

Captain Andy Duncan's Mental Training

Before I begin, I am in no way qualified to talk about this – I'm an undergraduate Historian and know little about the brain, and the techniques/views below may be flawed. But I believe they work. For some people, this may already be second nature, for others they may find a cavalier or more spontaneous approach to training/racing works better for them. You have to find what works best for you.

And apologies for the language, but it's there for emphasis.

The mental side of running probably accounts for 90% of performance.¹ On a basic level, your brain tells your body how to run, controlling your legs, arms, lungs, heart etc. Less intuitively, your mind can play an important role in helping you excel, beat your opponents and set new performance levels.

Wanting to run

Why do you run? To enjoy it? Want to win? Want to push yourself? Realising why you do run is most important. It gives you a fundamental reason why you are running around Jesus Green in the pissing rain.

Wanting to run well

Don't settle for a level of running which is easy. You have to stretch yourself. Don't be scared by how good you can be, be *inspired* by it. Don't think to yourself "I'm not going to make the Olympics" or "I'm not going to make the Blues team so there's no point trying". Aim high, though realistically. You CAN do it, and you WILL.

Goals

So you want to run well? NOW set a goal. For example, it may be breaking 2 minutes for 800m or 2hr 45mins for the marathon this season. This is your goal, and it is **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic and **T**ime-specific. Or **SMART**. This sounds proper sad to some, but gives you something solid and focused to work from.²

Write it on paper, maybe sign yourself a contract. Or use the Goals Sheet at end of this document. **Visibly** seeing your goal will help you remember it.

Whilst having goals, don't ever put yourself under pressure to perform. There's always other days, other races – indeed, you are as good as your next race...!

Long-term plan

So now you have your goal. Between now and the business end, you have to train to get yourself your goal. How? Now you break down the plan it smaller, specific chunks, which add up to the bigger goal. This is where your reps sessions, steadies strength work, tactics -- even diet come in. Depending how serious you are, everything you are doing should be feeding into your goal. Want to go and get battered at the formal swap? Think again. Don't fancy getting out of bed for the long run? Don't be soft!! You have to be consistent.

¹ Remember, 42.5% of statistics are made up on the spot!

² <http://www.topachievement.com/smart.html>

Mental Training, or “Mental Reps”

Believe it or not, you can train whilst sitting in a chair relaxing every muscle in your body, and this can lead to improved performance. It’s worked for me, and it’s free, definitely injury free and doesn’t take long.

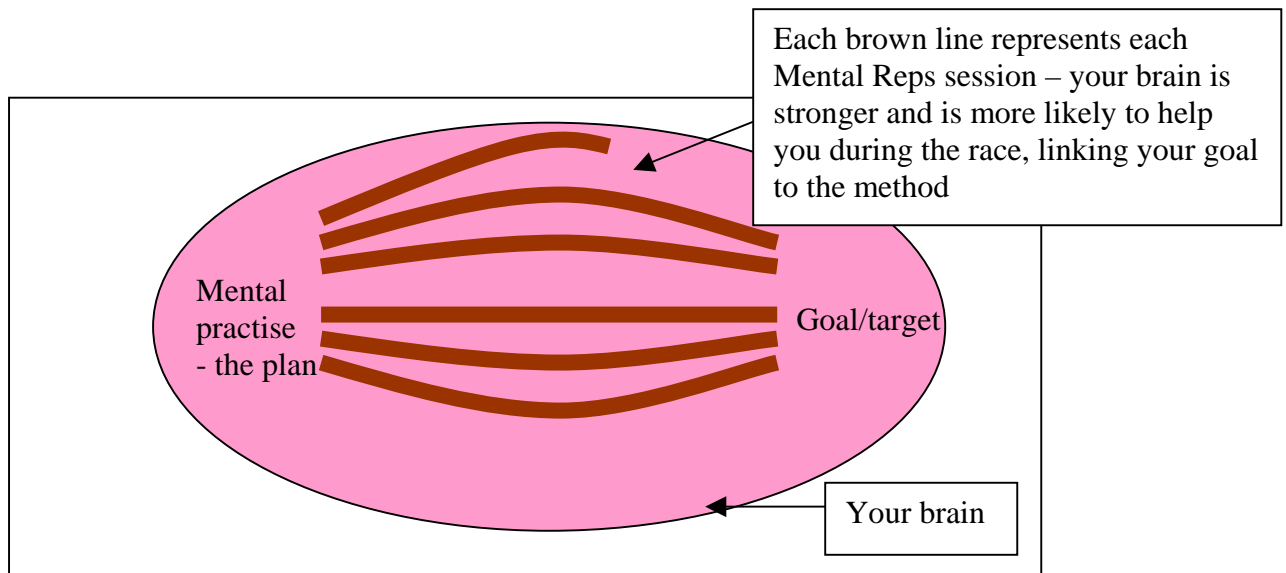
Sit quietly in a chair or lie on floor/bed. Relax. Every muscle. Close your eyes. Deep breaths. Think of your favourite view, or pretend you’re on your favourite steady run. Anything to make sure you are 100% relaxed and deep within yourself.

