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Are you doing it correctly?

by Phillip Molesworth

Generally runners just put on a pair of track shoes shorts and singlet and off they go on a run. But do they actually know what they are doing? Are the shoes the correct ones for what you are doing? When you run, are you running correctly? Are you running at the right tempo? Are you covering the right distances for your stage of development? Is the upper body and stomach up to the challenge? All of these questions and more need to be answered in order to avoid injuries.



Percy Cerutti once spent time sitting at a primary school and watched the children running around the playground for a number of days and made notes. He observed that the youngest children that had never thought about what they were doing had the best running technique and the older they were the worse their running style. He concluded that the children observed others and started to copy what older people were doing and slowly lost the efficient technique they started with by mimicking bad habits.

I have also observed this in many young and older people that have come to me for coaching and came to the conclusion that in order to help them to achieve their goals without injuring themselves I first had to teach them how to run. I also had to work through the questions at the beginning of this paper in order for them to run safely.

In this paper I hope to answer some of the issues around the distance runner. **The big issue is that everyone is different and the needs for one don't necessarily work for another.** You can't take the training done by a champion of your favourite event and expect to emulate them. Doing this is thwart with danger and injury usually follows. The work load they did on the road and track was only part of their training, they went through many other elements as the coach planned and implemented a full body and mind program that worked for them. What gets into the books is the workload in kilometres, track workouts etc. but is that what made them so great?

In the previous paper ([Loneliness of the distance runner](#)) I mentioned Peter Snell under Arthur Lydiard and the build up to enormous training loads on the road and even a marathon in his program.

I trained with Ralph Doubell (Mexico gold medal and world record in the 800 metres) who trained under the watchful eye of Franz Stampfl who also coached Roger Bannister to the first sub 4 minute mile. This training was all done at the Melbourne University track and generally started with a run around Princes Park and moved to the track. Sunday sessions in the winter included 100 by 100 metres walking the bend completing 50 laps of the track. We also did sessions of 50 by 200 doing a walk jog back to the start also 50 laps or 25 by 400 with a walk jog rest over 400 metres again 50 laps. The sessions during the rest of the week were similar but not as many reps but run with a level of intensity that was tough running.

So what is the correct way to train? How much do you do and how do you work out when to increase and by how much. Unfortunately I need to know the athlete in order to answer these questions but I can give you some guidelines on how to work it out.

As you can see, different coaches achieve the same goals with very different techniques. The common denominator is hard work for those who want to be at the top.

For those that don't aspire to be an Olympic champion or run a record. Don't despair this applies to the fun runner, fitness runner and the champions. It's the intensity and quantity that makes the difference.

I have often told new athletes not to worry too much about the event as it will find you. Your abilities whether sprint or distance is something you are born with and can thank your mother and father for. Your muscles are made up of a combination of fast and slow twitch fibres otherwise known as white and red muscle fibre. Dominant fast and you are a sprinter, jumper type with explosive muscle. Dominant red or slow twitch fibre makes you a distance runner and the event you excel at will depend on the balance of fast and slow twitch muscles. Some end up without a dominant fast or slow so struggle to excel in any running event.

I once had a girl aged 16 come and wanted to be a runner she had spent her youth as a gymnast. She joined my distance group but struggled badly and could not cope. I moved her into my sprint and jumps group but she struggled here as well. She was keen and was not afraid of work but her legs were not up to it. I took her over the javelin throw run up where there was a number of javelins and handed her one and asked her to stand on the line and throw it. To my surprise her standing throw was the best throw in the club that season, so I took her over to Gus Puopolo who was the current Australian throws coach as well as the Ringwood coach and introduced her. She started training with Gus and became the clubs and one of the state's best javelin, discus and hammer throwers. Gus took her to the hawthorn gym to do some weights and she set a national record for the bench press. The next Olympics she was in the Australian team but not as a runner or thrower but as a weight lifter. She found her events in athletics but achieved even more as a weight lifter.

One of the great things about athletics is that it has so much variety that there is a place for everyone.

So let me give you some hints on the answers to the questions I posed earlier. I am going to do a series of papers on the subjects and decided to start with the shoe and things to look for.

Are the shoes the correct ones for what you are doing?

