

Running is a Hobby- *The “Other” 21 Hours a Day.*

At a recent convention held to honor elite distance runners, a few of the men were asked if they had any hobbies that kept them busy while they weren't running or training otherwise. The response from almost all of the runners was that running, in fact, *was* a hobby to them and that was one of the reasons (along with talent and hard work) that they were able to reach such a competitive level. If you think about it, most high school athletes volunteer for cross country or track and field. This should show that the person at least finds some joy in the activity, if not the accomplishment that comes with it. Along with this many people have hobbies, as well. Some skateboard, some play video games or build models and whatnot. However, a problem evolves when a person spreads him or herself too thin in the number of activities and finds that some of them are suffering. For example, in the beginning of the summer Coach Gilchrist likes to tell the newer runners, or veterans that haven't quite gotten the message: “If an athlete spends the summer roller-skating instead of following the prescribed workouts for cross country, when the season starts, the person will most definitely be an outstanding roller-skater.”

So a question emerges that separates those who want to excel and those who are going through the motions. If you really enjoy running and doing well season after season, a commitment must be made to yourself and your team that you will do everything under your power to improve your best. If you spend the 21 hours that you aren't running or lifting doing other things to improve yourself as a runner, then you will see very real and amazing results in your performances and attitude. You will get more out of the sport if you pay attention to the little details and approach running as a “hobby”. You will also be a leader within your team, and others will work harder to build the squad to another level as well. It is commonly said that a team is only as fast as its slowest runner, so every person must do his or her part to strengthen the chain. Believe it or not, the time between training runs and races is very crucial to your performance. It is easy to find running something that can be thought about all day and a very pleasing hobby to build on.

So what exactly *can* you do during the day to improve yourself as a runner? The list is virtually endless, but there are basics that are too often scoffed at. For example, there are many people out there that understand how useful a good night's sleep is, and yet fail to tap into such benefits. Apparently, for some people, gaining a few imaginary points in any imaginary game that will launch you to another outstandingly imaginary level that will hardly raise your self-esteem for a few minutes and gains you little life skills is more important than participating fully in an activity (such as running) that will echo through your life in a positive way. If you do not get a full night's sleep consistently, your body is not getting the rest it needs and it is impossible to benefit from a workout the next morning. Eight to ten hours is recommended, which does not include reading or doing nails. Your body needs *real*, ‘out cold’ sleep. You will find that it is not hard to do and you really aren't missing anything that anyone else is doing. This is not saying you aren't allowed to treat yourself and go out on nights, but good sleep 5-6 days a week will make a great improvement in your ability and you will feel *great!*

Another example of a commonly shrugged off topic is eating right. Without sounding like mom or dad, eating right is absolutely necessary if you wish, eating right is absolutely necessary if you wish to be competitive. Also, once you get the hand of cooking simple recipes and learning what food does to your body, you will really get into it! Learn about complex carbohydrates and how they benefit you as a runner. Pasta and baked potatoes are a fabulous pre-meet dinner! Protein rebuilds muscles, and is therefore beneficial after a weight session. Research nutrition yourself from a credible source and find out the truth about good eating. This can be limitless in entertainment and taste value, as you will find that it is *not* only healthy if it tastes bad. You would be surprised to find that the foods that will help you as a runner can be very tasty! It is another common misconception that a runner will burn off fat and sugars anyway, so there is no risk of gaining weight, or, more dangerous, a runner must be skinny and develop an eating disorder. The truth is, to really take your running to another level, the right foods must be picked out constantly. Dig into articles and magazines, talk to experts and find combos of healthy food you like! Also, drink water **all the time**. A loss of 2% dehydration can account for *at least 10%* of performance ability. The slightest dehydration can render a whole cross country or track team unless at a meet. Above that, serious dehydration can cause permanent problems and health issues. Be aware of what soda does to the body, as well. Soda makes you feel full (*carbonation) so you don't eat as healthy, and it can stunt growth, it creates sugar highs that don't last, and is of no nutritional value.

There are some other good tips that can give you that edge against others. Weightlifting is fantastic for injury prevention and muscle toning. Icing can be very beneficial, even with no injury, as it relieves soreness. Take a Dixie cup, fill it with water and freeze it. Rip the top off around the ice block and use it as an ice massage! Subscribe to Runners World or High School Runner and research your sport. This may seem like a lot to do, but it can't and shouldn't be all at once. If you ease these extras into your day, it will become routine and will be easy. To get to another plane of ability you must give your body what it needs, and in order to do that you need to play the role of a student in running. Pick the minds of your coaches and captains, as well as veterans on your team. Don't be afraid to talk to an expert, that's what they are there for. One thing I found I liked is taking sports medicine, a great class that teaches you about your body and what it needs in regards to sports specifically. The possibilities are endless, and it will take sacrifice to be great at something, but you can love it as well. I was once told that "If you find something you love to do, you will never have to work another day in your life." Mental attitude is everything. Mind over matter, people. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter! That goes for hard workouts, cold mornings, early rises, anything. I think you will find that it is much more than just running mile after mile, after the details are factored in, it really becomes a type of art form. Who knows, if you strive to improve yourself every little way you can as a runner, you may be the next Olympian!

Godspeed and Good Fun,

Brad Siragusa

Helpful Quotes

Someone once came up to Duncan MacDonald and said: "I saw you on television and read about you in the newspapers! How do you do it?" MacDonald answered: "I don't watch television and I don't read the papers."

"Some people follow their dreams, others hunt them down and beat them mercilessly into submission." - Neil Kendall

"Somewhere in the world, someone is training when you are not. When you race him, he will win." - Tom Fleming

"Learn as if you were to live forever, compete as if you were to die tomorrow." - John Wooden

"The hardest thing about climbing the ladder to success is getting through the crowd at the bottom." - Anonymous

"The will to win means nothing without the will to prepare." - Juma Ikangaa

"Mind is everything. Muscle-pieces of rubber. All that I am, I am because of my mind." - Paavo Nurmi

"The experts are always telling us to listen to our bodies. Listen to my body? If I was listening to my body right now I would be home in bed eating a Danish and reading the funnies." San Antonio Marathon

"You have to imagine that training is like a bow that you pull back as far as possible to shoot the arrow at an exact point in time. This can be dangerous. Sometimes you can't hold the bowstring back any longer. Or you can overpull it." - Uta Pippig

A newcomer to a team asked the coach, after noticing practices were relentless, what would happen if there was an earthquake and the epicenter was where practice was held. The coach replied, "Then we would run right down into the middle of the Earth!"