

Developing High School 800/1600 Meter Runners

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The following is a capsule of my philosophy for coaching distance runners:

- There is no **MAGIC MILEAGE FIGURES** that will guarantee success in distance running.
- We need to train our runners for **RACING**, not for mileage or speed.
- In distance running, there is an enormous difference between running fast in **TRAINING**, and running fast in a **RACE**.
- **REST** and **RECOVERY** are critical aspects of training for the distance races.
- Distance running is a **MOVEMENT SKILL**, not just aerobic exercise.
- Distance runners do not **PEAK** with speed work.
- Distance runners need to be able to run fast -- like **DISTANCE RUNNERS** -- not like sprinters.
- Every race is a **TEST OF COURAGE**. For runners to achieve their goals and realize their full potential, we must encourage them to take that test.
- The most important time we spend as coaches is **NOT** the time we spend with our athletes on the track, but the time we spend **PLANNING WHAT TO DO** with our athletes on the track.

10 QUESTIONS FOR US TO CONSIDER

- 1) The 800 and 1600m races are speed/endurance events. Do we give our athletes **WITH SPEED** a chance to run these races.?
- 2) What does the 800-METER RACE demand you be able to do to be successful?

- You have to bring good basic speed (if not sprint speed) to the event.
- You have to be able to run the last 45-50% (350-400 meters) of the race anaerobically.
- You have to be able to race and maneuver in traffic.

3) What does the 1600-METER RACE demand you be able to do to be successful?

- You have to bring good basic speed to this event.
- You have to be able to run the last 35-40% (550-650 meters) of the race anaerobically.
- You have to be able to execute and respond to tactics.

4) What does that tell us about how 800-meter and 1600-meter runners SHOULD TRAIN?

- Both 800 and 1600-meter runners need to train to develop good speed.
- Both 800 and 1600-meter runners need to do a good deal of anaerobic training to develop a high-lactate tolerance.
- Both 800 and 1600-meter runners need to train to execute and respond to tactics in their races.

5) How do SPRINT MECHANICS apply to running the middle distance races?

THEY DON'T! There is no place in an 800 or 1600-meter race where you can run like a sprinter, high on the balls of the feet with exaggerated arm-action. 800/1600-meter runners have to be able to run fast using middle distance running mechanics.

6) Do we prepare our athletes to go into their races WITH A PLAN for racing their opponents, or do they usually just run to hit splits?

7) Is a PACE PLAN a race plan?

NO! Athletes have little or no control over the pace of their races unless they can front-run start to finish. Our athletes need to be prepared to compete well in races of all descriptions: fast-paced at the start, then slow-paced in the middle . . . slow-paced at the start, progressively faster thereafter . . . and fast-paced throughout.

8) What kinds of RACING WEAPONS can we train our athletes to take with them to the starting line?

- The ability to run fast from the start of the race.
- The ability to initiate or respond to changes in pace in the middle of the race.
- The ability to run fast at the end of the race.

9) In an 800-meter race, do TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS differ for 400/800 and 800/1600 type runners?

YES! 800/1600 runners have to develop exceptional speed-stamina to sustain the basic speed they have over 800-meters.

400/800 runners have to have the endurance to use their speed over the last 200/300 meters of the race.

10) In a 1600-meter race, do TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS differ for 800/1600 and 1600/3200 type runners?

YES! 1600/3200 runners have to force the pace in the middle stages of the race to strip the 800/1600 types of their superior speed at the end of the race.

-800/1600 runners have to be able to maintain contact with the front-runners in the middle of the race so they can utilize their speed to catch and overtake them at the end.

APPLYING STRATEGY TO THE 800-METERS

In a race proceeding at 6-7 meters per second, tactical errors can be irreversible. 800-meter runners have to make decisions and respond to events in their race in a split second. A moment's hesitation can be the difference between winning and losing in a race that lasts about two minutes.

- Running in lanes or alleys around the first curve

Runners behind at the break-line are at a disadvantage because they will have to run wide for much of the remainder of the race in order to move up and gain position on the leaders. They should make the most of the situation by not breaking for lane 1 or 2 immediately from the outside lanes, and run a diagonal straight line to the next curve to minimize the extra distance they have to run and avoid the congestion in the inside lanes.

- A fast, early pace

Tactically, a fast first 400-meters punishes an 800/1600-type runner more than a 400/800-type runner because it is closer to their maximum 400-meter speed.