It's interesting that most athletes especially the women only have one criteria when choosing a pair of running shoes. That is of course "how good do I look in these?" The shoe manufacturers have all woken up to this and provide shoes in a myriad of colours and designs to get the attention of these ill-informed runners. In this article I want to look at the issues you need to consider when making your choice. Of course the colours will catch the eye but I hope I can give you the tools to determine the rest.



Your footwear is very important, as it protects your feet and legs from damage from the repetitious pounding as you run up the kilometres. I have had many runners that have gone to a sports store and come back with the incorrect shoe for their requirements. You can't blame the shop assistant for this, as they get training to find the shoe that fits you and that is only one of the elements in

choosing the correct footwear. Your footwear requirements change with the type of work you are doing, but I am going to focus on the needs for the season and the distance runner.

First the shoe must fit well. This is what the shop people are trained to do so you shouldn't have too many problems in this area. But generally, there should be about a finger width between your big toe and the end of the shoe. If the shoe is too small you will get cramping of the toes resulting in bruising or even worse. If the shoe is too big your foot can move in the shoe resulting in painful blisters so it should fit in both width and length and feel comfortable. One of the issues with this is that everyone has one foot about half a size bigger than the other so there needs to be some compromise when fitting. If you wear orthotics then you need to take them for the fitting to ensure a good fit with the orthotics fitted.



Next the shoe should be flexible. If you take the shoe in your hands and bend the toe up it should not be too stiff or resist bending. If the shoe is stiff it creates pressure on your foot as you roll from the heel and off the big toe. This pressure causes stress on the metatarsals and if too stiff can result in damage and even stress fractures of the metatarsals due to the number of times you flex the shoe with your feet as you run, so the midsole under the ball of the foot should be flexible but at the same

time have sufficient cushioning to take some of the shock of landing especially if your running technique has a tendency for you to strike the ground with the sole of the foot (resolving this will be the subject of another paper)



Next is the technology in the midsole and heel. You need to jog around in the shoe in the shop and get a feel for the reaction in the heel midsole. If it feels spongy and rebounds giving you a feeling of bouncing then it is too soft it would be a great shoe for going for walks in but not running.



The midsole needs to act as a shock absorber that takes the shock of the foot landing especially on hard surfaces but should not bounce like a tennis ball. The constant bouncing will result in ankle, knee, hip and lower back problems. If it is too hard then it doesn't protect the feet from the constant landing. Once again running in the shop will help to work this out or even jump up and down to get the feel of the landing. Too hard will also result in ankle, knee and hip problems. Most of the better brands produce a midsole that cushions the landing without bouncing, but this can be a trap with the cheaper brands.

Then there is the weight. The shoes should not be too heavy but not so light that the other elements like midsole are compromised.



Check the heel for a wedge shape that assists in correcting the foot placing from the outside rolling across the foot and off the big toe. This helps runners with supinate or pronate problems by correcting the foot position on landing. If this is missing then it isn't a running shoe and is designed for other sports or walking.

Finally there is the type of shoe. You are purchasing a running shoe so you want a good grip in the sole. The shoe will be narrow when compared to a court shoe. That's because your shoe is for

forward movement and will not have the wide flat sole of a court shoe where it is required for sideways movement without rolling the ankle.



Having said all of this there was the Beach Forest potato farmer Cliff Young who won the Sydney to Melbourne marathon wearing a pair of these, (yes gum boots) but he lost a lot of skin when he kept tripping. Cliff was responsible for a lot of bad habits among young runners because of his poor running posture as well as his poor choice in foot wear. As a coach I was horrified to see young runners with their arms dangling by their sides and no knee lift. He didn't really run, it was more of a shuffle. How did he do it? His secret was that he kept running through the night while the others stopped for a rest. This way the tortoise won the race while the hares slept.



The subjects below will be discussed in my future papers.

If there are other subjects you would like discussed. Drop me a line and I will try to fit them in.

1. Posture. When you run, are you running correctly?
2. Is the upper body and stomach up to the challenge?
3. Are you running at the right tempo?
4. Are you covering the right distances for your stage of development?
5. What is the correct way to train?
6. How much do you do?
7. How do you work out when to increase and by how much?

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.

Phillip Molesworth

Phone: 0407 616 006 Email: phil.molesworth@bigpond.com

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)*
- *Marathon, road and cross country champions; and*
- *3,000m and 5,000m All American titles.*

