

THE CORNERSTONES OF TRAINING

If you want to have a great season then you need to get started now! To make sure you get off to a great start you will need to first understand how to approach your season. For a basic overview and understanding, read THE CORNERSTONES OF TRAINING below.

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Athletic training and competition are complex activities, with many variables contributing to success. However, all training principles and physiological laws of training are based on three very basic rules or cornerstones. These cornerstones eventually determine how successful your training will be, whether for the 100m sprint, shot put, middle and long distances or ultra-marathons. The cornerstones are moderation, consistency and rest.

1. MODERATION

Moderation basically comes down to not going to extremes in any aspect of training. Inexperienced distance runners, for example, should not attempt to run the excessive mileage in training that world-class runners often do. Serious injuries may develop that could bring your running career to an abrupt and premature end. Extensive volumes or hours of training are not necessary on a consistent basis and should be done judiciously. Only at the most advanced levels of the sport (and after 6 to 10 years of training) does the need for fairly extensive appear. It is true that athletes in some events have trained very intensively and extensively and have reached outstanding levels of performance. However, the long-term results of such training programs are inconsistent, with more athletes failing than succeeding in reaching the top. Some athletes develop serious injuries, and many become physiologically drained by the heavy training loads. We do not read much about these athletes in athletics literature because stories about failed sportsman and women do not sell -- the world prefers to read about winners. The human body can take far more stress than we generally give it. However, it needs to adapt to heavier stresses gradually. Moderation means a carefully planned training program that avoids extremes in physical or psychological stress. Training, and even competition, can be a beautiful and exciting part of life. It is however not all there is to life. The principle of moderation permits the athlete to enjoy the other aspects of life as much as sport.

2. CONSISTENCY

One way to avoid extremes in training is to train at a reasonable level every day. This does not mean using the same training load every day, but not having major periods of missed training. When an athlete trains consistently the body has more time to adapt to the stress of training, easing its way to higher levels of fitness. In cases where an athlete misses a few consecutive days of training, the body loses some tone and endurance. A day or two of extra hard training does not make up for that loss. In fact, the athlete may over stress the body, resulting in decreased performance levels, or even injury or

illness. Extra physical training can do more harm than simply tiring the body, so the consistency of training is the principle that should rather be applied for optimal improvement. The athlete who trains daily at a moderate level (with varying loads) will outperform the equally talented athlete who trains extremely hard at times and skips training at other times. Consistency has another reward for the athlete. As training continues, a solid fitness base develops. The longer time used to develop the base the less effect an interruption of training has. Although an athlete loses conditioning when training is interrupted, an athlete with a long-term base loses condition more slowly and regains it more quickly.

3. REST

Rest is the third cornerstone of training, and perhaps the most important for the younger athletes and veterans. An athlete simply must get enough rest. This is often the training principle least adhered to. As Bruce Fordyce says: "When in doubt get more rest." Athletes feeling tired or weak shouldn't try to do hard training sessions. Instead, they should do very light training sessions or simply skip sessions. No, this is not contrary to the principle of consistency, but part of a holistic approach to training, which allows for consistency over the long-term, with essential recovery days over the short-term. This principle also applies to the amount of sleep an athlete gets. Why do athletes need more rest? Firstly, the extra work creates extra physical stress, which calls for more recovery time. Secondly, the body makes its adaptations to stress when the body is at rest rather than during the stress. This is the essence of the physiological law of overload. If the body does not have enough rest, it cannot recover and adapt fully, so it does not benefit fully from the training. The body is like a massive computer with many complex-working parts. When it is worked very hard it may tire and overload, becoming less efficient. With a computer, when a problem occurs it requires "down-time" while the operators repair the problem. The body essentially repairs its own problems, but requires its own "down-time" every day. An athlete must learn to be "tuned in" to his or her body, as it actually "tells" when it needs more rest or when it has had enough. The body runs on rest, just as it runs on fuel. If it has too little rest, it begins to run or perform poorly.

These three cornerstones are critical to any training plan. If an athlete trains consistently at a moderate level while getting enough rest, his or her performance should be optimal and should continue to improve during the senior competition years.