Now let’s start mental training. Here is where you can “practise” anything you want. Race tactics, focusing on your goals, getting yourself motivated. Only try and do one thing at a time. If you want to work on improving your 800m race tactics, for example, only do this for a two-week period and nothing else.

Example:

So you want to race 800m well. Pretend you are on the start-line. You might know the track you are racing at, so envisage it. The gun goes off. Now, practise your race the way you want it to go. Don’t imagine it going wrong. So you set off fast, nice and relaxed round the bend. You break at the green line and head straight to the bend at the 200m start line, the shortest route. You feel **good**.... Round the bend to the water-jump area, you’re in a good position. 400m, the bell goes, **perfect** on 59secs split time as you planned. You are feeling **amazing**, but alert of those around you. Then 300m to go, you move through the gears and mentally kicking. Round to 200m to go, *then* 150m to go. From **HERE** it’s eye-balls out, giving everything you got but still keeping your form, nice and tall... working those arms... *fast* to the finish...

Doing this training frequently, say 2-3 times a week makes you mentally strong.³ Before you even step on the track, you have done the race 10-15 times before. The plan is engrained. See this crap diagram:



Don’t imagine your race going totally wrong, be POSITIVE. Of course you can think/imagine of how you respond to alternative situations e.g. you get a stitch or you’re boxed-in, but imagine POSITIVELY how you’d respond to it. Be creative with how you do these sessions in your head. Come race day, you may be nervous, but you know exactly what you want to do and how.

³ Maybe there’s something about neuro-linguistic programming here, ask Derren Brown

You can use these reps for loads of purposes –even non-running ones. Maybe you just want to relax and go somewhere else to get away, or maybe you need to get motivated and work hard, so repeat in your head “I will work harder”. Remember to stay focused and relaxed, and stick to one type of practise for 2 weeks or otherwise you won’t be as focused. Aim for 15-20min sessions – the time does go fast!

It sounds wacky, but so is donning lycra (or short shorts) and running around muddy fields in circles to some people. Try it for a month, 2-3 times per week.

At the same time, it is important to physically feel and appreciate your race tactics. Therefore, plan this into your training along with your mental preparation. If you are planning to kick in a race from 2km out from home, then in your training integrate this so you know how it feels.

