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Key Elements for Half Marathon Training

Rest

To help your body cope with the workload, rest is going to be as important a part of your training schedule as the running. Listen to your body and take notice of any warning signs. If you feel tired or fatigued even before you've run a step, find yourself thinking up excuses not to run or start suffering a series of minor injuries, then you probably need more time off. Taking enough rest allows physical and mental recovery and gives your body the time to adapt to your workload. Remember: on rest days, that is exactly what you should be doing!

Recovery Run

Training for endurance requires your body to work harder than it has ever done. To see improvement without breaking down, you'll need some recovery runs. These should be easy pace and you should feel totally relaxed. Enjoy the scenery. You should be breathing easily and be capable of holding a conversation throughout the run. This will mean that you are running in the 60-65% range of your Maximum Heart Rate (MHR) and it should be about 45 minutes in duration. This allows your body to adapt to the training workload and therefore improve. It also helps with the removal of the waste products, which accumulate in your muscles after harder efforts.

Threshold Runs

After the long endurance runs, tempo runs are probably your most valuable workouts. You will find them slightly uncomfortable and they'll require concentration, but they are well worth the effort. As they're run at a controlled brisk pace, about 80-85% of your MHR, you'll only be capable of uttering about 4-5 words to your training partners. Tempo runs improve your lactate threshold (the speed above which your body struggles to cope with the lactic acid created by burning energy without oxygen), your running efficiency and aerobic capacity (your body's ability to utilise oxygen). All this helps to improve your endurance performance.

Long Runs

Long runs are vital. After all, a marathon is a very long run. At first, concentrate on increasing the time on your feet rather than worrying about distance. Start off by heading out for at least an hour and run at 65% of MHR (conversational pace). Gradually this will build to 75% of MHR as you start to practice periods of marathon pace (MP) running. These runs improve your muscular endurance and condition your body to burn fat as its primary fuel source. They also prepare you physically and mentally for the task ahead.

Kenyan Hills

Hill running develops strength in your muscles and tendons without putting them under the type of stress they are exposed to during faster running. Run up a 7-8% gradient for 30 - 90 seconds at a steady pace. Turn immediately at the top and jog down the hill at a relaxed pace, then turn and repeat without any recovery. This type of session is used extensively by the elite Kenyan athletes that Keith Anderson met while training there, so ever since he has referred to them as Kenyan Hills - they are one of their main conditioning sessions. Like your Threshold training runs, you should be working at about 80-85% of MHR and only be able to utter about 4-5 words.



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Half Marathon Pace Practice

Understanding the pace you are able to run your Half Marathon at is very important. Pace judgment is crucial to running your best race. Half Marathon Pace Practice, at about 80% of MHR, allows your body and mind to get used to what will be required on the big day. So here's a guide of the paces you should be looking at running for your race pace practice:

- A finish time of 1hr 30 = 6.52 mins/mile pace
- A finish time of 1hr 45 = 8 mins/mile pace
- A finish time of 2hrs = 9.09 mins/mile pace
- A finish time of 2hrs 15 = 10.18 mins/mile pace

Warming Up

When you are going to do any faster running sessions such as Kenyan Hills, Threshold Runs or a race, it is important to warm up gradually. A 10-15 minute jog lets your muscles warm up and improve their range of movement. It also allows your cardiovascular system to prepare.

Cooling Down

Gentle jogging and light stretching allows your body to adjust back to a steady state after your hill or faster running sessions. Cooling down stops blood pooling in your legs, and helps remove waste products, such as lactic acid, from the muscle cells, which helps to avoid undue muscle soreness, so make sure you always include a 10-15 mins easy running once you have finished.

Cross-Training

It's important that your training is balanced with some non-impact activities such as swimming, cycling, rowing, aerobics, etc, otherwise you are more likely to pick up an annoying injury that will set back your training. More experienced runners should also add cross training to their regime. Endurance running requires good body conditioning and to achieve this you should aim to work a variety of muscle groups and not just your legs. Remember, though, that you are a runner, so just be careful not to make the cross training, whether it's lifting weights, using an elliptical trainer or doing Pilates, so intense that you are left too tired.

Enjoy your running!