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By Bruce Deacon

Making it All Work Together

How do you balance the yoga class, session with the trainer, weekly cycling with the gang? How do all of these fit with the schedule, and what do you do once you start feeling tired?

There are some workouts during the week that are more important than others. The long run is obviously the most important, and you will not be able to finish the marathon or the half marathon without it. If it is a particularly long run one week, then you will need to go into it rested and allow yourself a day or so to recover. Don't schedule any strength or power work the day before or after the long run.

The next most important run is the long speed work day (not all schedules). You should avoid doing other workouts on this day so that you can get the quality that you need to improve. The day after this workout (often Wednesday) is a good day for the yoga, light weights, swimming or cycling.

Reducing your runs to 4 times a week will not really affect your marathon/half marathon performance if your focus is on finishing or you are new to the sport and looking to improve. If you are looking to qualify for Boston or drop a significant amount of time from your personal best, then you need to run 5-6 times a week. You can't substitute yoga, weights or other similar activities for the runs.

Why? Well in order to be effective, training must be specific. In other words, you could swim all you want, but it wouldn't help improve your running. The movements and muscles you use during long distance running are specific to running. Although you might gain some strength or aerobic fitness doing other activities, if they are movements or muscles not used in running the improvements will not translate into faster running.

The key is to manage fatigue. There is only so much working out that your body can take before it starts to rebel (e.g., sickness, injury, debilitating fatigue, etc.). If your goals are running specific, then you want to accumulate as much of your manageable level of fatigue doing running specific training. So if you start to feel fatigued, your first response should be to cut back on your cross training.

Finding the Right Pace

As we move towards more pace specific running, it is important to know your marathon or half marathon pace. Determining your pace for the marathon or half marathon is a challenge. The math is easy (see http://www.coolrunning.com/engine/4/4_1/96.shtml). The tough part is knowing whether you are truly capable of your hitting your goal.

In my second marathon, I had set the goal of breaking 3 hours. It was a lofty goal considering my previous best time was 3:30. But there was no talking sense into me; I wanted that sub 3 hour time. I dashed off well on pace for my goal; however, my body just wasn't ready to lop half an hour from my time. In the end, I ran one of the toughest races of my life and took 2 minutes off my best.



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So how do you know if you can reasonably hit your time? The best way to tell is to do a shorter race. By running a 10k or a half marathon, you get a good indication for how your training has gone. By using a running equivalency calculator, you can determine how your time over a shorter distance is likely to translate to a marathon. A Google search will locate many of the ones on-line. Some are better than others, so average the times from a couple for a more accurate indication of how fit you really are. An example of one of these programs can be found at <http://www.mcmillanrunning.com/mcmillanrunningcalculator.htm>

If you can't find a convenient race, you can assess your readiness by doing a track workout. Use the equivalency calculator backwards by inputting your marathon goal time. This should show you a 10k equivalent time. For instance, if you are shooting for a 4 hour marathon, then you should be able to run a 51:00 10k. That means that you should feel fairly strong doing a workout of 4-5 times 1600 at your 10k pace of 8:13/mile. If this is a breeze, then you should be well on your way to a 4 hour time. On the other hand, if you finish up seeing stars and throwing up, then you probably either have the flu or an unrealistic marathon goal.

Now a word of caution. The equivalency calculators assume that you are equally strong at all distances. You aren't. I am more of a marathoner, so I can usually run faster for the marathon than my equivalent 5k or 10k times. Also, some of the programs are more accurate than others. If the time that you use for your equivalency calculation is old or run on a tough course or hot day, then it will definitely affect your marathon prediction.

Now is the time to objectively measure how realistic your goal is. If you have been a bit too ambitious, or your training has not quite gone as planned, you can then decide if you need to re-adjust your marathon goal and pace yourself accordingly on race day.

Wanting More Advice?

Do you have more questions about your training? Dash me a note at coachbruce@runvictoriamarathon.com

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