- Passing

Remember that half of this race is run on the curve! (More than half on wide-radius tracks.) When passing, position on the outside shoulder of the runner ahead must be gained on the curve in order to move past on the straight and into the inside lane before the curve.

- Staying out of boxes

The 800 is almost always a tightly-bunched race, so 800-meter runners have to be able to run in traffic. When positioned in lane 1 behind the leaders, runners have to be wary of others coming up from behind on their outside shoulder and becoming "boxed-in". In most cases, they are far better off running a few extra meters in lane 2 or 3 through the first 300-400 meters until the field strings-out to avoid all the contact and boxing-in that tends to occur in the inside lanes.

- Interruptions in pace

The biggest challenge facing an 800-meter runner is avoiding interruptions in pace. A basic rule in the middle distance races (800 and 1600-meters) is that a runner can only make TWO aggressive accelerations in a fast-paced race. Runners who have to spend those two accelerations to recover from being tripped, pushed, cut-off or getting out of a box will find themselves stripped of the ability to accelerate once more at the end of the race.

APPLYING STRATEGY TO THE 1600-METERS

Since the 1930's when the world record stood at 4:06, the "Magic of the Mile" lies in the opportunity it gives a front-runner to break away from the field. But since the middle stage of the race is relatively short, position runners who stay relatively close to the leaders can use superior speed to overtake them at the end.

- Front runners win by breaking away

The leaders of the race usually assume front-running positions and force the pace because they believe they are vulnerable to being beaten by faster finishers in a slow-paced race. They want a fast-pace from the start so their opponents will fall behind or tire to the point of being unable to increase the pace at the end of the race. If they have not been successful in gapping the field after 800-meters, they can employ some short bursts of faster running to initiate a break. This tactic is called surging.

- Position runners win by maintaining contact with the leaders

The first rule of position-running is, "Never lose contact with the leaders!" If successful, they can often use superior speed to overtake them at the finish. This simple strategy is often

complicated, however, by the fact that there are other runners in the race with the same plan. In this case, another position-running strategy called a long finish can be effective. The object of this tactic is to surprise the field by dramatically increasing the pace well before the finish . . . usually after about 1000 meters . . . and is based on the premise that the front-runners will be demoralized by losing the lead, and that other position runners will lack the confidence (or toughness) to respond with so much distance remaining to the finish.

- Final Thoughts

Some athletes are natural front-runners. Over the course of their entire careers, most coaches are fortunate to find 5 or 6 such runners who can dictate the pace of their races. Despite the advantages we may attach to position-running tactics, we should not make the mistake of discouraging our runners from taking the lead and forcing the pace if that is where they feel most comfortable and in control in a race.

ANAEROBIC TRAINING FOR MIDDLE DISTANCE RUNNERS

Emphasis is on creating a high-lactate state with repeated bouts of fast running . . . separated with an incomplete recovery period.

A) INTERVAL TRAINING

6 Examples of Interval Workouts (For a 2:00 HS 800m runner)

1) Increasing speed/decreasing recovery reps

5x (4x200m) @ 33-32-31-30-29 w/50-45-40-35-30 sec interval by set (no additional recovery between sets!!)

2) Russian intervals

5x (3x300m @ 48 w/jog 100m at 30-sec) Jog 800m between sets

3) Tempo intervals

2x 1000m @ 2:55 (70-pace) w/60-sec Int --4:00-- 4x500m @ 1:21+ (65-pace) w/60-sec Int -
- 4:00-- 2x 1000m @ 2:55 w/60-sec Int

4) Pick-up reps

8x 400m @ 70 w/90-sec Int and #s 2,5,8 @ 63

5) Neg-split reps

2x (300m-500-400 w/neg-split last 100m)

@ :32+14 (=46 300m) . . . 66+14 (=1:20 500m) . . . 48+14 (=62 400m)

2-min btw reps/jog 1200 btw sets

6) Sit 'n Kick Reps

5x (400m @ 64 . . . rest 30-sec . . . 200m @ 28) jog 1200m btw sets

B) SURGING TRAINING

2 Examples of surging workouts (For a 2:20 HS 800m runner)

1) Oregon surges

2x (600-1000-600) surging 200s @ 37-47-37-etc. Jog 600m between sets.

2) Cone surges (place cones at 133m intervals around the track)

5-4-3 laps striding to one cone and surging to the next. Jog 800 btw sets.

