

The Dreaded Back to Backs

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Two months to go, you've chosen your pack and you are working on your nutrition, experimenting with different foods, making sure you're on top of electrolytes and have discovered what your body needs in order to recover from a hard training session.

My athletes are now well into tackling back to back long days and in some cases, are already hitting the triple effect – 3 days of running paired back to back to back with each other. So, let's take this opportunity to address this training method as you prepare for the Grand 2 Grand Ultra.

The pairing (or tripling) of back-to-back days is what we commonly use to prepare an athlete for the demands of stage racing. Start to consider how your body will feel as the race wears on. Day #1, you are fresh, rested and ready! Day #2, you will likely persevere through the distance, maybe feeling a little blister or two, possibly realizing that you are dehydrated and not quite as energized as the first day. By day #3, the effects of the heat, the miles and the heavy pack start to take its toll. Putting your shoes on is an effort, your legs feel heavy and you start to believe that you are the world's slowest runner ever as you climb the ninth hill of the day. Day #4, you are in pure survival mode, you are mentally drained and fatigued and by Day #5 and onwards...well, you get the picture, I won't even go there but just to say, you're ready to see that finish line (note – that is why finishing a stage race is one of the greatest accomplishments ever, you pushed, persevered and challenged yourself in every way possible!)

I use the back to back method ONLY when an athlete is healthy. We build up the mileage very slowly, usually by increasing only 1 of the 2 (or 3) days at a time. For newbies to stage racing, I like to use a run/hike/run method and I focus the workouts on time on feet, not necessarily on distance. The athlete's job is to carry their pack and practice eating and drinking as they move. Start to set-up your week with paired training days (2 to 3 in a row) and be sure to follow the set with 1 to 2 days of pure recovery.

Here is an example for a beginner athlete who has already gotten their miles up, is healthy and has been training consistently:

THURSDAY: Rest

FRIDAY: 4hr steady run at "talking pace"

SATURDAY: 2hr hike with a good mix of ups and downs. If feeling good, power hike the ups and run the downs.

SUNDAY: 2 to 3hrs steady state run, walk all the ups.

MONDAY: Rest

Here is an example for a beginner athlete who is still building up miles and yet,

needs time on their feet.

THURSDAY: Rest

FRIDAY: 3hr Run/Walk with pack on

SATURDAY: 3hr Run/walk with pack on

SUNDAY: 1+hr Power Walk with no pack or Pure rest!

MONDAY: Rest or active recovery (ie – bike)

I recommend an increase of 30 minutes a week to ONE of the runs in the pairing, no more than that for a beginner athlete. And remember, there is a difference between experiencing pain of an injury or just simply have tired muscles. Don't push through pain of any sort but if your muscles are just sore and tired, head on out, start by walking and just get used to that feeling of heavy legs and overall tiredness. Knowing and embracing that feeling will help you come Day #4 because you will have already been there in training and know what it takes to get through it. It can be really helpful to plan these long days with friends as well. Line up a different run buddy for each of your 2/3 days in a row of running, don't give yourself that excuse to not run. As your hours begin to increase, you might start to feel like all you do is run/eat/sleep REPEAT and by the time you finish your long training session, the day is over. I recommend getting up early if you can and get some miles behind you. Pushing workouts late in the day is a sure way that something else will come up and you will cut short your training session, if not miss it all together.

Also of importance is what you do immediately following the training session. There are key windows for optimal recovery to take place in the first 60minutes upon finishing the workout. This includes a good blend of carbs/proteins and fats, icing the legs, elevating the feet, re-hydrating, replacing electrolytes and in-taking Omega 3's along with consuming any other recovery supplement that you may need. Coming in from your training session and not properly taking care of yourself greatly affects how tomorrow's session will be. Set yourself up for success and show your body well deserved respect. Hydrating for the remainder of the day, eating foods that promote recovery and getting to bed early will contribute greatly to tomorrow's run!

ONWARDS runners. Train smart, allow for recovery and listen to your body.