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The loneliness of the distance runner

by Phillip Molesworth

In these days of the covid19 pandemic the loneliness of the distance runner is even greater. As a distance runner you get used to the loneliness even when running in a pack as you have no time for social discussion as you run up those important kilometres. Sure there is the chatter as you gather for a pack run and then the social interaction at the end, but with the issues that we are now faced with you are really on your own. But don't you run alone most of the time anyway?



You track up the kilometres needed to build a foundation for the next phase of your training so you can achieve your goals most of it alone with just your thoughts for company, but isn't that what you go through as you race? There is no time for chatter it's you your thoughts and your plan against all and at that time even your friends are the foe.

In my youth I ran 150k plus during the winter to build up my cardiovascular system for the racing season. (In my case the steeple chase and 5,000 meters) Most of these kilometres were run on my own although I would sometimes run the 6 kilometres to the club join the group for the pack run and then run home again. On many nights I would wait for the tram to start as it turned into St Georges road and off I would go racing it from Preston to Fitzroy running on the centre gardens and jumping the shrubs as hurdles, I would then wait for the tram coming the other way and race it back this was only 4k return so I would do an easy 10k to complete the session.

Loneliness is something that the distance runner becomes accustomed to as it is part of what you have to do to achieve your goals. You can take advantage of your surroundings while observing the social distancing so don't despair.

Do you need a coach?

New Zealand super coach Arthur Lydiard in the 1960's made his athletes from 800 up, all run 100 miles a week (160 kilometres) and then they all ran a marathon before starting the track training for the summer. Yes they were lonely running these distances but it was also part of their mental development as they prepared for great things. His athletes included Murray Halberg 4 minute mile and 5,000 metres, Peter Snell 800 and 1500 metres, Barry Magee came third in a world-best marathon, all this on high levels of endurance and then moving to the track to develop speed.



The coach will talk to you about your past training and achievements to work out what your current foundation is. Then he will develop a plan for building up all the elements which includes endurance,

power, speed, mental toughness and technique as well as other important elements in your development. The coach will be there when the job at hand seems too hard, he will build you up and encourage you during the hard times, which will come.

The coach can't do the work for you it is up to the athlete to do what they need to do to improve. The job of the coach is to guide the athlete through the planning stage and oversee the plan as the athlete's work to achieve their goals.

The time for the endurance phase is now

Now is the season to run up the kilometres and build on your cardiovascular endurance and set a new foundation for the next competition season. This you can achieve alone, but you must do it with care as too much of a good thing can cause problems. Peter Snell ran a world record in the 800 doing this training but built up to it over a few years, so please don't think you can copy this and be like him. Peter was guided through each phase of the training by Arthur who kept a close eye on him making sure he was not overdoing it but at the same time pushing him to achieve amazing levels.

Start with a plan

You should now map out your plan for the future. There should be a long term plan that sets out the future over a number of years, this is then broken down into a 12 month plan which is then broken into phases. Now is the time to develop your endurance plan by working out the base that you have achieved already and developing a plan to build the levels gradually as your body adapts to each increment. The development of endurance is a slow process and can't be rushed, however the benefit of endurance is that it is the foundation needed to build the next season on and is also slow to lose.

If you are unsure of how to develop the plan then talk to a coach.

Athletics South West are here to help all our region's athletes and clubs so if you are an Athletics South West, Warrnambool Athletics Club, or Warrnambool Triathlon Club member, please give me a call and we can work on how to proceed and how I can support you.

I am available to assist through the current situation and while there will not be any face to face meetings for a while there is Skype, phone and email that we can use to advantage.

If we work together through the winter this way you should come out of the other end of this difficult period ready for the challenges of competition.

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Phillip is an Athletics Victoria Accredited Coach with over 40+ years of coaching success including:

- *5,000m and 10,000m junior and senior Australian champions (and 10th Australian all time in the 10,000m)*
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