

Glycemic Buzz: Pete Vordenberg

The last skipost regarding getting happily to the finish of a race brought quite a few emails. It seems more than a few out there are coming to grief with 10km or so to go. I think training, pre-race prep and pacing are perhaps most important, and should be looked at before secretes like the coke/coffee combo, or which sports drink is best, etc are taken into account (though they are also good to explore). Fuel is however very important. There has been a lot of buzz lately about the glycemic index. The glycemic index (GI) ranks foods based their effect on blood glucose levels. It's been a tool of diabetics for some time, and has caught on as a tool of sports performance. It should be noted that most of the GI research has so far been done on non-athletic folks and there is a big difference between what our bodies do with carbos and what a more sedentary person's body does with them. A food that raises the blood glucose rapidly has a high glycemic index. The idea is that one should avoid eating high GI foods before a competition so as not to create a drop in sugar levels while racing, but to use them during and after a race or training to maintain and replenish glycogen supplies quickly. I think that this can be fairly helpful, but that there is more to it, and that as is the case with many performance related things, you have to experiment with it for yourself. There are no rules. Some things to keep in mind when using the GI is that one food will affect different people very differently; also, how it is prepared and how long it is cooked can seriously affect its GI ranking. How much is eaten also comes into play, as does what it is eaten with, when it is eaten (empty or full stomach, after training, before), as well as other factors. My personal experience is that these variables make using the GI alone as a performance tool unreliable, and I am fairly sensitive to blood sugar levels. However, I know others who find it quite helpful. In the end, I think that checking out a list of high vs. low GI foods (readily available on the net among other places) is a good idea, and that taking that information and experimenting with the consumption of different types of food before, during and after an event may get some people a few more km down the trail.

Some other ideas:

Final preparation: Take it easy the week and especially the few days before the event. It is quite possible that many are starting the race with the tank a bit low. Skiing long or medium hard to hard depletes your glycogen stores. You cannot get in good shape the week before your race. The time for that is in the months before, right before the race is time to tune up with some easy skiing, some short (!) bursts of speed or a little (!) race pace work, aimed at feeling good, rested and excited not at getting in shape. The workouts should not break down the body.

When I can, I follow some variation on this commonly used routine:

Sat: race.

Sun: long very slow distance.

Mon: off.

Tues: (off, if tired) otherwise speed or very easy.

Wed: very easy distance.

Thurs: off.

Friday: easy with speed.

Sat: Big Race.

Pacing: Start at your own pace! (You know who you are.)