Preparing for the Fall Racing Season

There it is. I can feel it. Finally a coolness in the air. It is subtle, but it is there. It's time to start thinking about bringing the long sleeve shirts out of the back of the closet and drawers. That's right! Autumn has arrived!

Triathlons and duathlons have dominated the summer race schedule with few and far between road races. You've got the racing itch and it needs to be scratched. You search the internet and running magazines looking for 5Ks and 10Ks races to run. There seems to be at least 2 or 3 every weekend, so finding one is not a problem. You just need to decide which ones and how many to do and still be able train sufficiently for the marathon or half-marathon.

Spread out your races over the fall. I suggest running no more than one race every three weeks. This way, you'll have adequate time to train for your long runs in between races (if you're doing the marathon or half-marathon). If you're not training for a longer race, then you'll still need the time in between races to train and get fitter.

In order to train effectively, lessen the threat of injury, and to get faster, I would advise doing no more than two speed workouts per week. If you're a rookie at speed work, then only do one speed workout per week. To me, doing speed work is a "getting out of your comfort zone" workout. I feel getting out of your comfort zone is a point in your run where you can begin to hear yourself breathe and/or you are having difficulty carrying on a conversation. So you're going to have to push or challenge yourself during these workouts. There are two types of speed workouts: track and fartlek (Swedish term for "speedplay"). Fartlek is basically an interval workout on the road or, let's say the Memorial Park running loop.

Before you do any speed workout, make sure you warm-up adequately. I would say a minimum a of ½ mile jog. After your jog, then stretch. After you stretch, do 3 or 4 strides of 100 meters or 20 seconds to loosen your legs up. Strides are about ¾ speed of your fastest speed. Take about 30 seconds between each one for recovery.

Now decide what is going to be the duration of your workout. It could be by time or by distance. This could be 30 seconds if you're just starting out, or up to a mile or more if you're a veteran runner. After you decide the duration, then decide how many you're going to do. If the duration is 2 minutes or less or the distance is ¼ mile or less, I suggest a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 12 repeats. If the duration is over 2 minutes or ¼ mile, then I suggest a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 10 repeats. So the higher the duration or distance, the less the repeats. Don't forget to have a cool-down jog of a ¼ to ½ mile followed by your end of workout stretch. Now, once you done a couple of weeks of speed work, you're ready for a race.

First of all, you want to pick races that are certified. This means that they have been accurately measured and have a USA Track & Field certification number. To see if a race is a certified course, it is usually written on the race brochure, the race website, or on the online sign-up link. The last thing you want to have is an inaccurate course, especially if you're going for a PB (personal best). Some runners pick races for their course, some pick races for the post-race party, and some pick races for the amount of runners in them (big or small). If you really care about your race time, then pick races that usually don't draw a big crowd so you won't have to dodge in and out of runners and walkers at the start to settle in a pace.

So train smart and race smart, and I'll see you out there.

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