

Workshop Notes from Coaching Club Road Runners Theme

South Coaching Conference

Lee Valley Athletics Centre

1 October 2011

This session focused on the challenges facing coaches and leaders in road running clubs and groups. There is such a wide range of ages, abilities and aspirations as well as beginners joining throughout the year and more experienced runners looking to make progress or happy to stay at their current standard. How do you plan sessions to meet all their needs?

In the second part of the session, the Workshop focused on the observation and analysis of running technique and practical ways of improving strength and power in road runners.

The Workshop was delivered by Martin McCarthy and Bud Baldaro with support from Chris Benning. The topics covered reflected the needs expressed by coaches on the Local Coach Development Programme.

These notes complement the presentation from the Workshop and reflect comments made by coaches and leaders as well as the presenters. There was a huge enthusiasm and willingness to share ideas.

Training Sessions Suggestions for large mixed ability groups

- **Paarlauf or Pair Running** – Pair your slowest with your fastest runners to create even teams.
- **Repetition Running** – Following each repetition of a given distance, the fastest in each group moves up a group and the slowest moves down a group.
- **Everyone runs together** – and encourages each other (used by Bud Baldaro for his student groups)
- **Repetitions** – Divide into groups according to ability but end with some group repetitions or relays.
- **Steady Run** – Lead runners go ahead but then run to the back of the group.
- **Repetition Runs** – try going out for 5 minutes, then everyone turns back so the slower runners end up in the lead after the turn.
- **Steady run** – the slowest runner plans the route. The faster runners don't know the way so have to double back to stay on the route.
- **Quadrant** – using a square of roads with approximately 200m from each corner to the next, the runners are allocated to each corner and run for a given time.

- **Pace Judgement** – Practice pace judgement in sessions so that runners don't run too fast in a race. Don't rely automatically on the Garmin, but get the pace "in your head." Set a target time for a repetition and give a prize for the most accurate judgement across the complete session, whilst the worst pace judger buys the drinks.
- **Up the Clock Session** – using cones to mark out a circuit of 400m upwards, set the following session and use a whistle to indicate start of repetition and start of the recovery. The group starts together but quickly disperses according to their own pace –
 - 1 min run – 1 min recovery, 2 min run – 90 secs recovery, 2.5 mins run – 90 secs recovery, 3 mins run – 2 mins recovery, 4 mins run – 2.5mins recovery, 3 mins run - 2 mins recovery, 2 mins run – 90 secs recovery, 1 min run – 1 min recovery (repetitions at 5K pace)

Many variations can be used in terms of the distance run and the recovery and this session can be used very effectively with a large mixed ability groups. This session was used by Martin McCarthy for a Flying Coach visit to Hardley Runners on 5/5/2011.
- **Hills** – These are a vital part of a training programme and there are many types of hill sessions. The hill should not be too steep and the focus should be on the arm drive, the knee lift and the foot plant. Run to a time not a distance when working with a large group of runners. Two particular sessions were recommended
 - Martin McCarthy recommended running off the top of hills. This involves running up the hill at a steady pace and then raising your pace at the top of the hill over 50m-100m before jogging back to the start.
 - Bud Baldaro recommended a mix of Tempo Running – hills – tempo running.
 - Downhill running – caution is advised and a low gradient if used at all.
 - Circuits involving both uphill and downhill. Ideally incorporating hills of different steepness and length
- **Hill alternatives** – if you live in a flat area, a certain imagination is required to get the same effect as hill training –
 - Stadium steps
 - Ramps to car parks
 - Pedestrian bridges over railway lines
- **Tempo Runs** – This describes a run conducted at 85% of maximum sometimes described as "controlled discomfort." The session involves a change of pace before returning a steady pace e.g. 3 miles at a steady pace, a block of 1 k runs at 10k pace followed by steady running again.
- **Recovery Run** – This is conducted at talking pace.

