Mile and 1500 Meter Race Strategy & Tactics

Race strategy becomes more of a factor as race distance increases. Longer races provide more opportunities to apply tactics and strategies. Even though the mile and 1500 distances are relatively short, it is still long enough for race strategy to come into play. Choosing the correct race tactics is even more critical in the mile and 1500. If you make a tactical mistake in the 5K or 10K you have plenty of time to make up for your mistake. If you make a poor decision in the 1500 you may not have enough time to correct your error. This makes the 1500 and mile race the "chess match" of all running distances.

The Start

The first part of your race strategy is the start. You should try to establish good position in the first 100 meters of the race. Begin the race with a fast surge and try to establish a position in the second or third lane, near the front of the pack. The one thing you should try to avoid at the start is getting boxed in. Getting boxed is a likely occurrence if you place yourself in the first or inside lane. Runners to the front, outside and rear will trap you and you will be unable to make any sort of move. You will also be more at risk of getting spiked, tripped or elbowed. If you are starting on the inside line, make a strong move at the start and move to the front in the second lane. If you are starting in the middle or outside, take a straight line path that gradually moves you to the second lane at the first curve. Many runners make the mistake of heading directly to the inside lane immediately after the start. A better tactic is to run in as straight a line as possible and gradually move to the second lane at the start of the first corner.

Mid Race

Once you establish good position, in the second lane and near the front of the pack, try to settle into your steady planned pace. A steady even pace is the most economical pace. Save your surges for strategic times in the race such as maintaining contact with the leaders or making your own tactical strike.

Dealing with Surges

Because of the short distance of the 1500, it's important to react quickly and correctly to surges by other competitors. For most runners, the best position to be in is just behind the leaders.

Allowing other runners to take on the burden of the lead will allow you to conserve energy for your finishing kick. But you can't allow the leaders to pull away. Keep a close eye on the lead runners. When they make a move you must instantaneously decide if you are going with them or not. Just a split second of indecision can be very costly. The further back in the pack you are, the more critical your attention to the leaders becomes. You must react to the leaders, not to the rest of the pack. When the leaders begin to make a move, you must react immediately. Imagine a line of runners in which no runner accelerates until the athlete in front of them does. By the time the last runner in line reacts, the leaders would have built a considerable lead. So you should always react to the leaders, not to the pack. 14

If the lead pack gets away from you, don't panic. There are two strategies for reeling in the front runners. The most efficient and economical way is to gradually increase your pace and make up the distance over a full lap. This works well early in the race. If you find yourself behind with a lap or less to go, you obviously will need to use the other tactic of a strong surge to try to make up the distance quickly.

Finishing Kick

When you are ready to begin your kick to the finish line, be sure to properly position yourself in the second or third lane, Just as with the start, if you allow yourself to be forced to the inside lane you will not have any room to maneuver. Your finishing kick will use your creatine phosphate (CP) energy producing system as well as your anaerobic and aerobic systems. The CP system quickly produces the APT to fuel your muscles using creatine phosphate. You have enough CP in your body to fuel about 200 to 300 meters of all out running. Start accelerating at about 300 meters. If you are in the lead at that point, accelerate to all out pace with 200 meters to go and maintain that sprint pace to the finish line. If you are just behind the leaders, try to run in the leaders shadow until the 200 meter point. Then move to the outside and slingshot yourself into the lead and maintain your sprint pace to the finish. 15

Race Pacing Strategies

Running Pace Strategies and When To Use Them

Running a smart, strategic race can make the difference between meeting or failing to meet your

race goal. Running a smart race starts with proper pacing. There are a number of possible pacing strategies. Each of these strategies has advantages and disadvantages. The proper strategy will depend upon your strengths, your weaknesses, race distance, course conditions and race logistics. Here are the possible racing strategies and most appropriate uses.

Even Pacing

Using even pacing you would maintain roughly the same pace per mile throughout the race. This strategy is favored by many athletes and results in very good performances. Many studies have shown that the top runners in most races tend to run both the first half and the second half of the race in nearly equal times. This is an especially good strategy for the marathon because of the difficulty in performing negative splits in long races.

