TAPERING FOR THE MARATHON

Let’s Start With a Little Lesson in Exercise Physiology

The Three Key Factors to look at in regard to your training program are…

1. Training Intensity
   a. Interval Training
   b. Faster than Marathon Pace runs

2. Training Density
   a. How many runs you do in a week
   b. How often you do a long run
   c. How many days between faster or longer training sessions

3. Training Volume
   a. Total Weekly Volume
   b. Volume of Intensity Training
   c. Volume of the Long Run

When planning a successful taper you should not reduce the combined total of your training by more than 30-40% of your maximum training volume & intensity.

So what does this all mean when it comes down to the last 3 weeks before the marathon?

• Decrease total running volume by 10-12% each week starting 3 weeks out.

• Maintain or even slightly increase the intensity of your faster paced runs but do less total volume of the higher intensity work.

• Give an extra recovery day between high intensity sessions/ long runs.

• Look to have your last marathon long run or marathon pace run somewhere between 17-21 days out from the race. This should be a hard or long effort followed by a few easy days recovery.

• 2 Weeks out you still want to get in a faster paced run (intervals, tempo or marathon pace) in addition to a reduced volume long run.

• On the final week of the race you want to get in one faster paced run about 4-5 days out from race day and then follow it up with some easy runs to keep your legs moving and not feel like you have gone on vacation already.
RACE WEEK CHECKLIST

EQUIPMENT

- Check to see that you have all the gear that you will need for the race - shorts, tops, hats, gloves, sunglasses, etc.
- If anything you have is brand new then take it out for a test run to make sure that it will be fine on race day.

SHOES

- You should have worn the shoes you will race in already.
- If not, then do a few runs in them this week to make sure that they are broken in and won’t cause you any trouble on race day.
- If possible try to wear a new pair of socks that are the same type that you always wear.
- Wearing new socks will help to avoid them from slipping or bunching up in your shoes and should help to prevent blisters.

SUN-BLOCK/SUNSCREEN

- Sunscreen lotion will cause you to heat up when you are running.
- If you are going to use it on race day then put it on early enough in the morning so that it has a chance to get absorbed thoroughly.
- If it is a sunny day then you may want to wear a hat to keep your from getting sunburn as well as helping to avoid overheating.

FOOD

- Plan ahead.
- Know what you will want to eat on the last 2 days before the race and especially on race morning.
- Try to get reservations at your favorite restaurant done now.
- Or, if eating at home, then shop for groceries early.
- Although it is important to be well fueled and hydrated before the race, avoid overloading on carbohydrates and water.
- Know what is just enough and stick with it.
- As you are tapering for the race and you continue to eat what has been normal for you during the training cycle this will act as a carbohydrate loading program – so no need to go over the top and feel water logged and sluggish on race morning.
- The best way to stay on top of your nutrition strategy is to eat smaller meals frequently throughout the day.
- Keep your favorite snacks handy so that when in a jam you don’t go too long without having some food.
DRINKS/GELS

- If you plan on taking in the drinks at the fluid stations (Gatorade Endurance Formula – Lemon Lime) along the course than try to test out these drinks in training so you are comfortable with the taste.
- If you are using gels then make sure you have plenty to bring to the race and have used them in training.
- The PowerBar Gel Station is located at Mile 17. Flavors include: Chocolate, Strawberry Banana, Pomegranate Blueberry Acai, Double Latte, Orange Dream, and Vanilla.
- Don’t forget to take in some water with each gel.

SLEEP

- Get in plenty of sleep 2 and 3 nights out before the race. This is when it really counts.
- If you are staying in a hotel then think about bringing your own pillow if you are a restless sleeper.
- The more you can mimic the sleeping routine that you have at home the better quality sleep you will have before the race.

DAILY ACTIVITIES

- Although you will have more free time to do normal “life” stuff you should try to avoid starting new projects that are too labor intensive.
- Choose activities that will take your mind off the race, but won’t make you tired.
- This is not the time to start that gardening project that you have been putting off.
- Save that DIY project for after the race.

RACE EXPO

- Enjoy seeing all the new shoes, gear and training gadgets that are on display.
- However, unless it is something that you have used many times in training don’t plan on using anything that you purchase there in the race.
- Save it for when you get back home.

