

Endurance Running – the Basics of Training for Club Runners

As an Endurance (or if you prefer, Distance Running) Coach with Rotherham Harriers & AC, I am frequently asked by athletes for advice regarding training programmes, race performances etc. In some cases, the athletes are complete beginners and may be chasing a target like the Great North Run. In other cases the athletes have been around at the club for some time and will have established themselves in the local road running circuit. But whatever angle you are coming from, there are certain basic principles underlying training for distance running. Let me say at this point that there are many publications which cover this subject, sometimes in great depth and very scientifically. These are very valuable publications and anyone who takes the trouble to read these will become extremely knowledgeable on the subject. However, the purpose of this article is to provide a very basic guide to the principle of training for distance running, seen from my own perspective as a club coach.

The Basics.

In looking at the basics of training for distance running, a runner (or potential runner) will probably ask himself/herself the following basic questions:

How far should I run?
How fast should I run?
How frequently should I run?



Ad hoc advice for RH members from Jim Brogan

Those who have gone past the first hurdle of joining the club and taking part in the activities and maybe some of the races available, will have established a pattern of training, based on answers to the above three questions. They may not, as yet, feel convinced they have established the complete answers to the above three questions, but they will still be looking.

None of the above questions can be answered in isolation from the others though, as each will impact on the other to some extent. For example, if you train to complete exhaustion one day, you are probably not going to feel much like training the next day (frequency), or if you run absolutely flat out one day, you probably won't get too far in that run, or again feel much like running the next day. So, developing a distance training schedule is not a simplistic thing, and it requires some careful thought.

The Three Basic Components of Distance Training.

These can best be described as follows:

- 1. Steady Runs** of durations ranging from around 3 to 10 miles. The pace has to be fairly comfortable and sustainable throughout the run.
- 2. Long runs.** The pace of these runs is slower than for Steady Runs, around 15 – 30 seconds per mile, and the distance covered would be in the range 12 – 20 miles
- 3. Interval Training.** This is a training session where the athlete performs fast repetitions over a distance (400m – 1 mile usually) at a pace faster than race pace, with a timed recovery between. A number of intervals are carried out, depending on the distance being covered during the interval.

The purpose of the Steady and Long runs is to enable the athlete to develop good endurance, and that of the Interval Training is to facilitate development of greater speed for competition.

For absolute beginners to distance running it is important that the training programme initially concentrates only on Steady Runs, and this

would continue until the athlete has sufficient endurance to consider including Long Runs in their programme. By this stage athletes have usually commenced taking part in road racing events, usually in the range 10Km to half-marathon. Once the athlete has developed some experience of this type of racing, he/she will be looking at improving their training programme to produce improved racing performances, and this necessitates the introduction of Interval Training.

The Role of the Coach.

Many athletes seem to function perfectly well without seeking assistance from a coach. However, my experience, based on years of coaching and also as a competitive athlete myself, has shown that uncoached athletes may reach a point in their racing whereby performances become static or even start to decline, and at this stage the services of the coach is often sought. When an athlete asks my advice as a coach for the first time I usually go through the following points with the athlete so that I can make a careful judgement of advising on an improved training programme.

1. Keeping a training diary.

It is amazing how useful this can be. A well kept and detailed training diary is an invaluable aid to both the athlete and coach and often provides the vital clue as to why performances are not as good as they should be.

2. Setting realistic racing targets (planning)

Many distance runners fall into the common trap of simply racing everything that is going, without giving any thought to planning their racing with a view to achieving optimum performances. There is a strong scientific basis for this. Training Theory refers to the fact that no one can be at a peak all the year round, and it is important to take this concept on board when working out a racing programme. Again this is an area where consultation with a coach is most beneficial.

3. Making the best use of the time you have available to train

We all lead busy lives, often with demanding jobs and young families. Time available to train can be scarce, and hence should be used

wisely. It is useful for an athlete to look carefully at their entire week, and find the spaces available for training. Don't forget, even half an hour can be sufficient time for a brisk run. Lunchtime runs at work, and even runs to and from work can prove to be of great value in the course of a training week.

4. The benefits of a planned rest.

This is something that runners usually don't want to hear about. But again, it has its basis in scientific Training Theory. If an athlete has been training hard for a long period of time and has raced frequently, the body will cease to respond correctly to training, and often chronic fatigue and discouragingly poor performances will set in. A complete rest from running for up to two weeks is often required to enable the athletes body to recuperate.

Final Comments

As you can see from the above, I have not written down any specific training schedule which will take you to the ultimate aims of achieving personal best times or even winning races. Of course, everyone runner wants these, but it is important to grasp the basic concepts of training for distance running before a detailed training programme is set out. Everything described above is important and, if you consult with a properly qualified distance running coach (this is one with a licence obtained from UK Athletics), then you will ensure that the programme set out for you is a good one and will give you every chance of achieving your goals in distance running.

Jim Brogan
Endurance Coach (level 3)
Rotherham Harriers & A.C.)

