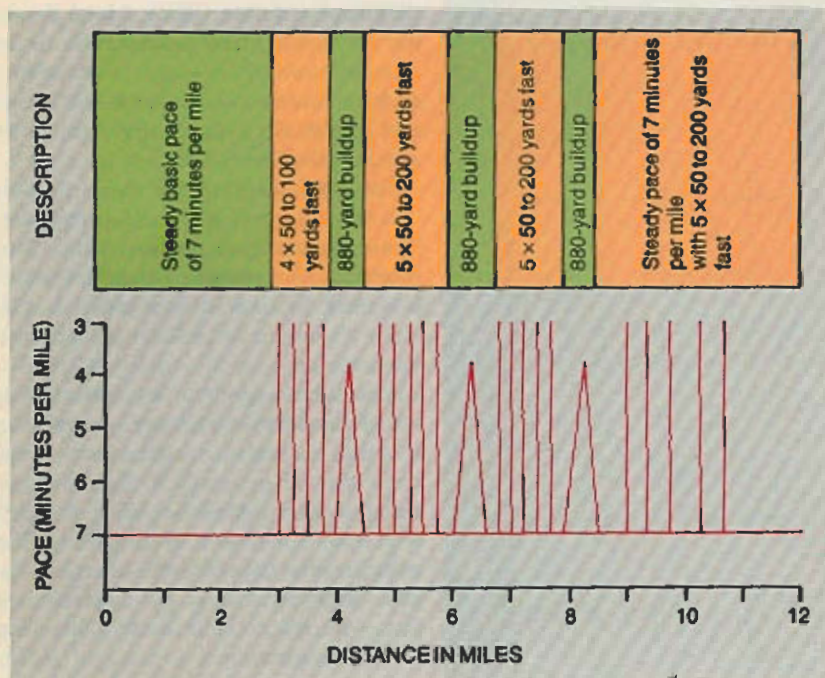


THE CONDITIONING OF DISTANCE RUNNERS



The 12-mile medium run gets a twist in the sharpening phase of the program. Normal seven-minute pace gives way to 880-yard buildups, as well as shorter periods of very fast running. This is speedwork, and will get the runner ready to race, but it requires neither track nor stopwatch.

Tom Osler was among those who helped push and pull America toward running mania. In 1967, he published *The Conditioning of Distance Runners*, an unassuming but important little booklet that has worn remarkably well. In December RW reprinted the first half of Osler's booklet, which included notes on the philosophy of the system as well as a program for developing the base on which racing fitness is built. This month, RW excerpts the second half of *Conditioning*.

Illness

The range of possible difficulties in this category is enormous. Each requires its own peculiar road to recovery. For example, in the case of a minor cold, with only nasal congestion, light running at a slow pace will at times help to conquer the difficulty. Usually, in the event of throat irritation and weakness, complete rest is demanded. Fever or coughing naturally require complete rest. If it is at all reasonable, the athlete is advised not to take medication, but to allow his own powers of recovery to operate. Nearly all medications have side effects that will further re-

tard the return to complete fitness. However, if it appears that the body will not be able to conquer the illness in a few days by means of rest, professional help should be sought. Once the runner is certain that the illness is definitely under control (there is no coughing, sore throat, or fever) he can begin the active recovery described below.

Let us suppose that the athlete has suffered a minor virus infection, and has rested for about five days. He may still have a few sniffles, but no coughing or fever. After deciding that his body definitely has the problem under control, the runner should try the following recovery plan, designed to return him to reasonable fitness in seven days:

The runner should divide the length of his medium runs by seven. He will run this distance very slowly the first day. Symptoms of side stitch, muscle soreness and weakness are likely to be felt. The second day the runner should try to add another seventh of his medium run to the first day's mileage, again running easy. He should observe that he feels much better than he did the day before. If he does not, he should return to complete rest, for he is not prepared for running. Each day he adds one seventh of the medium run to his previous day's mileage, running it at an easy, relaxed pace. He must continually observe the sensation that although he is running farther, it is easier. After seven days he will probably feel ready to resume normal training.

In the event that the athlete has suffered a more serious illness, he should consider a more gradual return to fitness—perhaps two or three weeks or longer. It may be necessary in extreme cases to begin with walking. In any case, the distance should slowly be increased according to a plan similar to that described above. *Daily improvement must be observed, or a return to rest is demanded.* In no case should the athlete attempt fast running until complete recovery is established.

