

TRAINING PERIODIZATION STRATEGY FOR THE COMPETITIVE RUNNER

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In the last issue I discussed the "Habituation Principle" which is what happens when your body becomes "habituated" to a steady repetition of training. When that occurs, it's time to change your training structure. In this issue I will outline the proper way for you to initiate this change via a training schedule based on periodization.

The body's response to a repetitive stimulus diminishes over time. So applying the same stimulus week after week, month after month, and year after year, would eventually become ineffective. This is why all athletes should follow the principle of periodization in their training. Periodization simply means you follow a certain training strategy or plan for a set number of weeks, and then change the structure and focus for another set period and so on with the culmination of these time periods bringing you to an eventual peak.

To give you an idea of how to properly structure your training, periodization programs are generally 6 weeks per cycle and include 4 micro-cycles: Conditioning Phase, Efficiency Phase, Strength (Stamina) Phase, and the Performance (Peak Races) Phase. After the completion of a full Macro Cycle a complete rest and change of exercise modality is best for the athlete before they begin the process all over again (hopefully with an improved fitness level). I have outlined the Micro-Cycles below.

CONDITIONING PHASE This period or phase is primarily about building your endurance over time. It includes both your daily, "maintenance" runs as well as your weekly long run. The proper intensity is 65-75% of max heart rate. The duration is a gradual progression and depends on your target race. During this phase the stimulus improves your lung capacity and the muscular endurance of your legs and glutes. It also helps to improve your body's ability to use stored fat as fuel which is very important to an endurance athlete.

EFFICIENCY PHASE Many coaches or schools of thought would put the Efficiency Phase at the end of a Macro-Cycle but I have found putting it near the beginning helps improve your stride efficiency for those long tough workouts ahead as well as to keep you safer from injury due to less pounding. Efficiency workouts are really speed workouts and include Hill Repeats, 80 - 100m Accelerations on the grass, 200m - 600m repeats at Mile Race Pace, etc. I suggest incorporating this phase for 4-6 weeks after completing 6 - 8 weeks of conditioning. I would include two days of Efficiency training per week that averaged 1 - 2 miles (per session) in total distance of the repeat pace work. An example would be one day of 8 x Hill Repeats (running hard) with a hill that takes 30 - 90 seconds to climb. Later in the week I would also include a set of 10 a 20 second fast accelerations in bare feet on a soft grass field (soccer field would be perfect).

STAMINA PHASE The Stamina Phase is one that combines both interval training to improve one's V02 Max as well as Lactate Threshold training to

improve, you guessed it. the Lactate Threshold! This is the most grueling and yet most rewarding off all 4 phases. A full 6 weeks is recommended for this phase. While continuing the long run and the maintenance runs the Efficiency (Speed) workouts are replaced by one day of Interval (V02 Max) training and another day of Lactate Threshold work or "Tempo Runs".

The appropriate pace for Interval training as it is intended to improve your V02 Max is 3k - 5k Race pace. The appropriate duration of these intervals is 3- 5:00 for a total of 3-4 miles of paced intervals. Remember, V02 Max is a measure of your body's ability to utilize oxygen. You don't start operating at maximum oxygen consumption at this pace until about 2:00 of steady exertion (therefore the need to go beyond it to at least 3:00. The benefits of running at this intensity for repeat intervals maxes out at about 5:00 so try and stay just at or under the 5:00 limit as much as possible. One of the most important factors in proper interval training is the rest period. The rest period should be 1/2 to 2/3 the duration of the interval itself. If you are running your 800m repeats in 3:00 for example, your ACTIVE rest period should be 1:30 - 2:00. You do NOT want to be fully recovered before the next interval. To teach your body to run at race pace tired is the entire point of the workout!

Lactate Threshold training develops your Lactate Threshold which is basically your pain threshold. It is the point at which your body starts to produce lactic acid. You don't want to actually instigate this during a proper LT workout, you want to stay just below it. For most people this translates into a 10k - Half-Marathon race pace depending on the nature of the workout. LT Intervals (5:00 - 10:00 at LT Pace with a 1 -2:00 rest after each) are best done at 10K Race Pace, 20:00 and longer LT Steady State or Tempo Runs are best at Half-Marathon or so race pace (85% of Max Heart Rate). By hovering just below or just at your LT for these durations you stimulate your body to improve (raise) the Lactate Threshold so you can hold hard, steady paces for longer periods of time. Run these workouts once per week during the Stamina Phase for a total duration of 20 - 40:00 per workout.

PERFORMANCE PHASE During this final phase (4 - 6 weeks), the focus shifts to peaking for a target race or series of races. Quality over quantity becomes the rule and workouts mix a little of all the phases. For example, a typical quality workout day during this phase might consist of 2 x 1 Mile at Tempo Pace followed by 2 x 1000m at 5k Race Pace, followed by 2 x 400m at Mile Race Pace and finished off with 2 x 200m FAST! (All with appropriate rest periods of course). The other quality workouts during this phase are usually a race over the weekend followed by the long run a day or two later. Just remember, high quality with plenty of rest in between.

These 4 Micro Cycles above represent a comprehensive Macro Cycle of the most productive way to train for your next target race. You must tweak the design to complement your race distance and personal needs, but it is a tried and true format to reach your best peak in 20 - 24 weeks. Good Luck!