

5: Physiological Characteristics of Elite Triathletes

Have you cowered at the thought of performing a VO₂ max test, because your friends in the local running clubs boast of such incredibly high scores that you couldn't possibly expect to duplicate their results?

Well, the good news is that elite triathletes generally record treadmill running VO₂ max values 8 - 23% lower than runners normally do due to the fact that triathletes generally carry more muscle mass than specialist runners.

Treadmill VO₂ max scores for elite male triathletes have been reported to be between 70 to 85 ml/kg/min, while recreational triathletes have values between 55 to 67 ml/min/kg. Elite and recreational female triathletes have reported treadmill VO₂ max values between 54 to 73 and 44 to 65 ml/kg/min respectively.

What does this mean to you? Well, anyone who has been tested always wants to know where they fit in to the overall scheme. Your VO₂ max score gives you an idea of your potential as an elite triathlete, however we all know that a triathlon is comprised of so many variables that it is impossible to judge the winner by VO₂ max alone!

Other important variables that will affect your performance is your anaerobic threshold; swim, cycle, and running economy; and of course the top two inches - psychological factors. So, what to say to those runners with VO₂ max scores of 80 ml/min/kg stamped on their forehead? "How about entering a triathlon?"

References:

Information taken from Sleivert & Rolands (1996). Physical and Physiological Factors Associated with Success in the Triathlon. Sports Medicine: Jul 22 (1). 8 - 18.

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