Training for Distance Running

Training should prepare athletes physiologically by offering progressively more challenging stimuli to train the energy systems, heart, lungs, and muscles. Training should also prepare athletes tactically so that they have an understanding of what will happen with their body during competition.

Children should begin with a general training program. Specificity can increase with age. Training needs to be designed to meet the interests and goals of the members of the training group. In many cases, the coach can provide for specific needs of individuals while orchestrating a workout where everyone is doing the same thing, only at different paces. The workouts and training activities described in the upcoming section provide some ideas on how to meet the developmental needs of athletes within the framework of a group workout. When developing an endurance training regimen for your athletes, you first need to consider these four concepts:

1. *Consistency.* Distance runners need to make running a habit. Children who are new to running should quickly advance to doing some form of endurance running up to three or four days per week. Advanced adolescents can run five or six days per week.
2. *Variability and training the whole athlete.* Although consistency is important, children should not do the same run every day because they will quickly get bored and lose interest in running. Training for the distance events can be fun and interesting with the use of alternative activities that are developmentally appropriate, such as general strength circuits and activities that promote general athleticism.
3. *Progressive loading.* When designing the training schedule, begin very conservatively and progress cautiously. Keep good records and chart the increase in training load. The training load is affected by both volume and intensity. As the championships approach toward the end of the season, the overall volume is dropped and intensity is raised.
4. *Rest, recovery, and regeneration.* Once an athlete is involved in an interesting training program and tastes success in competition, it is easy for the athlete to slip into a cycle of overtraining. Indeed, all athletes need to invest as much thought and energy into recovery and regeneration as they do into their workouts. Variables that athletes (with the help of their parents) can control include making sure the athlete gets enough sleep, eats well, and has a positive attitude. Coaches should provide periodic recovery weeks (e.g., three weeks of progressively harder training followed by a recovery week). Also, coaches can encourage rest and recovery by allowing breaks from training for family vacations and holidays.

Distance-Running Activities

The activities presented here provide work on the different elements of training needed by all distance runners. The activities are divided into three categories: ancillary training, fartlek training, and pace and speed work.

Ancillary Training

Ancillary training refers to activities that support the goal of effective running but are not specific to distance running. These activities help distance runners (and walkers) build the foundation they need to be successful. Ancillary training works to develop the whole athlete. Stronger, well-rounded athletes are less prone to injury and will be able to tolerate more strenuous specific training later in the developmental cycle.

PUSH-UPS

Athletes assume a traditional push-up position with weight distributed evenly over both hands and with either the toes or the knees on the ground. The muscles in the trunk are flexed, and the back is kept straight with the head in alignment with the spine. To perform push-ups, the athlete bends the elbows to lower the body down to the ground and then raises it back up again.

SIT-UPS

Athletes assume a traditional sit-up position with the knees bent and the feet flat on the ground. The muscles of the trunk are flexed, and the back is kept straight with the head in alignment with the spine. To perform sit-ups, the athlete lowers the back down to the ground and then raises it back up again. You can mix up the program and let athletes choose the specific style to be used that day, such as "V style" sit-ups, partner sit-ups, or oblique crunches.

BODY WEIGHT SQUATS

Athletes stand with the feet flat on the ground and shoulder-width apart. The muscles of the trunk are flexed, and the back is kept straight with the hands held down at the sides. While keeping their weight on the heels, athletes bend the knees to lower the body down and then straighten the knees to rise back up.

LUNGES

While standing, athletes step out with one leg, bending it at the knee so that the lower part of the front leg is straight up and down and in line with the knee. The athletes push back off the front leg to the standing position and repeat the move with the other leg.