Even Effort

This type of pacing is very similar to even pacing but relies more on effort level rather than actual chronological pace. With even effort pacing you try to maintain the same perceived effort level throughout the race. This type of pacing is more appropriate for beginning runners. Even effort pacing will result in slowing throughout the race due to the perceived effort level rising as you fatigue. This type of pacing will allow you to finish comfortably, but will not result in optimal performance. Even effort pacing is also a good strategy for more experienced runners in mountain races or very hilly races. Attempting to maintain even pace on steep hills can result high fatigue levels and difficulty in maintaining a quality pace in the last part of your race.

Negative Splits

Negative splits involve running the second half of your race faster than the first. Many coaches favor negative splits, because the easier start will reserve strength and energy for a fast finish. This type of pacing can be very enjoyable because you will pass a lot of runners in the last half of the race. If the course is flat and conditions are good, it can also give very good results. This is not always the best strategy if the second half of the course is harder than the first. It can also become difficult to catch competitors that run stronger in the first half and open up a large lead. This type of pacing is a good choice in flat races between 1 mile and half marathon.

Surging

Surging is a race strategy in which your change your pace throughout the race depending upon course conditions and where your competitors are. Surging is a very useful strategy and if used 16 properly can give excellent results in any race. If you are a competitive runner and are competing for top positions you will use this strategy in nearly every race. Surging can also be a valuable psychological tool. If used properly it can demoralize your opponents.

Front Running

Starting strong and trying to hang on throughout the race is an example of front running. This is not recommended for most runners. The idea of this type of pacing is to open a large lead and then try to hang on for the remainder of the race. This will always lead to a lot of pain in the last half of the race and very seldom results in top performances. There are some runners that have a very efficient stride that can maintain a quality pace when very fatigued. This type of runner may have success with this type of pacing, but for most runners, this is a bad pacing strategy.

Strong Start/Middle Float

Starting strong, then running at a quality, but relaxed pace in the middle and finishing strong. This is a modified type of front running. Using this strategy, a runner will start strong and create some separation from the other runners. This runner will then slow to a strong but relaxed pace and try to recover while maintaining a lead. Then when partially recovered will finish strong. As with front running, only a runner that is able to handle a lot of pain and has a very efficient stride will have success with this strategy.

Middle Push/Strong Finish

Starting at a relaxed pace, pushing hard in the middle miles and try to hang on for a strong finish. This is a very popular strategy that consistently results in top performances. Using this method, the runner will start with a relaxed pace in the early miles. In the middle of the race, the runner will pick up the pace to just over race pace and try to maintain this pace through the middle and ending miles before accelerating to the finish with a sprint kick. If you have the mental and physical strength to maintain that quality pace through to the finish, you will get very good results with this strategy. 17

Top Ten Ways to Improve Your Mile and 1600 Meter Performance

Get Stronger

The mile is a power run. If you're going to maximize your mile or 1600 meter performance you need to develop your ability to quickly generate a lot of speed and power. That requires strong muscles. Stronger, more powerful muscles will increase your stride length and decrease your ground contact time. Think of your leg muscles as rubber bands. When a strong rubber band stretches and contracts quickly it will fly across the room with a lot of power. A weak rubber band will just flop ineffectively. You can't do much to strengthen a rubber band but you can strengthen your muscles with a well designed and periodized strength training program. Include strength training in your year round program and you will reach new mile PR's

Get Explosive

Strong muscles give you the potential to generate a lot of speed and power but you need another element to finish the power equation - explosive strength. You need to be able use your strength to generate power and forward momentum very quickly. How do you do that? Simple - just include explosive strength training or plyometrics in your training program. High intensity plyometrics will train your muscles to very quickly and efficiently release the energy stored during the "loading" phase and greatly increase your power and speed while decreasing your speed sapping ground contact time.

Warm Up Dynamically

One of the myths of running that seems to hang on is that you should perform static stretching exercises before a race or training run. It has been proven that pre race static stretching not only does little to prevent injuries but it also may decrease your race performance. Pre race static stretching has been shown to decrease your muscle stiffness and reduce the ability of your muscles to produce explosive power. Static stretching may also cause a decrease in your "stretch reflex" which inhibits your muscles ability to efficiently use stored energy. A better warm up routine is to do your normal cardiovascular warm up followed by functional dynamic drills. The dynamic drills or stretches will prepare your muscles for high intensity running without reducing your performance levels. You should still do some static stretching after your race as a cool down

activity and to maintain range of motion.

