

Bringing It Home

It's October, and we're just a few weeks away from race weekend. All the kilometers of training are about to pay off! In prior articles we've discussed training plans, goal setting, motivation, the mental side of distance running, and the experimentation needed to prepare for race day. Now is the time to pull all of these concepts together and use them to formulate your race day tactical plan. If you have trained to the best of your ability, trust your training. Formulate a realistic plan for race day and follow it. And most importantly HAVE FUN! All this training was the work. The race is a celebration of all that hard work!

Taper

The taper is the period preceding a distance race, in which the quantity (volume) of running is reduced, but not the quality. Use this time to rest up, eat well, and prepare for the race. Remember too that carbohydrate loading does NOT mean unrestricted gluttony. Rather, it is a shift of calories in which a higher percentage of calories are derived from carbohydrates. Chose proven foods that you know you can digest well for your pre-race meal.

Race day variables

Distance races are equal parts preparation, race day tactics, race day variables (weather, crowd, course difficulty), and wild card (it's your day, or not). Preparation and tactics are under your control, so plan wisely and you will do fine. Weather, the course, etc. are not under your control so do your best to prepare for them and not to fret over them. If you can adopt the attitude of "I will prepare to the best of my ability, I will race with a smart tactical plan, and, I will take what the day will give me" then you are already a winner in my book, and the clock will take care of itself.

How it should feel

It's tough to put into words what a marathon or half-marathon feels like in describing it to someone who has never experienced it. However, it IS useful to describe how you 'should' be feeling at various parts of the race, and the actions to take if you are not feeling appropriately at the various points of the race.

Here is a simple scale to convey (or internally evaluate) your progress.

Great – unchallenged, all systems feel wonderful.

Good – still on the positive side, but starting to feel the effort

OK – neutral – you're still moving forward, but it's now work.

Struggling – still moving forward, but have slowed down considerably, and walking some.

Bad – relegated to walking. The wings of the plane have been shot off, and you are frantically looking for the 'eject' button. Remember, there are a ton of other races out there. If it's time to call it a day, do it, and live to fight another day.

For a half marathon, ideally you should progress through this as follows:

Great: Start to at least 8 km. On the ideal day, to 13 or even 16 kms. If you start to feel less than great before 8 km, you need to consider slowing your pace. Conversely, if you feel great for several kilometers, do not use this as an excuse to increase pace beyond that which you have trained for (in other words, stick to your plan!).

Good: 8 km to 16 km.

OK: 16 km to finish

For a marathon, ideally you should progress through this as follows:

Great: Start to at least 15 kms. On the ideal day, to 20 or even 25 kms. If you start to feel less than great before 15 km, you need to consider slowing your pace.

Good: 15 km to 32 km.

OK: 32 km to Finish

These will vary from person to person, but at least it gives you descriptive criteria for evaluating your progress during the race.

Race Etiquette

As we prepare for race day, it's also worth discussing race etiquette. For many of you, this will be your first half or full marathon. It's good to know a few common courtesy 'rules of the road' for the big day. This is also a good refresher for seasoned runners too. The first rule of thumb, is, when in doubt, use common sense.

At the Starting Line

- Line up according to how fast you plan to run or walk. Pace signs are often placed at the start area to help you with this. Line up according to your expected pace/finish time.
- Listen to the pre-race instructions. What you hear will not only help guide you through the course but will also keep you safe.

During the Race

- Run or walk no more than two abreast so that other runners who want to, can easily get by you. If you are walking in a group, stay in the back of the pack.
- If you are stopping at an aid station, move all the way over to the table, grab water, and move away from the table so others may get water too. If you want to stop and drink, get past the aid stations and move to the side of the road, out of the way of other runners. If there's a trash receptacle, by all means use it. If not, don't go too far with your cup. The race volunteers will be collecting the cups and will appreciate not having to go on an extended "litter patrol."
- Move to the side if someone behind you says, "Excuse me" or "Coming through." Yes, you are about to be passed and the person behind you is giving you a heads up. It's proper race etiquette to let that person through.
- If you need to tie your shoe, or stop for any reason, please move to the side of the road. People coming up behind you are still moving and if you abruptly stop in front of them, the scene is set for a collision.
- Pay attention to what is going on around you during the race. Just as in real life, expect the unexpected.

Approaching the Finish

- Follow the instructions of the race officials at the finish. You may be told to stay to the right or to the left.
- Once you have crossed the finish line, don't stop. Keep moving to the end of the chute to keep the finish area from getting too congested. It's good for your body too, to keep moving after a half or full marathon for at least 10 to 15 minutes.
- Enjoy the post-race refreshments, but remember others want to enjoy the goodies too. Moderation is the key so there will be food for the last people finishing the race.

Good luck. And as always, send in any training questions you may have.

Happy Trails!
Coach Jack