

Winter Training

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For the last few years I have been developing a method to keep my distance runners fit, develop speed, and prepare them for track through the winter months. The method that I use is mostly for the more advanced runner, the one who would most likely be motivated to train through the winter. The winter preparation is based mainly on the desire for the runner to be ready for our "elimination" races during the month of May and for the first week of June when we have our state championship in California.

From the day of the last cross country race I let the runner have time off. The runner is told that they should take some time to go do the fun teenager things with friends and not stay after school for a workout. The athlete should not to run unless they really feel like going out on their own. The athlete is to contact me when they are ready to run again. It usually takes around two weeks for the athlete to get antsy about running again. When they are recharged and eager we start the program.

The first step is to set them down and do some goal setting. I let them state to me what they want to do during the upcoming season, which races are important for them and also if they want to set time goals. Together, the athlete and I try to set reasonable goals and also "dream" goals. The "dream" goals are always something that we keep between ourselves lest we want someone else to misinterpret these near unattainable goals as athletic arrogance. They are something that the runner can dream about achieving through the tough stages of training and races.

It is now time to start running. The plan during the winter is for the athlete to develop strength, flexibility, and speed. The reference to strength is not just running strength but also body strength. The athlete should be in the weight room at least twice a week -- three times a week is best. A basic upper body regimen for runners should include bench press (only as a warm up), sitting military press, lat pulls, curls – front and reverse, triceps lifts, pull ups, dips and some light leg presses. We also do a core strength routine. The core is the stomach and lower back. Running doesn't do a lot to develop this part of your body, however, in a race a weakness in the core will throw a runner off form and keep them from finishing well. We do things like crunches, Russian twists, eagles, reverse eagles, single leg lifts, and double leg lifts. This routine should be done about four times weekly.

The actual running plan is to build up running strength during this time. I try to get up to consistent mileage where they balance out at approximately 56 miles per week. I try to incorporate into this week of running a program that includes a long run (10-12 miles), an AT (aerobic threshold) run, and maybe a fartlich run. They also do one extra little thing. They run sprints one day a week after a short run. Don't get this mixed up with intervals. These are short, fast accelerations with a casual recovery. There are three or four of these activities from which to choose and they run a different one each week. For example: after a run of four miles they will line up and run 6 X 40 meters (jogging or walking back to the start after each one), then 5 X 50 meters, then 4 X 60 meters. Then jog a mile or two and go home. They can do this after a weight workout if they

want. The next week they may do 6-8 X 100 meters. The next week 6-8 X 150 meters, and maybe once during the winter 6 X 200 meters. These all should be faster than 800 meter pace and fairly close to full speed.

During the winter it is also important to get the distance runner into a flexibility routine. The stretching should be done briefly as a warm up and then completely at the conclusion of their running. Stretching should include some calf and Achilles stretches. Something for the hamstring and a real concentration on the IT band and hip area. These are the most common areas of injuries that are caused by overuse or lack of flexibility.

One thing that I really feel passionate about is the need to rest the psyche. Because of this -- forget about racing! We are fortunate in California that we don't have the indoor season to tempt us into racing. If you want your runners ready in May or June, you cannot race them from September – December, then indoor, and then again March-June. The kid doesn't have that much to give. I was fortunate to see the World Junior Cross Country Championships and the Junior Pan-American Games last year and one thing I learned from talking to coaches from other countries is that they are absolutely amazed how often our young runner race each year. If you take a look at how the collegiate runners are being handled, they race half as much as a high school runner and the post graduate runners even fewer than the collegians. Keep the hunger in the athlete. Make them anxious to get into races in March through June.

Our track season officially begins on February 1. Generally our first meet is four weeks later. I generally don't start my runners on the track with intervals until mid to late February. In the Spring of 2002 I had two outstanding athletes and their first interval workout was the last Tuesday in February. By mid April the boy runner ran an 8:55 3200m and the girl runner ran a 10:36 3200m (two weeks earlier they ran 8:26/9:52 3000m, respectively). The runners can be prepared with only eight to 10 weeks of well-planned track work.

In summary, use the winter to set goals with your athlete and keep them hungry for the season. Keep in mind that you are using their winter to repair their body, build strength and flexibility, re-establish focus, and keep them healthy. As a coach be patient and consistent and the athlete will also be patient and consistent with their training.

Basic week of winter training:

Monday – 8 miles, weightlifting, core work

Tuesday – 4 miles, 6-8 X 100m sprints, 2 miles.

Wednesday – 8 miles (4 miles at 5:30 – 6:15 pace), core work.

Thursday – 6 miles, weightlifting, core work

Friday – 8 miles fartlek (8-12 X 30-60 seconds accelerations)

Saturday – 10-12 miles, try to run over hills, core work.

Sunday -- off or easy 4-8 miles