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By Bruce Deacon

Lookin' Good

It is really unfair. For almost any sport except running, it is expected that you will need some instruction in order to get the hang of it. Yet most of us got our first introduction to running or jogging in gym class, where the only instruction we got was to "take a lap". It was assumed that everyone could run if they tried hard enough.

Maybe the teacher just figured that if the kids did enough running that they would catch on. However most of these children never did. They either grew up to hate the activity that nobody ever taught them how to do, or are plagued by injuries caused by poor running form.

If that school gym teacher had known what to say, they would have told you to "run tall". In running, good posture is the key. Slouched shoulders or a backwards lean will slow you down. Imagine that you are like a puppet suspended by a string. Your head is high, your shoulders are back and your chin isn't too far forward.

The next form tip is to relax your upper body. Don't tense up the arms, jaw or shoulders. Just relax and focus on letting any tension go. Your arms should swing forward and not from side to side. Bend your elbows at a 90 degree angle and cup your hands into a loose fist. Your hands should come up to nipple level and swing back level with your hips.

The last big form tip is to control your stride. This is done mostly by ensuring that your center of gravity is not too far back and not excessively forward. Think of your center of gravity as being your sternum. Ideally, it should be ever so slightly ahead of your hips, giving you a bit of a forward lean. This allows you to use gravity to propel you forward. However, if your lean is too pronounced, you will start to notice tightness in your lower back.

Strong to the Core

There is hardly a running magazine or book out there that doesn't devote some time to discussing core strength. This is actually for a good reason. A strong core will help your form, protect you against some injuries, give your stride some power, and keep your form together over the last few kilometres when you are tired.

Finding exercises is easy. An internet search of core stability workouts for runners will yield hours of instruction. However, finding the time and getting into a routine is much more challenging. Three times a week, set aside some time after your run to do some core work. Start with only a few exercises that include some variety. Get away from crunches and try work with a stability ball or other implements that will have you working on a number of different muscle groups.



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To Lift or Not To Lift

Adding weights to your training can give some variety and make you a fitter and stronger athlete. Here are some simple tips:

- Remember that you are training to be a distance runner, so the running has to be the priority. If you start to feel like the overall training load is leading to fatigue, then the weights should be the first thing you reduce.
- Limit your weights to the easy days and preferably not the day before a hard effort.
- Use lighter weights and higher repetitions done in a way that forces you to use stabilizing muscles. For instance, exercises can be done on an exercise ball instead on solid ground.
- Go light on the leg weights. Your running should be sufficient to keep you good and strong.
- Consider asking a personal trainer, kinesiologist, or certified weight room attendant to set up a program that will benefit your running and not just make you buff for the beach.

Want More Advice?

Email me at coachbruce@runvictoriamarathon.com. Check out my training blog at www.runningforit.com. Follow me on Twitter - @brucedeacon.