



Let's Talk Running... Mental Barriers

"This is your brain on running"

This article was published in the February 2004 issue of Runners World by Jeff Galloway and outlined some can't-fail strategies to overcome mental barriers. He commented about that what might be hindering your running is not your quads or calves, but your brain. He states, "Luckily, our bodies can be Justas strong – if not stronger – than our minds." The following training strategies will show you how to overcome all those negative mental messages that have been hindering your training. Here is a summary of the four different training techniques.

Hills: Sneak up on Them

Galloway recommends scheduling a run in a hilly area once a week. Start out jogging slowly for the first mile to get into a comfortable rhythm. Then run only a dozen strides up the hill and jog back down. Walk for 30 to 60 seconds and repeat, but then go a few strides farther up the hill before jogging down. Repeat again, going even farther up the hill. Keep your effort level faster than a jog, but it shouldn't be too taxing. Your brain will enjoy the rhythm of exercise. The first time out, do only three or four repeats. Increase the number of repeats by one each week.

Speed Work: Take One More Lap

Galloway states, "Complex speed work session can be too much for the mind to deal with, especially as your body begins to tire." He recommends focusing on completing one very limited segment of work at a time. For example, at the beginning of an 8-lap track session, start by running just one lap. At the conclusion of that lap, say "one more," and then power through the next lap. By allowing your body to complete the task at hand (running one lap) without thinking about the next lap will simplify the entire effort.

Long Runs: Go One More Mile

Long runs can be tough on the body and brain. Your mind doesn't like workouts that take a long time and your legs don't like workouts that cover significant distances with all the pounding. Galloway suggests taking walk breaks to help overcome both of these obstacles. When you insert regular walk breaks, a long run becomes a series of short runs. The key is to start this from the very beginning. For example, if you insert a 1-minute walk break after every mile of a 10 miler, your mind has the simplified task of just focusing on runs that are 1 mile in length. Furthermore, your body gets used to planned breaks that allow for recovery while allowing you to continue making progress. This approach will ultimately reduce the physical and mental stress of running long distance.

Racing: Search for the Extra Reward

"Your mind can come up with lots of reasons to hate racing: the pressure of competing, the hard effort, the fear of failure," states Galloway. So the strategy is to come up with an even stronger reason to enjoy racing. He recommends starting with the race flyer. Skip over all the info about the race itself, and zero in on the post-race refreshments and freebies. Also, add another reward by getting a friend who is also running the race to meet you for lunch afterward so you can share stories. Free stuff, good food, great company, and the satisfaction of completing the distance will keep your focus on the positive.

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