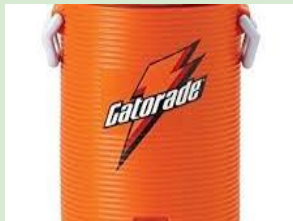




SUMMER MARATHON TRAINING: WEEK 18

No hydration in the parking lot this Saturday!

Hydration available roughly every 2 miles on the streets of Chicago!



Upcoming Events:

Saturday, October 9th, 7a.m. @ Old School: Fun Run

Sunday, October 10th: Chicago Marathon

Saturday, October 16th: "Shake-out run" and End-of-the-season party at Panera.

Last week I focused on what to do the last few days/hours before the marathon. Today, I am going to focus on the race. The most important thing is to have a plan and stick to it. This applies to pace and nutrition. Every emotion is heightened on race day and the more organized you are prior to stepping up to the start line, the more successful you will be.

The following article was written and published in Runner's World by someone who knows a lot more about racing and winning than me.

Have a great race and I look forward to seeing everyone on Saturday, October 16th. We will meet in the Lake Bluff Panera parking lot around 7a.m. for a short run. The end of the season party will start at 8. If you don't want to run, join us for breakfast and give-a-ways after the run.

Have a great race weekend!

The First Half

You're finally at the starting line, warmed up and ready for the task ahead. It's all too easy to get carried away and run the first mile too fast. A better approach is to run the first mile at, or a bit slower than, your goal pace. Because you won't have done much of a warm-up before the start, your body won't be prepared to go faster than race pace. Also, if you run too fast at the beginning of the race, your body will burn off extra glycogen and start to accumulate lactate that could negatively affect the rest of your race.

After the first mile is out of the way, the best strategy during the next few miles is to settle into a good rhythm. Try to run fast but relaxed. Establishing a relaxed running style early in the race will go a long way toward helping you avoid tightening up, so you can maintain your goal pace to the finish. Go through a mental checklist periodically to make sure your shoulders are relaxed, your body is upright, your breathing is steady, you are maintaining your stride rate and any other personal cues you use to help maintain good running style throughout the race.

Take a carbohydrate drink at the first aid station, or, if you're carrying your own, within the first mile or two. It's useful to take in carbs right from the start rather than waiting until you think you need them. If you wait until you feel tired and light-headed to take in carbohydrates, it will be too little too late. The longer you can postpone carbohydrate depletion, the longer you will be able to maintain your goal pace. It's also useful to drink a few ounces of fluid at each 5K aid station during the marathon to minimize dehydration, using thirst as your guide on how much, and how frequently, to drink. A few seconds lost at each aid station can translate into several minutes gained toward the end of the marathon.

Mentally, the first half of the marathon is the time to cruise. Try to save your mental and emotional energy for the second half of the race. All other factors being equal, if there's a group of runners in the lead pack at halfway, the winner will be the one who has cruised along at the back of the pack, saving his or her energy for the demands of the second half of the race. Regardless of your ultimate finishing place in the marathon, you should realize that the second half is much harder than the first half; just try to get the first half out of the way at the correct pace without using any more mental energy than necessary.

To Group or Not to Group

Although in most cases you should stay with your pacing plan, the weather or the tactics of other runners may merit slightly altering your strategy. If you're running into a headwind, there's a substantial advantage to running in a group of runners and letting others block the wind. Though you may need to do your share in leading the group, you'll still save considerable energy compared to running by yourself into the wind. On a windy day, therefore, you may need to run faster or slower than planned to stay with a group.

Even on a calm day, the best strategy is to deviate slightly from your goal pace, rather than running most of the way by yourself. In big-city marathons such as Boston, New York, or Chicago, being stuck by yourself isn't a problem. At almost any pace, you'll be among a number of runners, and you can work with them to reach your goal time. In a smaller marathon, however, you have a reasonably high chance of running by yourself for many miles. In that situation, you must make a judgment call as to whether to go a few seconds per mile faster or slower than planned to stay with a group. Although drafting behind other runners will give you a small energy advantage, most of the benefit of staying with a group is psychological. You don't have to set the pace, and you can relax and go along with the group.

Most runners find it quite difficult mentally to run by themselves for long stretches of the marathon. So what's the trade-off between having company and having to compromise your strategy? A rule of thumb is to deviate from your goal pace by no more than 8 to 10 seconds per mile if you would otherwise be running by yourself during the first 20 miles of the race. Running 8 to 10 seconds per mile faster than planned may not sound like much over 1 mile, but this difference in effort can put you over the edge after a couple of miles.

The best way to judge whether to pick it up to latch on to a group is by how you feel at the time. If you feel as though you can handle it--you aren't accumulating fatigue, or working noticeably harder and less efficiently than at the slower pace--then go for it. If your breathing is uncomfortable and you can sense that you're working at a higher intensity than you can maintain until the finish, then relax and let the others go. The group won't carry you the whole way beyond your level of conditioning. You may find that the group will soon break up and that you'll once again have others to run with.

During the final 6 miles and 385 yards, you can afford to be more independent. If no one else is running at the correct pace for you after you've passed the 20-mile mark, you need to muster the courage to go it alone. Chances are that forging out will work well psychologically, because if you've prepared well and run a fairly even pace, you'll be passing other runners throughout the final miles. Nothing lifts the spirits quite like passing another runner late in the marathon.

