



SHARPEN YOUR GAME

Merrithew instructor and triathlete David Taylor knows what it takes to make the most of your pre-race training. Here, he outlines six key pilates exercises that can give triathletes an edge

Words David Taylor Images Shutterstock



1. Hip twist

Develop dynamic stabilisation around the hip and core endurance for a steadier pace.

Starting position: Seated position, with hands placed behind the body, arms straight, legs together, extended toward the ceiling.

Exercise:
Inhale to prepare.
Exhale to circle both legs clockwise back to the starting position.
Inhale and pause.
Exhale to circle both legs in a counter clockwise motion back to the starting position.
Repeat 5x in each direction.

Modification: If the hamstrings are tight or the core is strained, bend the knees at a 45 degree angle, which lessens the lever and takes pressure off the abdominals and hamstrings.

Expert tip: Pay attention to small details like the elbows and arms. Arms should be straight but not hyperextended, and the torso should remain long and straight, with shoulders down and room left around the neck.



2. Side kick

This exercise helps strengthen the hip flexors and glutes for a faster running pace.

Starting position: Lying on one side, with the head resting on the bottom arm. Legs forward at a 45 degree angle with the top leg lifted to hip height.

Exercise:
Inhale and with control, kick the top leg forward only as far as a neutral pelvis can be maintained and with the foot dorsi flexed.
Exhale, plantar flex the foot as the leg kicks back behind the hip maintaining neutrality.
Repeat 5x on each side.

Modification: Intensify the exercise by bending the upper arm at the elbow to mimic the motion of running. As the leg kicks back, the arm moves forward, and as the leg moves forward, the arm moves back.

Expert tip: Keep the core strong, and maintain the distance between ribs and hips. If the core collapses, the hip and ribs will move closer to each other.



*Due to the nature of the three disciplines of the triathlon, most of the training is performed in the sagittal plane of motion. To understand your sagittal plane, imagine dividing the body into left and right halves. Any forward and backward movement parallel to this line occurs in the sagittal plane. For example, a lunge or a bicep curl. This overuse leaves triathletes open to overuse injuries. Strengthening the muscles around the joints provides the dynamic stabilisation required to maintain a strong musculoskeletal system.

*Iliotibial (IT) Band Syndrome is a common injury and may be avoided by strengthening the lateral hip stabilisers and strengthening the glutes.
• For full videos of the exercises, visit merrithew.com/blog

3. Shoulder bridge

This exercise focuses on the glutes and hamstrings for a better pedal stroke.

Starting position: Lying on the back, spine neutral, with some space between the small of the back and the floor. Arms by sides, palms down.

Exercise: Inhale to prepare. Exhale, lifting the hips up, hold. Inhale, lengthen right leg toward the ceiling, foot plantar flexed. Exhale, dorsi flex the foot as the leg lowers to hip height. Repeat 3x, then switch to other side. Repeat 5x on each side.

Modification: For an increased challenge, repeat the exercise with the arms lifted directly above the shoulders, fingers pointing up. To make it easier, repeat the exercise while peeling one foot off the floor and lifting it slightly, keeping the knee bent, then switching sides.

Expert tip: Keep the weight even across the back to activate the posterior muscles, and keep the glutes active to ensure the hips stay level.



4. One leg kick

The position of this exercise is similar to the aero position on a racing bike, and helps activate the glutes and hamstrings for a stronger pedal stroke and builds endurance through the upper back and shoulders.

Starting position: Lying on the stomach with hip bones off mat and pubic bone down, elbows bent and placed under the shoulders, scapulae flat on the ribcage.

Exercise: Inhale to prepare. Exhale, bend the right knee, foot plantar flexed. Inhale, lengthen the right leg down. Exhale, bend the right knee, foot dorsi flexed. Inhale, lengthen the right leg down. Repeat on the opposite side. Repeat 5x on each side.

Modification: Elbows bent, forearms on the ground, forehead resting on hands.

Expert tip: Make sure the abs stay lifted, keep the collarbone wide and avoid sinking into the shoulders.



5. Obliques roll back

This exercise strengthens the oblique muscles to help maintain a streamline position in the water and mimics rotation when coming up for breath.

Starting position: Arms at shoulder height, back straight, knees bent, feet flat on the mat, hip distance apart.

Exercise: Inhale to prepare. Exhale, roll pelvis backwards rotating torso to one side, open one arm to the side at shoulder height. Inhale, return to starting position. Exhale, repeat on opposite side. Repeat 5x on each side.

Modification: Mimic coming up for breath and challenge the abdominals and hip flexors by placing the hands behind the head with the elbows bent.

Expert tip: When leaning back, move from the pelvis, not the shoulders. Moving from the shoulders will torque the back and put strain on the neck.



6. Double leg stretch

Build explosive power in the core that will help boost your swim time with this exercise that targets the abdominal muscles.

Starting position: Lie down on back. Press the small of the back down to the mat. Feet up, knees bent to a 90 degree angle. Hands rest on the outside of your knees. Shoulders off the mat, chin tucked in.

Exercise: Inhale to prepare. Exhale arms and legs extend in opposite directions. Inhale to return to starting position. Exhale to extend. Repeat 5-10 times.

When finished, relax the head down first, then the feet and legs.

Modifications: Mimic a tumblturn by crossing the wrists at the top of the extension and squeeze the biceps against the head.

Expert tip: As the arms and legs extend, the back will want to arch. Keep the abdominals strong in order to keep the lower back on the mat, and prevent flaring of the "six-pack" muscles.



David Taylor was introduced to pilates as he was preparing to tackle his first marathon and as an Ironman athlete, David found that the key to success for all three disciplines was pilates. In 2013, David turned his pilates passion into his full-time career, successfully completing the Stott Pilates full certification program. In 2016, David became an Instructor Trainer for Merrithew. Merrithew was co-founded by Lindsay and Moira Merrithew in 1988. For over 25 years they have been dedicated to enriching the lives of others by providing responsible exercise modalities and innovative fitness brands across the globe. For more information visit merrithew.com