

Winter Training

There is work to be done!

For some, the Grand to Grand Ultra might seem like eons away! After all, it's only November and you don't need to be race ready until mid September. Plenty of time for training in the months ahead right? Well, you might want to give that plan a re-think! Considering that you have entered yourself into the challenge of a lifetime, you want to be as ready as ready can be when the big day arrives. This means making your Winter count and beginning the journey to being G2G ready. I'm not talking about running 7 days a week though. Lets look at a few aspects of training to focus on over the next few months.

INJURY PREVENTION

We can break injury prevention down into two parts. Firstly, if you were struggling with any kind of running injury or constant niggle over the past year, now is the time to get a handle on the root of the issue so that you don't bring it into the New Year with you. See a local physio for a full assessment and then be diligent on the rehabilitation exercises prescribed. Spend time daily on that foam roller and maybe sign up for a yoga class once or twice a week even if stretching is not your favorite pastime. Cut back the running and spend more time working on your foundation as a runner, it will be time well spent in the long run.

Secondly, you want to make sure that you are being preventative in getting injuries once training starts to ramp up. I recommend getting a functional movement screen done from a personal trainer or physiotherapist so that you can determine the areas in your movement patterns that might become limiting factors down the road. Then, take this knowledge to the gym with you and incorporate it into your strength, stretch and mobility program.

STRENGTH TRAINING

The demands of completing a self supported stage running race require an exceptionally strong core (think glutes, trunk and back) in addition to quads, calves, hamstrings and feet that can withstand the repetitive motion of running and the many miles logged on them. Add a heavy pack of 20lbs or so and you need an upper body and solid core that can resist fatigue while keeping you upright and moving well day after day.

So, hit the weight room but do so in a structured way. I recommend that during the off season and base building phase that runners lift between two to four times a week. A mix of heavy lifting (low reps, high weights) paired with high intensity (high reps, agility, plyometrics and balance exercises) will have you well prepared.

A few thoughts to consider when strength training:

- 1) Technique is everything! Form first and foremost. If you are unsure, ask a professional before doing or seek some detection/correction technique
- 2) Incorporate a mix of squats and deadlifts to build the legs up to increase power.
- 3) Spend time on wobble boards, discs, balls, BOSU's and balance boards to mimic the demands of trail running. Time to awaken all the small muscles in the feet, ankles and lower legs.
- 4) Choose exercises that focus on the major muscles used in running (quads, glutes, calves, hamstrings) and also on the supporting and assisting ones (adductors, abductors, flexors and extensors)

Remember that a quality strength training program will allow you to hold form longer and will improve your neuromuscular co-ordination and balance. Your muscles will also be more resilient to fatigue. Combine these factors and you will be less prone to injury while running faster and stronger in the months ahead.

RUNNING

During the off season or Winter season, we can continue to make fitness gains that don't involve running 6 days a week. The following is what I suggest doing over the next few months if you were to run four days a week.

- 1) Power Walking – This is a greatly needed and often forgotten about skill for G2G preparation. Over 90% of people will walk large amounts of the G2G course so it's a movement pattern that needs to be trained. Winter is a great time for this. Hiking, snowshoeing and/or out on the roads and trails “moving with purpose” is a good place to start. See my “Powerwalk 101” training article coming soon.
- 2) Endurance – Build your base. 80% of your training time should be spent at “talking pace” as this is where we develop our aerobic engine. If you can't hold a conversation, you are going to fast. This includes hills. Power walk your inclines to hold your heart rate down.
- 3) An intensity run of choice – Do a weekly run of choice that challenges your anaerobic system. This could be in the form of intervals, tempo's or hill work. Pending what your weakness is, include various 4 week block sets to work on this aspect of your running. If you lack leg turnover, do some short speed sessions of intervals or fartleks. If you find you fatigue near the end of your runs, add in some tempo sessions. If hills are not your friends and your leg power is lacking, hill repeats work great. Just be sure you add a good warm-up prior to any intensity session.
- 4) Run for Fun – At this time of year, I wouldn't call “fun runs” junk miles. I think they are important to reduce burnout and are a good reminder as to why you love the sport so much. Winter is a great time of year (if you are healthy) to be flexible in your running and just go and enjoy trail time either with friends or alone. Leave your watch at home, run by feel and enjoy!

EXTRA REST

Mental or physical fatigue, we all need rest. If you just came off a busy season, be sure you take that time to reset before plunging into G2G training. Sleep in an extra morning or two and add an extra rest day to your week. You are better to train less with higher quality than to train everyday and drag yourself through the motions. Spend extra time with family, friends and catching up on all those household items that you pushed aside. When its go time, you want to be rested, ready and refreshed. If you are not motivated to go out running right now then don't. Cross train, go the gym, power walk or ski. Give yourself that mental break now so you don't feel burned out come late Spring.

In addition to weekly rest days, consider rest weeks when looking at the big picture. I typically start my athletes on a basic monthly structure where every fourth week is a rest week. During that rest week, there is an added day of full rest. Volume drops and the number of training sessions is typically reduced. I find this helps to reset the battery and re-charge both mentally and physically for another three works of focused work.

CROSS TRAINING

As mentioned, if you are healthy and all systems are a go, then I'd suggest during the next few months you run two to three times a week plus one power walk session. Additional cardiovascular training could be in the form of cycling, elliptical, nordic skiing or something else of your choice. It's beneficial to stimulate your muscles in other ways besides the repetitive motion of running. So have fun with the cross training and mix it up each week.

SAMPLE WEEK

Here is what a basic week of training might look like over the next few Winter months. Remember, this is only an example.

MONDAY

Rest (full day off other than light stretching, rolling or massage)

TUESDAY

AM – RUN #1 – intensity session

PM – Strength #1

WEDNESDAY

Cross train of choice

THURSDAY

AM – RUN #2 – intensity session

PM – Strength #2

FRIDAY

Rest or Strength #3

SATURDAY

RUN #3 – Endurance

SUNDAY

AM – Power Walk or Hike

PM – Stretch (Yoga or other)