WORKOUT DESIGN FOR DISTANCE RUNNERS

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with nifty little assists from
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Everything there is to know about designing distance workouts in 50 minutes?

- Well, no, not really. But John Hancock did ask me to address two topics especially:
    1. How do I keep athlete recovery in mind when building workouts?
    2. How do we individualize distance workouts at TCA?

- So, kind of—sort of, yeah, just about every big picture thing I can tell you about our distance workouts in the remaining 48 minutes…
- We'd better get moving here! I'm going to weave individualization in throughout and talk more about recovery at the end.

Issue #1: How do we group distance athletes at TCA?

Potentially as many as three groups, though never more than two to deal with separately on any given day. Most of our individualization happens right here:

- *400/800 Types*
- *800/1600 Types*
- *1600/3200 Types*

You know how it goes. The 400/800 types are fast, or at least you see the potential for real speed in them. They're going to spend time on your 4x800, and possibly run the open 800.

The 800/1600 types are your faster distance runners, plus possibly one or two you're afraid you'll lose if you make them run the 3200 on a regular basis.

The 1600/3200 types are those who simply aren't well suited—and may never be well suited—to run a high-end 800. Finding events for these kids will mean having them run the 3200. But, they also include your Tanner Normans and Kaitlin Hanenburgs.

The 400/800 Type

My examples: Eric Versaw, Clark Mourning, Kelsey Brown, Emily LaValley

Kind of a rare breed at TCA because…

1. May or may not have run cross country, but probably not suited—for whatever reason(s)—for high mileage. If they didn't run cross country, it's very difficult for me to get them out of Coach Daggett's clutches.
2. They rarely, if ever, run 1600s (and almost never 3200s) in meets.
3. Some quality days with Coach Daggett (mostly M). Some quality days with me (mostly W). Rarely with distance on a Max VO2 day. But, they will run reps and ladders with distance.
4. Need at least two recovery days/week of 20 – 25 minute runs. I ask them, with varying success, to run these at a little above recovery pace (steady state). Long and slow does these kids no good whatsoever. These days (T, Th), I split their services with Coach Daggett. We don't have the coaching staff to give these 20-25 minute runs close oversight; the kids simply have to do it.
5. I'll let Coach Daggett speak to his concerns when working with these kids…

The 400/800 Type (Coach Daggett's Perspective)

1. Who's in charge? An athlete needs to have a primary position group.
2. They are either a long sprinter who runs 800s or a short distance kid who runs 400s. One of the coaches needs to be the primary contact who controls the athlete's schedule.
3. If the athlete doesn't know what to do that day they should check in with their primary coach.
4. There should be a pre-established schedule between the coaches each week.

Race Planning

1. Race planning should be a few weeks out with big races in mind.
2. I would want a long sprinter running some 800s to have a combination of low and high competition 800s. I want them to run it fresh and tired.
3. I tend toward two events for our athletes at most meets. The 400 and 800 at the same meet is usually rough, so it might be 4x2 and 800 one week and 400 and 4x4 the next, etc.

The 800/1600 Type

My examples: Adam Avischious, Lauren Hamilton, Regan Mullen, Emily Hanenburg

1. If you gave distance kids their choice, this would be the group most (as in almost all) would choose to be in. But, the training is actually harder for this group than the 16/32 group. Not just anyone can hack this, let alone show up and race well in the 8 and 16. *Not a good group for your Osgood-Schlatter kids.*
2. These kids will typically run the 4x800, so they get plenty of speed work. Usually, they get at least one 3200 per season, though I've not always done that.
3. Some quality days with the 16/32s doing the same workout, some quality days with the 16/32s doing slightly different workouts, some quality days doing totally different workouts than the 16/32s. In general, more higher speed stuff, shorter distances, and faster pacing. Volume of quality, though, usually ends up being only slightly less. Slightly shorter recovery runs, often with the last mile at steady state.
4. A little about the circus when we have 8/16s and 16/32s doing different workouts on the same two lanes (sometimes three) of the track…

When 8/16s and 16/32s share the track for different workouts:

1. We have, at best, three lanes of the track. Sprinters and hurdlers occupy the remaining lanes. Adding to the confusion, soccer is usually practicing in the middle.
2. Coach Hanenburg takes one group. I take the other. There's (usually) no magic formula to decide who gets whom, we just divide it up on the spot.
3. Normally, we alternate directions on the track for workouts. It's near impossible to do that on these days, but occasionally we manage.
4. Starts have to be coordinated for a minimum of passing. Runners have to clear the track immediately with end of each rep. Get all you can done while the other group is taking a break to get heart rates down. Sometimes on ladder workouts we can keep the two groups together for a lot of the reps.
5. Coaches sometimes have to run across soccer field to give splits. Athletes may walk across D rings, but never across soccer field.

The 1600/3200 Type

My examples: Josh Simkins, Megan Brunette, Kaitlin Hanenburg, Tanner Norman, Shelby Stableford

1. Historically, most of our top kids have been 1600/3200 types, but some have had to be talked into it. None of the above, though, had to be talked into it, but I did kind of dial way back on Kaitlin's 800 opportunities without really asking her about it.
2. These kids sometimes run the 4x800, so they're not completely out of the fast stuff. And I try to get them all at least a couple 800s during the season to work on speed.
3. Some of my 16/32s (mostly boys) will eventually become 8/16s as their speed and strength develop.
4. Heavier on Max V02 workouts, longer distances on ladders, and longer distances on recovery run days than 8/16 group.
5. One key to recovery for these kids is not having them run the 3200 every week.

Keeping Athlete Recovery in Mind

1. An ounce of prevention is worth of pound of cure. The less you put athletes in a deep hole, the less extra work it is to manage getting them out of the hole.
2. We do one workout a track season where part of the point is to put them in a big hole. Races take care of all the rest of that that is necessary.
3. **M**, T, **W**, Th, F, **Sa** schedule. Harder workout of week is typically on Monday. Secondary workout on Wednesday. We try to race our top kids on Saturdays, but Saturday can also be a workout. Sunday runs are discouraged. Friday is typically pre-race.
4. If an athlete's heart rate is not down below 120 bpm, they will not start the next set of reps with us (Don't bother with measuring heart rates on intervals.).
5. If an athlete can't make the designated pace on a rep, they sit a rep. The second time it happens, I figure they're cooked and therefore done for the day. Also, 1st interval pacing.
6. I figure it's psychologically better to add reps on for kids who need more work than to pull kids off before a "complete" round of reps, intervals, or ladders is done.
7. If kids ask to cross train, I usually let them. I regret not listening to a kid far more often than I regret listening to a kid. But, you still have to know your kids.
8. Kids with persistent lower leg issues have a designated Thursday cross training day.