- **Rest** - This is an important part of any training schedule and should be regarded as a session.
- **Which sessions to choose?** Most runners have limited time. It was recommended that a training week includes a long run, a medium run and a speed session. The athlete was aiming for a 50 mile race in this instance, but the principle applies to all.
- **Transition** – Any transition such as from grass or forest to more road running e.g. in the Autumn, or grass or road to the track e.g. in the spring, should be gradual to allow the body to adjust to the different terrain.
- **Treadmills** - If using a treadmill for a session, set in on a 1% incline to simulate the effects of running outdoors.
- **Disabled runners** – A number of coaches had runners with a learning disability within their groups and ensured that a running buddy was assigned to assist them at each session, so that they could participate in the group session.
- **Fitting in your own running** – Some clubs have resolved this by taking a team coaching response. By building up the number of coaches and leaders, it's possible to have a rota, allowing each coach to pursue their own training.
- **Heart rate monitors** – These are very useful for relaxed and controlled recovery.
- **Health and Safety check points**
 - Don't forget to wear hi-viz jackets.
 - Check whether there is ice/obstacles on the roads.
 - Remember that large groups of runners can look potentially threatening, particularly on narrow paths or cycle ways, especially in the dark.
 - Allocate colours to key routes and identify checkpoints on each route for groups to meet or to use in an emergency.
- **Running Style** – try holding leaves in each hand to encourage relaxation of the upper body. You mustn't crunch them! Use this technique for athletes who have upper body tension.
- **Knowing Your Athletes** – It's vital to know your athletes and their aspirations. We discussed the difficulty of know everyone in a big group and identified that we need a structure within a club or group so that people belong to a smaller unit and have a coach or leader who knows them and can mentor them. It's vital to have trust between the athlete and coach and to know the full extent of their commitments, outside their time allocated for running. It's also very important that runners take ownership of their improvement as opposed to relying on the coach.
- **Progression** – A good suggestion from the group was to have a 10 week Beginners Course to take beginners up to 5k, then an Improvers Course up to 10k, and following this, they join the club.

- **Strength and Power** – Bud Baldaro recommends the Oregon Circuit for runners. This was devised by the coach to Luiz de Oliveira, the coach to Olympic 800m champion, Joaquim Cruz. The principle is to intersperse exercises with running. This could take the format of 8-10 exercises with 1k running in between. The exercises could focus on the upper body or legs or a mix of both. The session can be flexible to suit your group and could be adapted for indoor work or around a track or grass circuit e.g. 8 exercises every 2 laps. The emphasis should be on perfecting the correct technique for the exercises in the first instance and going for a specific time rather than distance. The circuit can be repeated 3-4 times with a recovery in between the repetitions.
- **Running Technique** – We debated this at length and agreed that good running technique can improve performance and help to avoid getting injuries. Drills and core mobility exercises can be used to improve technique.

Bud recommended 4 exercises and advised that these can be done after training, whilst watching TV (?) They can be done daily, increasing to 3-5 sets of each exercises, holding the exercise for 30seconds.

- The front plank
- Left side plank
- Right side plank
- The bridge – can be extended to bringing up alternate legs.
- Lunges, going forward and back.

In terms of drills, coaches demonstrated drills to each other, including high knees, skipping, running backwards (using arms). (Further examples of drills can be found on the internet if you search “form drills for runners”).

- **STYLE CHECKLIST**

	Upper body	Comment
1	Head is erect facing ahead	
2	Eyes gaze down	
3	Jaw and face are extremely relaxed	
4	Shoulders are relaxed	
5	Arms swing comfortably at the side	
6	Angle of the elbows is 90 degrees or less	
7	Hands stay high (don't drop below hips)	
8	Arms don't cross the midline of the torso	
	Remember – the backswing is what	

	<p>allows for forward power and the arms only swing forward to recover for the next backswing.</p> <p>Proper arm movement and positioning allows the legs to do their job.</p>	
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- **Lower Body**

1	Hips should be forward - centre of gravity over driving foot	
2	Legs drive forward in a straight line	
3	Knee lift relaxed and not too high	
4	Foot lands naturally on heel or forefoot	
5	Slight forward lean	
6	Effective balance between foot strike, push off and momentum	
7	Effective stride lengthening can only be done properly by pushing off more forcefully.	

- **Further reading**
 - **Charlie Spedding – “From Last to First”**
 - **Sage Rowntree – “The Athlete's Guide to Recovery: Rest, Relax, and Restore for Peak Performance”**

Christine Benning

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