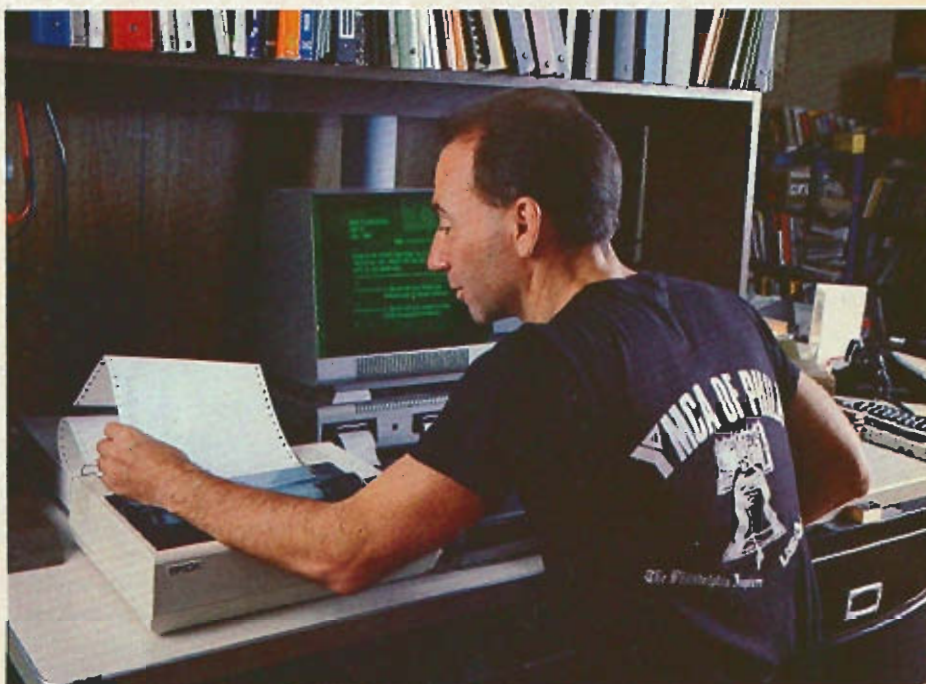
Injury

The techniques required by each special injury could fill volumes. The plan described here is general in nature, and should work well with most injuries.

Picking up where the base work of Tom Osler's program left off, this month we get down to such specifics as sharpening for a race, and dealing with injury and illness.

BY THOMAS J. OSLER
IRA BLOCK PHOTOGRAPHY

PART II



Let us assume that the injury is centered in the tendons. Such injuries are characterized by somewhat sharp pain observed during special motions. Muscle soreness is dull by comparison. The runner should first determine if the pain diminishes or increases as he continues to run. He should begin running at a slow pace. If, after a few miles of running, the pain has essentially disappeared, he can continue slow running as usual. Fast running should be avoided.

Sharpening

We now come to the magical part of the training program—sharpening. In the next few weeks the runner will experience the rapid response of his body as he conditions his muscles and reflexes to efficiently utilize his newly acquired stamina for optimum racing performance.

Before Starting: The athlete should reflect upon the following measures of his fitness to be-

Tom Osler, a former national road racing champion, has been writing about training and racing for nearly two decades.

Left—Tom Osler is more inclined these days toward base building than sharpening. Above—Like the equipment in the sport he loves, Osler's writing tools are more sophisticated today. But in both running and writing, commitment and enthusiasm are unchanging essentials.

Right—Osler's family has grown since he first wrote, and so has his interest in longer races. In the 1970s he became an ultramarathoner of note and wrote The Serious Runner's Handbook. Opposite page, above—Osler continues to train and race, and to ponder training and racing. Stretching was perhaps underrated when Osler first wrote, but even teachers can learn.

gin sharpening work. All must be well before sharpening work can be done with profit; if not, the sharpening procedure to follow will likely fail.

- Is he in robust health? If not, he should continue with slow running until all symptoms of difficulty have vanished. Sharpening work will likely aggravate any minor illness the athlete has when beginning this form of training.

- Is the runner's weight at the proper level? If not, he should diet before he begins sharpening.

- Any tendon problems the runner has are likely to grow worse under sharpening work. It is best that the runner allow all such problems to heal while continuing slow running.