When you're racing a marathon in which your specific finishing place is an important consideration (e.g., the Olympic trials, or a small race where you have a chance of winning or placing high), then your pacing strategy will be somewhat determined by the actions of others in the race. If a group of 10 runners breaks away, then you'd better go after them, even if it means running faster than planned. In general, though, it's best to stick close to your race plan and your goal marathon pace. Even in these situations, physiology can't be thwarted, and often running an appropriate pace will leave you stronger at the end than runners who tried to hang with a group beyond their ability on a given day. (Recall Meb Keflezighi in Athens and London.)

13.1 to 20 Miles

From the halfway mark to 20 miles is the no man's land of the marathon. You're already fairly tired and still have a long way to go. This is where the mental discipline of training will help you maintain a strong effort and a positive attitude. It's easy to let your pace slip during this stretch--5 seconds per mile, then 10 seconds per mile, or more. By using all the available feedback on your pace--whether in the form of mile or kilometer splits or a pace watch--you'll know exactly how you're progressing, and you should be able to concentrate and maintain your goal pace during these miles.

Slowing during this portion of the marathon is often more a matter of not concentrating than of not being able to physically maintain the pace. Focusing on your splits gives you an immediate goal to concentrate on. The ability to do a bit of adding in your head while running is a helpful skill and gives you a mental task to keep your mind sharp. If you're 5 seconds too slow when you calculate your split, don't try to make up the lost 5 seconds during the next mile; aim to run your goal mile pace again as your target to get yourself back on track. By focusing on these incremental goals along the way, you'll prevent a large drift in your pace and should be able to stay very close to your goal.

It's not unusual to have a few miles when you just don't feel good. These bad patches are a test of mental resolve. Often these stretches will last a while and then mysteriously go away. For example, you might feel tight and uncomfortable from miles 15 to 17, but then get back in the groove again and feel good to the finish. The key is to have the confidence that you'll eventually overcome this bad patch.

I learned this lesson during the 1983 San Francisco Marathon. After working quite hard from 13 to 16 miles, I had a stretch of about 3 miles when my breathing felt out of sync, and I struggled to stay with the other two leaders. I kept telling myself to relax and that the other guys might be hurting, too. Fortunately, I settled back into a comfortable rhythm by 19 miles, felt strong enough to drop the other two runners by the 20-mile mark, and cruised home to victory. If I had let myself think negatively during the bad patch and let the other two runners get away, I wouldn't have won that race.

Taking in carbohydrates every 5K during the second half of the race can help you maintain your mental focus. The only fuel for your brain is glucose (carbohydrate), and when you become carbohydrate-depleted, the amount of glucose reaching the brain starts to decrease. If you've carbo-loaded, this shouldn't start to affect you until well past the 20-mile mark. Taking in carbohydrates during the race, and particularly between miles 13 and 20, however, will help ensure that you stay alert and think clearly throughout the race.

The Final 6 Miles and 385 Yards

Having made it to 20 miles, you're at the most rewarding stage of the marathon. This is the part that you've prepared for during your long months of training. This is when your long runs, during which you worked hard over the last stages, will really pay off. Until now, everything required the patience to hold back. Now, you're free to see what you've got. During this final 10K, you get to dig deep and use up any energy that you have left. This is what the marathon is all about. This is the stretch that poorly prepared marathoners fear and well-prepared marathoners relish.

The key from 20 miles to the finish is to push as hard as you can without having disaster strike in the form of a cramp or muscles so tight you lose your stride effectiveness. You will have prepared yourself for this during your long runs, your marathon-pace runs, and, to a lesser extent, your tempo runs. You need to use your body's feedback to determine just how hard you can push. Chances are, by now your calf muscles, hamstrings, quads or some combination of these are on edge and will limit how fast you can go. You need to test the waters a bit and push to what you perceive to be the limit that your muscles will tolerate. Try to pick it up a bit and see how your muscles react. There's a risk that in trying to increase your pace you'll end up with a cramp, so the safe option is to just try to maintain to the finish. But competitive marathoners will take the risk to get a slightly faster finishing time. The more marathons you run, the more you'll know your body's reaction to these stresses and how hard you can push your muscles. You can take progressively greater risks as the finish line nears.

Although figuring out "how many miles to go" can be daunting early on in the marathon, in this final stage it can be comforting and help keep you focused. As the finish approaches, telling yourself, "Less than 3 miles to go," or "Just 15 minutes more," can be motivating. If you're struggling a bit toward the end, picture yourself finishing a run on your favorite training loop so the remaining distance seems more manageable.

If you've been drinking according to your thirst and taking in carbohydrates throughout the race, your muscles should be able to maintain the pace to the finish line. Continue drinking until the last few miles. Keeping up your blood sugar level will help you stay alert so you can concentrate well to the end. When you see the finish line approaching, give a little more effort so that you run strongly over the line--but not so much that you cramp and have to stop within sight of the line and limp across. Show yourself that you have mastered the marathon and are able to kick it in a bit to the finish. Then enjoy the fruits of your labor.

***"Once you make the decision that you will not fail,
the heart and body will follow."—Kara Goucher***