Rotherham Harriers & A.C are fortunate to also have the services of Pete Shaw, who currently holds a level 3 award for coaching Endurance Runners. Either myself or Pete are more than happy to advise any Rotherham Harriers & A.C athlete with any aspects of their distance running.

A Training Week

Jim Brogan refers in his lead article to the importance of keeping a training diary if you seriously want to improve. I recently asked Rob Watkinson how his training and running were going, as I hadn't seen him for a while.

His training diary might not bear much resemblance to mine or yours. Rob is a specialist middle distance track runner, especially 1500m, but has had some spectacular successes with us in road relays, shorter road races and cross-country. He has indicated he will be contributing to our 'fitness' series in future. Meantime, here is Rob's response: a typical training week?

I've struggled a bit with my form this year, despite training harder than ever. Perhaps I'm just past it. Still I'm enjoying my athletics and have vowed to stick with middle distance for another year.

I got off to a slow start with a 1.52, 800 at Stretford, won the Yorkshire 1500, followed by a 1.50 800 at

the BMC GP meeting at Manchester. A week later ran ok for 4th and a 4.12 mile in a tactical inter counties mile.

A few weeks later ran another 1.50 800 at the BMC GP at Watford. A week later had a terrible run at the North of England Champs, finishing 4th in final. Unfortunately I felt rough before and during this one. 2 weeks later and beginning to run better with a 3.48 1500m at the BMC GP at Solihull.

Have concentrated on pace in training since then in preparation for the AAA this weekend where I'll be doing the 800. Its always a long shot to make the final but I'll give it my best. I follow this with another BMC at Cardiff and the final one at Crystal Palace.

Below I've shown an example weeks training for last week. I put together my own training program now, although Pete Watson (my coach) still comes to the track once per week to coach me.

	AM	PM
Sat 25 th Jun	1.5mile jog on treadmill at work.	3.48 1500 at Solihull5 th in B race. Crap last lap 62 secs. (Fish and chips after)
Sun 26 th Jun	35mins with 20 brisk.	At Wombwell track. 5*200 off 4mins Av 25.2
Mon 27 th Jun	Easy 35mins	
Tue 28 th Jun	Hot but windy. Felt v.gud5*300 off 3min Av 40.0	Easy 27mins on treadmill at work
Wed 29 th Jun	50mins with 33mins at 165+bpm. Tired.	Weights (8reps quick) 3 sets each step up 55kg walking lunge 15kg Jumps 15kg Squat 100kg Leg press 150kg (slow) Leg curl 85kg (slow) 3kg upper body exercises (bit of burn)
Thur 30 th June	30mins plyometrics on cricket field	25mins easy on treadmill at work
Fri 1 st July	Easy 23mins	Felt Ok *(300*4 off 45secs) lap jog in-between Av 45.2
Sat 2 nd July	Easy 27 mins	35mins with 20 at 168+bpm. Bit tired

Rotherham Harriers & A.C.

Fitness and Training

1. Endurance Running– the Basics of Training for Club Runners Jim Brogan, Endurance Coach (level 3)

You may be reading this as a seasoned runner perhaps with many successes behind you– or, hopefully, awaiting you. Or again, as a beginner to the sport, or even a potential beginner!

Some are athletes from an early age, but many people take up running later in life—in response to concerns about fitness or obesity maybe, or a host of other reasons.

Some are motivated by the urge to improve and excel in their chosen sport, but many more are happy to be able to work physically for an hour or two, to get the maximum benefit from what they are doing in terms of fitness, general well-being and enjoyment of their environment. And while we are addressing primarily 'running', in many instances this is to support and enhance performance elsewhere, either in athletics or other sports.

As a runner, you will never be short of advice. But whether or not to take the advice is another matter. If you get your advice from people who have long experience and knowledge, it might have a more persuasive ring to it.

Another thing that unites runners is injury and illness– I don't know any runners who have escaped these problems over the years.

When we put these, and other aspects together, what we find is that you, the runners, together have a fund of knowledge and experience that is truly staggering. This holds true within any club, especially our own, which is moderately large. Also, on a wider scale, we can multiply it by the number of clubs, and add the experience

of all those who are not club members.

By modern communications, especially the internet, we can access that knowledge as and when it is made available. I remember myself, when in the past I have had some peculiar ailment or injury, thinking 'someone somewhere in the world must have had the same problem– what did they do?'

Our aim in this series of publications is to bring you the general, and more specific advice of our qualified coaches and trainers on numerous aspects of running, starting with the general, but also dealing with such aspects as how to train and prepare for your first marathon / half marathon, whether diets or supplements are of any value and so on. Don't forget that as RHAC members, you can personally get advice from RH coaches. We may be highlighting particular case studies.

Our aim also is to allow and encourage runners who have or have had problems– injury perhaps, or illnesses arising or as preconditions– to tell others about them. We certainly will not be offering medical advice, but an awareness of other people's difficulties is often illuminating.

Then again, we will probably be offering also from time to time articles on philosophical or environmental aspects. Apart from the printed version, it will also be appearing on the internet. This series is part of our commitment at Rotherham Harriers to help our members with all aspects of their athletics and training.

Series Editor: Peter Humphries