it can take somewhere between 10 days and 2 weeks for your body to reap fitness benefits from a particular workout. In other words, these last couple weeks will not gain you any fitness; only create undue fatigue if you choose to overdo it. This is the time to forgo the strenuous workouts and focus on sharpening the point in your conditioning.

But, while you won't gain fitness during this time frame, you certainly can lose fitness without the proper preparations. This is where the intensity comes in. Properly timed, the intensity is designed to keep all of your systems in order and keep your body from 'forgetting' how to ride the bike at race speeds.

Up until this period the goal has been to create a training overload then recover from that overload to see the fitness gains. Now the opposite is taking place. You have already created the overload with a season of training and racing. Your goal now is to eliminate the overload and reap benefits through proper recovery.

In order to plan your peak properly, the easiest method is to work backwards from your key race day. Assuming a longer peak period, we'll follow the 2-week taper routine. A tapering plan during this period would follow a pattern like this:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
45 min:Easy spin, heart rate zones 1/2 (assuming a race the prior day)	Rest or active recovery	45 min:Easy spin, heart rate zones 1/2	45 min:Warmup, tapering repeats - 4x90 followed by cooldown	Rest or active recovery	45 min:Easy spin, heart rate zones 1/2	RACEor Tapering repeats  45 min: Warmup, tapering repeats -

						4x60 followed by cooldown
Rest or active recovery	45 min: Easy spin, heart rate zones 1/2	45 min: Warmup, tapering repeats - 4x30 followed by cooldown	Rest or active recovery	45 min: Easy spin, heart rate zones 1/2	45 min: Warmup, tapering repeats - 3x30 followed by cooldown  May also be a day for previewing the course	KEY RACE

Each of these tapering repeats should be done as a maximum sustained effort for the time allotted, meaning as hard as you can go steadily for the 30, 60 or 90 seconds. Avoid an overly large surge at the beginning only to fade at the end, as you'll get more out of these intervals by remaining steady and consistent. Allow for full recoveries between each interval, usually around 5 minutes. By the time you complete each of these tapering workouts you should feel better at the end than when you started.

As I've mentioned before, this is a generic schedule and will need to be adjusted to accommodate your specific calendar, but the principles are very simple. First, make sure that your tapering intervals are laid out every three days. Beyond three days and you'll end up with a loss of fitness. Less than three days and it's likely that you won't have the proper recovery that you'll need. You can, from time to time, adjust this timing if necessary but generally every third day is ideal. Second, be sure to not create a training overload or too much fatigue. Some might benefit by doing longer intervals (1-2 minutes) while some might choose to stick with shorter efforts (30-45 seconds) but whichever combination you choose it should combine to be 50-75% less workload than you were typically doing during workouts in the prior period. For instance, if you were previously doing 8 x 1 minute intervals during a normal workout in the previous weeks, 3 or 4 x 1 minute efforts would be just right for tapering. After a season of training and racing hard, this period can be difficult for some because they may feel like they are not doing enough. It's OK, you deserve the rest after all the hard work you've done.

Just as your key workouts were important earlier in the season, it's important to note that these workouts have just as much importance and cannot be taken lightly. At a time when the frequency of your training is minimized it is critical to follow through with these tapering intervals as a missed workout will mean a loss of fitness and possibly complications with the timing of the final workouts leading up to race day. But, as can happen with any period of the season, illnesses or injuries can occur that may require alterations of the plan. In cases like these, stick to the guidelines above and focus on the workouts especially during the last 3-4 days before your event.

Also, be sure to keep a training log tracking how you plan your peak so that you can reference this for the following seasons. Everyone reacts differently to a peaking routine and it may take a couple tries to find out

what works best for you. Any tapering is beneficial but some may need a little more recovery and possibly even a longer tapering routine while others may be much more comfortable with the shorter 10 day plan. Listen to your body and try to get a better understanding of what level of recovery you may need and write it down for next time.



That's it! You've prepared yourself well up to now with the proper training and recovery. All you have to do now is emphasize the recovery and focus on a few more key intervals. Following a simple tapering plan will allow you to find a higher level of fitness that's already there within you but that you may not have even known existed. Good luck on race day!