

MENTAL PREPARATION

We've all been there in a race, we're teetering on the edge of our limits, tip too far into the red and you're blowing up. As much as I don't enjoy David Goggins "get hard" mentality, his mental game is rock solid. His [40% rule](#) is worth giving some insight to. It basically states that when we first want to give up or give in we're only 40% done. Understanding how to become more resilient and how to be tough out on the course and in daily training comes from build mental strength and strategies. The article below is the cliffnotes of a 60 minute podcast episode available on YouTube. If you're reading this in the off-season, no better place to start utilizing these tools!

Trusting your Training

Countless pre race interviews you hear people answer the question "what was going through your head as you broke away/ made the move/ caught the lead pack and broke away?" - "I just trusted my training".

There is a lot more to it than simply just "trusting your training". As a coach my goal is to create programming that helps build confidence and improve your ability to build fitness that meets the specific demands of your goal race. This could be honing your ability to run up hill, build endurance to run for hours on end, or to have a lights out kick at the end of the day.

Here are a few questions to ponder before race day and answer "Yes" to before race day:

- Have I trained on specific courses that match my goal race?
- What are the demands of the race?
 - Environmental (heat/ humidity)
 - Hilly / Mountainous / Flat
 - Extensive Endurance/ Track & Speed

Tempered Excitement

People can oscillate between two extremes - extremely excited to race and anxious/ nervous before race day. There is such a thing as a happy medium for race day and workouts. If you're overly excited, you can often find yourself going out too hard before crashing and burning. The opposite which is fueled by anxiety, doubt, and fear lead to underperformance from the outset. This often looks like a race that was far and away from your ability that was seen in workouts. They both feel similar - a lack of control and chaos in the moment, difficulty concentrating or an overwhelming focus on a "limiting belief". The belief that this is meant to fail, putting all your eggs in a metaphorical basket can be extremely detrimental.

- One "bad" workout doesn't define your training cycle and certainly doesn't define the outcome on race day.
- Find a balance between anxiousness and excitement. Utilizing B and C races can help work on pre-race anxiety and help you implement tools
- Be willing to leave money in the bank in late stage workouts. There is power in knowing that you could have done another rep or another 20:00 at race pace. There is significant power in self control
- Create a pre-race routine. Our bodies love rhythm. Creating a routine helps temper anxiety and build confidence that things are "going right"

Visualization

Our brains are wired to look for threats. We love to work ourselves up into a mental froth over what can “go wrong” on race day. This usually means that we’re not thinking about the most important things: did you train? Was it specific? Do you have a routine? Instead, we simply look for the things that oppose convention and fit a negative narrative. When we’re going for a major performance, we have to visualize success and build a narrative of success - instead of wondering “how can I F\$%k this up, try to shift into “how can I succeed”?

- Formulate a picture of success.
 - What is your place of unlimited possibility?
- Develop positive self talk - “I got this”, “I’m strong”, “I’ve done harder workouts”
 - Test this in workouts
 - Test this in long runs
 - Test this in smaller / lead in races
- Scenario Planning - How do you shift when things go sideways?
 - How will you handle a sour stomach?
 - What if you drop a gel
 - What if you see a slow split in a race?
 - Think through scenarios, build plans
- Make time for Visualizing
 - In the 2 weeks leading in, take 5 to lay down and visualize yourself on the course, succeeding!
 - Visualize yourself overcoming a past race mistake

When the heat is on!

What do you do when things start sliding sideways or confidence begins to shift negative? If you are a good visualizer, you should have some tools in place for yourself. The biggest you can make is thinking that you have it all figured out. Sometimes these scenarios are simply thought experiments that change how you pack and prepare for a race. Other times, it's about taking a risk and seeing it pay off. Let's dive in.

What's worked in the past for you in race?

- Did you negative split?
- Did you sit at the back fo the pack through 1200 before accelerating?
- Did you add a few minutes of up tempo running in your warm up to get your body prepped?

What's worked in training?

- Doing a specific workout before a marathon to determine readiness? (this can be a good or bad thing to hang on to - it has a big opportunity to hurt your confidence)
- What race-day nutrition? What day before fueling? Pre-workout/ long run breakfast choices?

These are all things you need to be prepared and make sure you have in place prior to race day.

Key Tool: Sit down and write down what works. What is your recipe. Assess your last couple of races and ask: what went right? Why?

What do I do if I start to shift negative and everything else is in place?

This can happen when you've seemingly prepared your mind and body to a T but something still feels off. We can overthink an injury into reality, or simply start to self-sabotage out of a fear that we might succeed. We may prevent ourselves from pushing ourselves to the bitter end because we're afraid of how it might look, or simply a fear that we might fail if we push that hard. These are extreme and more than likely, you're struggling with a feeling of anxiety - feeling too good too early or even feeling tired earlier than you wanted both can lead to these ear worms of negativity drilling into our brains.

Deep Breathing

- Resetting your breathing with a deep belly breath is essential to engage your sympathetic nervous system that engages the fight-or-flight response. A few of these can help lower your heart rate and help lower the overall pressure of the moment.
- Nasal breathing is helpful too. The classic in through the nose, out through the mouth breath is a great way to hit "reset" at the 5K marks in a marathon or to line you up for a big moment in a race. This could be lining up for your kick in a 5K or fully committing for the end of a race.

Throw away negative thoughts

- Recognize, interrupt, act. This is not an instantaneous framework. This is a tool you must practice in training. When you feel the negative thoughts coming in you have to first recognize that you're having negative thoughts. This step of recognizing can be very hard and could take dozens of workouts to develop and hone ahead of a race. Once you have recognized that negative thoughts you need to interrupt the negativity. This could be as simple as saying "you're going negative", "Shift to positive", "we're not done here". Simply making a statement isn't enough, you must send a signal to your brain that you're making a shift. To act simply means that you're taking a deep breath, a snap of your fingers, or visualizing your success or letting out a sharp quick breath. While small, these simple actions put the negativity behind you and point your intentions forward. Thoughts are not always reality.

Positioning

- Remember why you're out here. What are you training and fighting for? Is this the realization of months of early mornings and hundreds of miles of training? How many late nights friends did you give up for early mornings with the road? You have come too far to give up now.

- I have shared with many people over the years of an Ethiopian training partner Mesfin Haftu. I was trying to hang on for 400 repeats and he said to me “don’t be afraid to hurt”. It was in that moment that I found another gear, to push forward and through discomfort. Late in a race or a workout, it’s a great reminder that pain ends, and I can’t be afraid of it.

Deeper Thinking

- **What are some tools you can implement to improve your race day sharpness?**
- **What are 3 scenarios you’ve experienced in the past that led to struggles in workouts or poor performance on race days?**
 - **What protections can you put in place to avoid these mistakes in the future?**
- **What 3 things do you struggle with most on race day or in workouts?**
 - **Do you need to breath, reframe, or reposition yourself?**
- **What is your place of unlimited possibility, if you could build a perfect race or training scenario what would it look like? (write it out)**
 - **How would it feel?**
 - **What does it look like?**
 - **What role do you play?**
 - **Who else is there?**
 - **How do you talk, act, and show up in this vision?**
- **What is your vision for your next race?**
 - **What are you able to overcome?**
 - **What are you telling yourself?**
 - **What do you feel at the finish line?**
 - **What do you feel at the start line?**
 - **How does this version of you handle tough times?**