Build Your Endurance

The mile and 1600 meter distances may be relatively short but that doesn't mean you don't need a high level of endurance. One way to illustrate the importance of endurance in even a short race like the mile is to compare it to a longer race distance. If you are training for a 5K you would never consider limiting your long run to 3 or 4 miles. If the longest run you can perform is at or 18 just further than your goal race distance you will never be able to run your goal race at a quality race pace. This also applies to the mile. If your longest training run is only a mile or two there is no way you can run a quality mile race pace. Including a weekly long run in your training routine will improve your endurance level and will get you on your way to a new PR. You don't need to do the weekly 20 plus milers that longer distance racing requires but try to build up to between 8 and 12 miles on a consistent basis.

Be a Sprinter

This may seem like a no brainer but many milers and 1600 meter runners leave sprint training out of their weekly routine. Running at over speed or faster than race pace during practice will build your foot speed, improve your neuromuscular conditioning and make you a more efficient runner. One good way to include sprint training is by doing five to ten 100 meter strides or sprints at the end of each training session.

Run Hills

Hill training is one of the bread and butter workouts for mid and long distance runners. Hill running is one of the most efficient ways to build your running strength. Try to include both uphill and downhill running at least one time per week. The uphill running is great for increasing your running strength and power. Downhill running is one of the best workouts you can perform for improving your running economy, neuromuscular conditioning and muscle elasticity.

Get Tough

It's obvious that mile and 1600 meter racing is physically tough. Maintaining race pace during the final lap when your legs feel like blocks of solid granite and every molecule in your body is screaming at you to stop is one of the toughest tasks in running. That's where both physical and

mental toughness will pay huge benefits. How do you build your physical and mental toughness? One way is to practice running at very high intensities when you are already in a highly fatigued state. At the end of a hard training run or repeat fight the temptation to slow down. Instead speed up to your finishing kick pace. Finishing each training run or repeat at a sprint pace will toughen you both physically and mentally as well as conditioning your central nervous system. Fast finish training also gives you the added benefit of improving your all important finishing kick.

Train Progressively

One of my favorite inspirational quotes is "If you keep doing what you've been doing, you keep getting what you've always gotten." Running is one activity where that is very true. If you keep training at your current level your performance level will stagnate. You will keep getting what you've always gotten. You should always be training progressively. As your fitness level increases you should be increasing the intensity and duration of your training. The distance of your long runs should increase as your endurance level builds. When doing interval training on the track you should be adjusting either your pace, the distance of your repeats, your recovery time or a combination of those training elements. No matter what your level of running and fitness is you should always be pushing yourself with progressive training. 19

Train for your Goal

The next time you go on a road trip just hop in your car and start driving. Don't have any goal in mind; just get in your car and go. Where will you end up? Who knows - you could end up anywhere. You may have fun on a trip like that but you aren't going to accomplish much. This same scenario applies to your mile and 1600 meter running. If you don't have a goal in mind your training will be somewhat aimless and you'll have more than a little trouble in getting anywhere. Make sure you have a goal pace or finishing time before your start training. Then design your workouts around that goal time. With a specific goal in mind your workouts will be more effective and you will have a way to measure your progress.

Dorsi Flex your Foot

One of the most important and often ignored components of your training and your running mechanics is ground contact time. To develop maximal speed and power you need to minimize

your ground contact time. Developing your muscle elasticity, strength and power will help you do that but you also need to put your foot, ankle and legs into the proper mechanical position to take advantage of that strength. The first motion in your stride should be lifting the front of your foot to a dorsi flexed or "toes up" position. That will initiate the "runners triad" of a flexed hip, flexed knee and dorsi flexed foot. Keep your foot in that dorsi flexed position throughout your stride, especially at touchdown. Your toes up position is similar to cocking a gun. Your foot, ankle, Achilles tendon and calf muscles are ready to load up with elastic energy and release without the energy waste caused by a toes down position.