

Race preparation Guide

This guide is intended to help you think through how to maximize your results from your races.

Pre-Race

Sleep. Make sure you get a good night's sleep the night before and more important is a good night two nights before. Often runners are so excited about a race that they find it difficult to sleep the night before a big race.

Dinner. People talk about carbo-loading, but it is really up to the individual and not really necessary for races 5K and below. Don't experiment – stick with healthy foods you enjoy.

Water. Drink plenty of water during the day so that you are well hydrated for the race. Drink some before the race – but not enough to make you feel bloated.

Eat. For afternoon meets - get a good breakfast and lunch. Then bring a light snack to eat at 1:30 or 2:00PM for a 4:00PM race. Try to get something with some carbohydrates and maybe some protein – not just sugar. Candy bars will give you short bursts of energy, but this is long distance running and you need something more substantive... For Saturday morning meets – a light breakfast with maybe a light snack.

Meet Bag Gear. Here is a quick check list:

- Running Shoes
- Spikes
- Uniform – Top & Bottom
- Socks
- Warm-ups – tops & bottoms
- Extra safety pins
- Rain gear
- Dry shirt for after the race
- Water
- Pre-race snack
- Post race snack & water/Gatorade

Course Map. Know the course and know where the mile and 2 mile mark are. Know where the final 1/4 mile is so you can drive to the finish. Know the hills and corners.

Meet Schedule. Know when your race is. Know which races are before your race, and at which race you should be warming up, putting on your spikes, and reporting to the starting line.

Warm-up

Relax. Stay out of the sun. Stay warm when it is cold (if you are cold, your body will work harder to warm you up). Stay cool when you are warm (your body works harder keeping you cool). The basic idea is to make sure you do not waste energy before the race. Keep off your legs so they are fresher. Burn less energy by keeping a comfortable body temperature (enough sweats for cold days, enough rain gear for cold, rainy days).

1-3 Miles. Running 1-2 miles before the race "warms-up" your body - for top varsity runners, you can do up to 3+ miles to make sure that you get in enough mileage for days that are not peak performance days. It is best to start this about 40 minutes before the race. An alternate strategy is to run 2-3 miles an hour before the race to look at the course. We like to do a short warm-up (1/2 mile) at threshold pace about 20 minutes before the race.

If you have several hours before a race after a long bus ride – 2 warm-ups is sometimes good – right off the bus to get loose and the pre-race warm-up when you normally start your warm-up. Rule of thumb that we use – on hot days do a shorter faster warm-up and on colder days do a longer slower warm-up.

Stretch. Before and after the warm-up, stretching is very important. Racing is the toughest thing on muscles. If the muscles are limber and well stretched, then runners can actually run more easily and greatly lower the risk of injury.

Strides. Between the 1-2 mile warm-up and the race – strides are good to do. These are 50-100 meters in length depending on how you feel. They should be at slightly faster than race pace – not a full sprint. At least 4, but probably not more than 8 should be done. This builds on the warm-up and the stretching.

Heart rate. You should have an elevated heart rate when you are at the line. This means that you need to be doing a few strides in the few minutes before the gun goes off. Do not just go to the line and stand around talking for 5 minutes. Find a way to do some strides. Stretch. Keep moving.

Nerves. Almost all runners get the "butterflies" before a race. This is actually good – it means your body is preparing itself and getting tuned up to handle the effort of the race. Get into a routine – this will help you calm your nerves and make things a part of a normal process that you can feel comfortable with from race to race.

Acknowledge your competitors. Feel free to shake their hands and wish them well.

The Race

Plan & Goals. You should go into the race with a plan. How fast you want to run. How fast you want to go out. When to remind yourself to keep working. Who you want to stick with. What are your goals for place and time?

Team. "...the strength of the wolf is the pack." One of the most powerful elements in a successful race is running with your teammates in packs. Helping each other out, pushing each other, sharing the pace-setting duties, setting a proper pace all make running easier. Cross country and Track are two of the most individual of sports, but yet the most team oriented...