RACE STRATEGY

- Use this final week to work on your pacing strategy.
- This is a good time to have a reality check when it comes to the training you did going into the race and matching it up with what is a realistic goal for the race.
- Once you have done that then take a look at the weather and see if any adjustments will need to be made for drastic temperature changes or wind.
- At the end of the day keep your fingers crossed for a nice tailwind!
RACE COURSE MANAGEMENT

START – 4.5 MILES

• Head out of Hopkinton at a controlled pace and let your body gradually warm up and get into a rhythm.
• Run gently on the steep downhill sections and avoid breaking as that will weigh heavily on your quads. Instead use shorter, quicker steps until you have room to open up your stride.
• The first 5K should be about “waking up”. Don’t expect to feel good until you have gone a few miles down the road.
• Look to get a sip of water around 3-4miles. No major need for a carb drink at this point unless the weather is hot or you haven’t had some calories in a while before the start.

4.5 MILES – 10 MILES

• The course rolls down towards Boston with a few small uphill stints along the way.
• This is where you want to establish your goal race pace and you should be running well within yourself. No need to make any drastic changes in pace.
• It is ok at this point to go slightly quicker than goal pace on the downs and then to slow equally on the uphill portions. It is all about the average pace at Boston.
• Don’t forget to drink fluids every few miles (approx 20 minutes).
• If you plan to take gels along the way then have one around 8-9miles. Follow it with a few ounces of water.

10 MILES – 15.5 MILES

• You are now well into the course and you should still be feeling good. Avoid the desire to chase a fast time as there is still a long way to go. Use the few hills in here as an opportunity to work some different muscles. It will give your quads a break and save them for what’s coming ahead.
• As you pass through the narrow streets of Wellesley you will hit the halfway mark. However, although this is the halfway point in distance it is still early on in the race. Enjoy the moment but keep everything in check. Save all of your emotional strength and power of concentration for what lies ahead as you will need it coming out of the hills. For the experienced marathoner the 20 mile mark is the real halfway point.
15.5 MILES – 21 MILES

- The rollercoaster begins.
- As you make your way out of Wellesley and on towards Newton you run down a big hill before mile 16. This will serve as a good indicator as to how your legs are feeling and how you should plan your strategy going forward.
- If your legs are still feeling great then you should look to stretch them out a little bit before getting to the Fire Station at the turn on to Commonwealth.
- If your legs are lacking the pep that they had in the early miles don’t worry – just hold steady and conserve your energy for down the road. Now is not the time to be too aggressive.
- Don’t forget too stay on top of your fluids. It is always easier to drink on flat or downhill portions of the course as opposed to the uphills so take in those fluids and gels now before getting to the Newton Hills.
- At 17.5 miles is the first major incline. It often feels like the worst one of the bunch because you just haven’t been running uphill for so long. Not to worry as once you get over this one and have a chance to recover then your legs will feel much better for the ones ahead.
- There is no way around the hills from 19-21. Although they aren’t really that steep or that long it is where they are on the course that matters most. So the best thing to do is to maintain your effort level here and not worry too much about the pace. You are not looking to conquer the hills as much as you want to get past them without expending all your energy. If you do this then you will have plenty of time over the last 5 miles to get back what you lost through the hills. If you are too aggressive here then it can make the last 7 miles very tough.

21 MILES – THE FINISH

- As your crest Heartbreak Hill and make your way past Boston College and onto Cleveland Circle you heart rate should be returning to normal. Your legs might not be ready yet but give it time. The downhill section from 21-22 is steep and it may not be until you get on to Beacon Street where your stride feels back to normal.
- Although you are 75% of the way to the finish there is still plenty of work to be done. Stay on top of your fluids and keep those calories coming in. You want to offset dehydration and glycogen depletion as much as possible at this point.
- If you have managed the course well so far and have held strong to your pace then now is the time to make your move. The rolling flow of the course down Beacon Street will allow you to chase some faster miles if you can open up your stride.
- Keep your eyes open for Fenway Park, the famous CITGO sign and the Boston skyline. These are all great motivators to push you along for the last few miles.
- A quick trip down Commonwealth where you will dip under Mass Ave is the last major obstacle on the course. As you exit the tunnel you have about ½ mile to go.
- Turn right onto Hereford and then make your way up to Boylston Street.
- As you hit Boylston give it all you have and use whatever is left in the tank to make your way to the finish line. Let the cheers of the crowd carry you on and rejoice in all that you have accomplished.

- Congratulations! You have conquered Boston.