

Should the Endurance Athlete Not Run?

I think I just heard a pin drop? Yup. Before you read on, or before you start defacing the article and sending me threatening letters, hear me all the way out. I'm writing this article to make you think about how you train...not to tell you how to train. I tell my athletes all the time, there are lines where sport coaching and performance coaching cross and I do my best not to cross those lines. I am not an endurance athlete myself (don't stop reading because I said that), but I've spent a lot of time reading and discussing many of these topics with fellow professionals who either are endurance athletes themselves, or who train them. This article is based off of those discussions as well our own personal experiences with training endurance athletes whether it be cross country, triathlons, marathons, or ½ marathons. And for all of you who may think that I should be put on a deserted island with no food or water because I am tell you to not *always* run, please understand that my wife was a college runner. So at worst, please put her on the island with me!

The endurance athlete:

I know you're probably itching to see why I think that should not run. Well, truth be told, I don't disagree with running (for distance) as a whole. I don't think it is great for the body, but then again, a lot of things aren't great for the body. My concern with most endurance athletes is not that they run, but more that they don't do anything but run! Typically endurance athletes like to do what they do. That means if you're a cyclist, you ride your bike, if you're a runner, you run. I think that is great, in fact, it is a must if you are to excel in your chosen sport. But the other key piece to growth and development in the sport is doing the polar opposite. Therefore, if you run all the time, don't.

It almost seems taboo to tell someone who will be running for an extended period of time to do some type of exercise that is the polar opposite, right? Wrong. You should hear your coach(es) preach cross-training for sports by participating in other activities which allow different movements and patterns and some development in areas that your "typical" sport does not. That means that if all you do is run in a straight line at a slow pace, try doing some multi-directional conditioning or some faster paced sprints commonly known as sprints. Perhaps even participate in a "team" sport where you must use and develop things like hand-eye coordination, proprioception (awareness of your body in space), and various motor skills which you may not possess. You don't need to be good at them, and you don't need to compete at a high level—you just need to do them.

For young athletes, the cross training is essential in keeping the body healthy and helping your body develop a variety of qualities. Unfortunately, in this day and age, people seem to think that playing a sport 24/7 means that you are going to excel, but that's rarely the case. For every athlete who does excel, there are thousands and thousands who don't. The younger you are, the more you need to cross-train. So that means if you're younger than 14 years old, you need to be participating in other physical activities other than your chosen sport/activity frequently. I don't care how or when you do them, but do them!

You need to include them regularly. Not everyday, but frequently. How frequently, I don't know. It depends on your specific situation. Like I just said, the

younger you are the more regularly you should do them. . How about this, 1-2x a week if you're 15 or older, and 2-4x if you're younger than 15? Those are written in stone, so before I get emails wondering about your specifics, figure out how that can possibly fit into your schedule. Fit in some type of activity between 1-4 times per week, depending on your age. It doesn't need to be long either, anywhere between 10 and 15 minutes should be fine to start. You can adjust from there if you want and either go up or down. We often use just a few minutes of multi-directional movement training 2-4 times per week with all of our endurance athletes. These drills themselves often take no more than 5 minutes per session.

I Already Cross-Train:

Before you stop reading and tell me that once a month you do the ski-jumping on Wii and how the yoga is actually hard and that you sweat doing it, understand that cross-training takes effort. If you are a runner, try playing/participating in the following: basketball, baseball, volleyball, badminton, soccer, lacrosse. It isn't rocket science, so that is far from a full list, but simply choose activities which challenge you in ways that you're not used to functioning.

Consider lifting weights or doing some type of performance training for your body as a means of cross-training. Yes, I just said lift weights...unfortunately; it's a common assumption that lifting means squats, deadlifts, and bench press. Even worse, the assumption is that lifting (in any sense) will make you bigger and bulkier and slow you down. This thought process does not account for all of the variables associated with performance training.

All of our athletes lift weights: male, female, old, young, runner, football player, it doesn't matter. We train them to help enhance their life and their sport(s). That means that our distance athletes lift weights. For our distance athletes, we do this with a variety of exercises (many single arm and single leg variations) and movements (multiple motions for both upper and lower body) to help balance out and keep the athlete healthy and give them a solid foundation to improve their performance.

In addition to the strength training, we also do a fair amount of multi-directional movement training with our distance runners. We are able to build this training right into their workout program so that we can give them some of that cross-training that they need. These include a variety of dynamic drills and movements which make the athlete move side to side with some stop and go movements. We don't expect our endurance athletes to have their agility be their best skill, but we do expect them to do enough of it to give their body a break from the prolonged position involved in endurance training. This also means that performance in these drills/movements is not of most concern.

Start today by taking advantage of opportunities to improving your training with a couple simple adjustments. Throw in a couple movement drills a week around your typical training day; add in some proper strength training; and most importantly, do it regularly so that you can reap the benefits of it.

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