Controlled Start. Any mistake you make will be running too fast during the first 1 - 3 minutes of the race. Many runners burn themselves out at the start – sprinting to be at the head of the field. This is the absolute wrong thing to do. Cross Country races are 5 km – a pretty long way. If you go out too fast, your body will switch into anaerobic mode – meaning your muscles will be fueled by the non-oxygen system, creating lots of lactic acid. This will cause you to "die" and not run optimally for the full 5 km.

The other benefit of a controlled start is that you are going out with others of similar capability that you can run with for the length of the race. And you get the added benefit of catching the people that went out too fast. This always helps psychologically.

Steady Pace. The most efficient way to run a race is a steady pace throughout. Many times runners will lose concentration during the middle of a race and let their pace slip. It is important to take the lessons learned in previous races as well as measure how your body feels in races to ensure you expending the proper level of energy in the race at the right time - (we call it running within yourself).

Concentration. This is the other common error that runners have – losing concentration on your objectives for the race. Sticking with the runners in front of you, not moving up to catch the next person, letting your pace slip.

Excuses & Pain. It is easy to let self-doubt enter your mind when running. Your pain is increasing, your muscles are tired, and your lungs are working. You can start thinking about something else and making excuses why you do not really want to run quite so hard today. This is the critical decision point where you can lose concentration and decrease your pace. The two best ways to deal with this are:

Breaking opponents. You have someone that you need to beat. It is the last half of the race and you need to break them before the finishing kick. Here are some ideas:

1. Over the hill. Most runners work hard up to the top of a hill and then relax. If you keep your effort the same for 50 meters after the top of a hill, you will open up a gap on other runners around you.

2. Corners. Most runners will slow down on a corner and take a while to accelerate back up to full speed. If you take a corner hard and make sure you are running at good speed after the corner, you can also open up a gap.

3. Surging. Part of a race plan may be to go out fairly slowly the first mile, or to run with a set of competitors for the first 2 miles – then accelerate the pace for at least 400 meters to break your opponents.

Pack running. Nothing is more effective to breaking away from an opponent than your teammates running in a pack. Remember the strength of the wolf is the pack.... A small conversation in the middle of the race – a joke or a few words of encouragement between teammates can help teammates and separate you from opponents. The 3 ideas above can be executed as a pack of runners.

Confidence. Be confident in your training. You have earned the right to run well. You have done too many hard workouts and runs – early in the morning – thru rain and bad weather – to let yourself and your teammates down.

Finishing. Your finish should be starting as early as a mile from the finish line. Evaluate your capability of pace for only 1 more mile – and get to that pace. A consistent, hard driving long drive to the finish will be much more effective than a sprint at the end. Our training is designed to give you the strength to finish the last mile well, and our racing strategy of going out conservatively puts you in a position to finish strongly.

Finish chute. Do not slow down in the finish chute until you are well past the finish line. Remember to get your place card or give your card to the finish line officials – this is your paycheck for the work you just put in.

Post Race

Shake hands with your opponents.

Look around for the people that you were running with during the race. Shake their hands and congratulate them on a nice race and effort. Thank them for their help and motivation.

Cheer your teammates.

Get back on the course or track and cheer your teammates home. Congratulate them when they finish.

Gather the team.

Ask each other about their races - what worked and what did not? What did you learn? Help evaluate your races and what went well and what could have gone better.

Drink

Drink Water or Gatorade. As soon after the race as possible. It will help you recover tremendously.

2-3 Mile Warm-down

More for Varsity. Within 10-15 minutes of finishing the race, you need to do a 2-3 mile warm-down with the team. The whole team should do this. It should be very slow, and you should be talking during the entire warm-down. The purpose is to flush your system of as much lactic acid as possible. It is a proven medical fact that 20 minutes is an optimal time to warm down and flush the system. This not only makes you better prepared to run the next day and less sore that night when you go to bed – it also give you a very good day in terms of mileage.

Stretch.

Before and after the warm down - and when you get home.

Eat & Drink.

Drink something as soon after your race as possible. Eat and drink something as soon after the warm-down as possible. Try something that will get electrolytes back in your body – things with Potassium are good like Bananas, fruit, Gatorade, etc.

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