

Putting the Icing on the Cake

Getting the “taper” right

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I really don't like to use the word “taper” when it comes to the final weeks of preparation for a big event. Sorry, but it brings back memories of one too many athletes who suddenly bring their training to a halting stop and then just jump on the carbo loading band wagon, consuming way too many calories only to arrive feeling like a slug on race morning. I've seen months of hard work essentially go out the door and poor performances on race day happen due to this protocol. Lets look at how to get yourself to that start line in Kabab feeling fresh and ready.

Right about now, you should be reaching the height of your training. Many people describe this as the eat, sleep, work, run REPEAT cycle. You should be comfortable with long, back to back days on your feet and wearing a heavy pack filled only with the gear that is essential to your race. You know now what food works for you, how much fluid and electrolyte replacements your body requires and you are certain that your clothes aren't going to give you any irritations or chaffing. Flights and travel details are booked, you know your body can handle the heat and you are addressing any little niggles or injuries that have appeared. YOU ARE READY.

So, how do you spend these last 4 weeks? While it will vary from person to person, the majority of athletes should still be training hard for another 2 solid weeks. My athletes are now into multi-day back to back to back trainings. This will continue for another 14 days with volume still high as we mimic and prepare the muscular system for repeated stress day after day. It is normal for the athlete to run on tired legs. We do a mix of walking and running and hiking during these training sessions, time on feet is key as the athlete learns how to deal with mental fatigue, remain focused, keep on top of caloric intake and post workout recovery.

I will stress the importance though at this time that no athlete should be running in pain. Training sessions should be stopped immediately if injuries keep appearing. I recommend switching to a cross train if this is the case. Don't push through your last long sessions and hard training efforts if there is injury present. Race day is much too close. Taking care of your body is the first and most important focus!

During week 3, my basic rule of thumb (although again, always specific to each athlete) is that that I cut the work volume in half. So, lets assume that during Week 1 and 2 (of a 4 week out plan from race day) the athlete was training 16hrs a week, they now drop down to 8hrs. Intensity stays but now volume is reduced drastically. We no longer focus on endurance as that part of the training is done and developed, the athlete can go the distance of the race and be confident in their aerobic engine. I often program for a workout followed by a rest day or a light active recovery day such as yoga, power walk or spin session. If the athlete is used to running 5 to 6 days of the week, I bring run workouts down to 4 and no more than that. I want sleep time to be increased and I want to allow extra time for wrapping up things at work and home and all those loose ends that typically cause stress to a person

before they hit the road for a trip. Remember that during this week you CANNOT cram training. This is not the week to add extra miles and do missed workouts. What's done is done and all the hard work that you put in all summer long is what will make the difference during the race. Any heat training work should continue, making sure that you rehydrate well after. With expected temperatures being around the 30C mark, be sure that you are doing your runs in the heat of the day to mimic race temperatures. If you live in colder areas, get access to a sauna or do portions of your runs fully clothed on a treadmill.

And finally, race week. Rest is your best friend during this time. I encourage lots of time with your feet up and fueling yourself with nothing but quality calories. Hydration is critical. In terms of training, the athlete should spend time earlier in the week doing 1 to 2 light workouts. This could be a 35min recovery run or a run of similar time with some quick leg turnover pickups. Some of my athletes will only do a few light walks. Remember that we are not trying to make gains here but rather just keep the legs moving and the body loose and relaxed.

You are going to require lots of liquid to get through this adventure. All of your training sessions from now until the race should be teaching your body how to drink and utilize that water. Being that the race will take place between 5,500ft and 9,500ft, hydration is the key to dealing with altitude. Those coming from sea level are going to feel the effects of altitude and the added taxation on the body. Water is your best friend when it comes to acclimatizing. If you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated. Set yourself up for success and use a watch timer to remind yourself to drink every 15minutes. Your fluids should not just be straight water but a balanced mix of electrolyte replacement as well. The body needs both.

There is no need to gorge yourself and over eat. I'm also not a fan of the big pasta carbo loading dinner the night before. I won't go into great details on my nutritional thoughts (that is another article in itself) other than to say that focused fueling for the race starts two days before. I suggest consuming an added 100 to 200 calories per meal and making sure that you eat healthy snacks in between. Ask yourself if what you are eating will be beneficial to propelling you towards that finish line? Keep that water bottle in your hand and don't be scared to add extra salt to your food. Make sure all your stores are topped up. Your healthy fat intake should be increased during this week, lots of avocados, omega 3's and nuts. Remember that carbs come in the form of vegetables. Yams and potatoes are an excellent source. Quality, lean protein should be in each meal.

So, be sure to make the most out of early September and put those final efforts in. You are in for an incredible experience, the challenge of a lifetime. Remember that when you can't run, you can always walk. Move with purpose, take care of your nutrition and hydration and manage the heat appropriately. Wishing each of you an awesome time at the Grand to Grand Ultra. Go get it – don't stop until you cross that finish line.