When to Start: The runner should count backward seven weeks before the first race in which he wishes to run his best. He should also carefully weigh the fact that once peak form is reached, he may only retain it for five to eight weeks, after which time a return to easy running is necessary in order to avoid "going stale."

Expected Results: In about six to eight weeks from the start of this sharpening program, the runner can expect to improve from 10 to 20 seconds per mile upon his performance.

Weekly Schedule

The runner will continue to record essentially the same mileage per week as he did during the previous base-building phase.

A typical week's running will now look like this:

| | |
|-----------|--------------------------|
| Monday | Easy |
| Tuesday | Speed Workout |
| Wednesday | Moderately Long Easy Run |
| Thursday | Speed Workout |
| Friday | Speed workout |
| Saturday | Medium Easy Run |
| Sunday | Race |

The easy run and the speed workouts will cover the same mileage as did the easy run and the medium run, respectively, during the base-building workouts. The long run, however, should be shortened for the first four weeks to about three-fourths of its previous length to ensure that the body remains fresh. Even greater care must be observed during this phase of training than before, for the results of overtaxing one's reserves with speed training will be much



harsher.

The First Week: It is very important that the runner learn from the start the precise method of doing the speed workouts. Remember that you are training and not racing.

Now to a description of the first week's workouts. Let's suppose that our runner was running 12 miles during his medium runs in the base-building period. His speed workouts will then cover a total of 12 miles at essentially the same pace as he did the base building; however, he will now insert faster runs into his workout, as indicated by the diagram on page 44.

The runner begins as usual, running about a seven-minute-per-mile pace for the first four miles. At about three miles, he does a few 50- to 200-yard fastish runs in order to loosen his muscles for the 880-yard buildup to follow. It is important not to sprint all out during any of the fast runs.

After about four miles of running, our runner begins the first of three 880-yard buildups. These are the most important parts of the sharpening program. It is here that the runner will learn the delicate art of running efficiently at racing pace.

The runner begins the half-mile at an easy, fully relaxed pace of about 6:30 per mile. At about 50 yards he increases his speed somewhat and concentrates heavily on relaxing every fiber of his body at the faster pace. He continues to in-



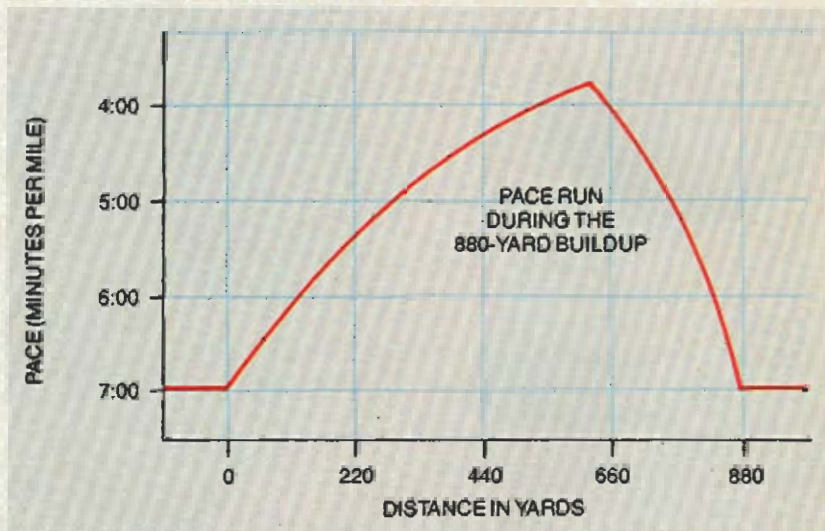
crease the speed a bit every 50 to 80 yards until he has covered about 600 yards, at which point he is running at nearly top speed. He carries this pace for about 50 yards and then begins to gradually reduce the pace, until he has covered the 880 yards and is now running smoothly at seven minutes per mile. You see that nothing is done violently. No quick, jarring accelerations or decelerations. The runner should try to completely relax at his current pace before he attempts the next acceleration about 50 to 80 yards later.

The diagram opposite illustrates approximately how the runner's speed varies during this half-mile.

One must observe that the emphasis here is not on speed, but on relaxation with speed. The runner is not learning to run fast, but to coordinate his movements efficiently so as to be able to relax at a fast racing pace.

The runner now continues at a seven-minute pace for about one mile, during which he does several fairly fast (yet relaxed) 50- to 200-yard spurts. He then does an 880 buildup as described above. He continues in this way until three 880-yard buildups are completed. Then he runs about three easy miles until his total of 12 miles is completed.

His speed runs will continue at the rate of three per week for the first six weeks. He will not increase the total mileage of the speed runs. The stress load during the first seven weeks is in-



creased according to the following plan:

| | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| First Week | 3 × 880 |
| Second Week | 3 × 880 plus 1 × 440 |
| Third Week | 4 × 880 |
| Fourth Week | 4 × 880 plus 1 × 440 |
| Fifth Week | 5 × 880 |
| Sixth Week | 5 × 880 plus 1 × 440 |
| Seventh Week | 6 × 880 |

After about four weeks the runner² is advised to replace one of the buildup workouts with a pace

Continued on page 80

An 880-yard buildup begins and ends at a modest pace, but by the 600 mark the runner should be in high gear. It is essential to stay relaxed as the pace increases.

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Distance Runners

Continued from page 47

run of two to three miles. Here the runner will follow the same buildup procedure that he used during the 880s, but now he does only one speed run, and the accelerations are less severe. He may also wish to do a workout of fast/slow 50-yard spurts for about two miles. This would again replace one of the three speed workouts of that week. A workout of this type tends to accelerate sharpening.

After about four weeks of this sharpening work, the athlete should notice a considerable improvement in his racing times. He runs faster and faster each week until about the seventh week. At this time, he should carefully consider increasing the number of halves run at the present rate of one every two weeks. If he feels that the strain is too great, he may wish to continue the season with only six 880s per speed workout, or perhaps even reduce the number to four or five. His overall feeling of health and his performances should be the guide.

Experimentation with longer distances than the 880 yards, run in the same relaxed buildup/builddown manner, is to be encouraged.

Symptoms of Success

As mentioned previously, the athlete must take extra care during this phase that he is running with sufficient ease, and not overtaxing his reserves. Listed below are several symptoms the athlete is likely to experience if he is training properly:

- During the first week or two of sharpening, the runner will notice particular difficulty in relaxing during the faster portion of the 880s. However, after five to seven such workouts he will begin to notice that his legs respond easily to the continued demands of acceleration.

- The athlete will also notice a new sensation in the hour following the completion of the workout. Instead of the mild feeling of physical depression that followed the slow workouts, he should feel unusual leg life and zip.

- It is of particular interest to note the body's reaction to such everyday stresses as climbing stairs following training. I have observed a sensation that the steps are not even there, as I rise with no effort at all. This I rarely feel following slower runs of the same length.

Symptoms of Failure

The body posts certain signs when it is not responding favorably to the sharpen-

ing. These are important to observe in sufficient time for correction, lest the body go into a state of physical depression and performance drop even below the base level.

- Heaviness in the legs and sluggishness following a workout are sure signs that the runner is overdoing it and probably aiming for too much speed at the price of relaxation.

- A general "I don't care attitude" concerning everyday affairs is characteristic of nervous depletion.

- The desire to quit during races is a sure sign of being overspent. The body should delight in the battle and thirst for competition.

- Persistent leg soreness should not be observed.

- Mild signs of lowered resistance, such as headache, sniffles, etc. are signs of physical depletion.

When the above symptoms of impending danger are diagnosed, the runner should return to slow running as before until they disappear. If the runner notices that his legs lack zip during the beginning of a speed workout, he should avoid the fast running for a day or so until freshness is restored.

The athlete must also be aware that his resistance to illness during this period of peak racing fitness is not as strong as it was during the base training phase. His edge, though sharp, can easily be broken.

Termination: The athlete's body cannot withstand the strain of racing and training at this peak level indefinitely. Generally speaking, he will probably race well for about three months from the start of his sharpening. The length of time he can hold his peak depends on the thoroughness of his base training, the energy loss he has sustained from hard racing, and the care with which he did the sharpening training.

At this point, the athlete is advised to return to slow running. If he does so before he exhausts his reserves, he will be delighted to observe that he races at very near his peak performances for some time to follow, and only slowly returns to his base level. He can expect to race swiftly for about two months following his return to base training. In about three months he will return to his base level.

If the runner continues sharpening training for too long, he will decline much more rapidly to poor performances. The harder he tries, the lower he will fall. Ultimately, sickness or injury will likely overcome him. In this way nature will force him to take the needed rest. □