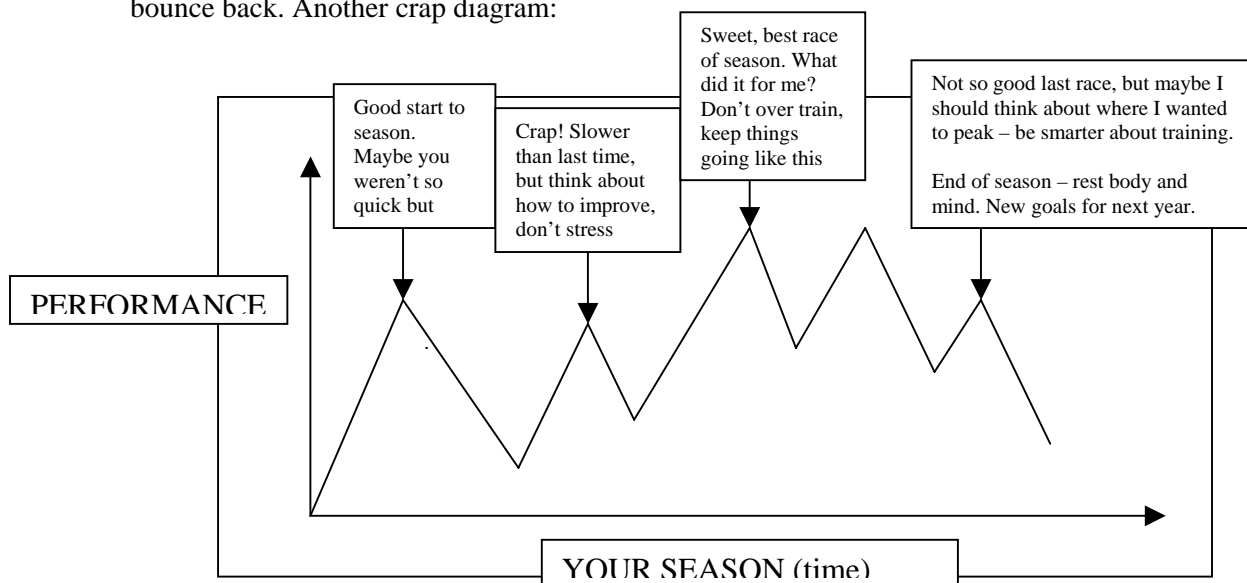
Competition

Let’s get competitive. While racing is all about participation, do yourself and your competitors justice and give 110% in your racing. This is it, this is why you’ve been training, so do it well.

If you have a specific competitor/rival i.e. Oxford, then you HAVE to beat them. In the middle/end of a race, don’t be soft and let them win, HAVE ‘EM. You CAN and you WILL beat them. If you have an Oxford vest in front of you, work up to and past them. If they’re coming back at you, say in your head “F*** off, no, I am going to beat you”. This is where you can squeeze every last bit of effort in your body.⁴

Mental responses to bad races/training

Sometimes things don’t go to plan. But mentally you have to be POSITIVE and bounce back. Have a break. Then see what went wrong rationally – did you miss something out? Learned something new? If it was out of your hands, then don’t beat yourself up. You can’t always be at your absolute best, or always peaking. The whole point about peaking is you have top days, then some troughs – you will bounce back. Another crap diagram:



⁴ May I refer you to Alf Tupper, the Tough of the Track http://www.toughofthetrack.net/tough_poem.htm

Injury

You will sometimes be injured. It happens. But remember, you can still train both physically (cross-training/aqua jogging) and mentally (Mental Reps!).

Approach injury POSITIVELY. You will get better. This is just a 3 month, maybe 12 month lay-off in a 10 year running career. Use you injury time to eliminate other issues, stretch, get stronger in other areas. Often, runners can *improve*, yes *improve* when injured. You may find you want it more, or maybe more savvy about training/racing. Use your head – you want to run still, so do everything to get back to fitness. Your body is amazing and CAN and WILL heal!

Good times

Enjoy them and savour them. When you succeed, it should be a great feeling. Use those positive times for the future. Dip into your memories, and spur yourself onto higher levels, or help yourself out of troughs. Get better and better, be the best you can be.

Last bit

You have a brain so train it, use it and look after it. While physically some humans are naturally superior, your brain can help you catch up – “it’s not the size of the dog but the size of the fight in the dog” – as the H&H site says sometimes if you click refresh enough.

To sum up, want to run, do it well and don’t be soft. Just do it (cheers Nike!).

Extras

Obviously, all this stuff above comes together with the physical work of training, injury prevention, getting physio etc.

Other quick tips:

- Cross-training – is a break from running, has added benefits and rests strained areas of body. Weights if done properly can make you strong.
- Injury prevention by resting well, diet and strength work. Remember your core-stability!
- Sports-massage – is expensive but can make you feel brand new. Maybe try a foam roller too.
- Training-diary – if you’re not keeping one you are missing one BIG trick. Note down what you do each day, times etc. and then refer back to it. Maybe if you are keen note your resting heart-rate, weight or amount of sleep – then you can pick out your body’s cycles and plan for them.

By Andrew Duncan, CUH&H Club-Captain 2007/8

Credits: none too specific, but probably picked up bits from around the place, including my coach Andy Fox, and some of the people quoted below.

Great quotes:

“My greatest power in life is my power to choose. I am the final authority over me. I make me.” Terry Orlick

“Where your mind goes, everything follows.” Terry Orlick

“The one thing over which you have absolute control is your own thoughts. It is this that puts you in a position to control your own destiny.”

“A journey of a lifetime begins with a single vision - followed by one step, then another and another.” (Old Chinese proverb).

“...every tough achievement being like a kiss on the wind -- you send it out in the air, invest on it and then wait, hope, suffer, until at some stage, often unexpectedly, it comes back...” Paolo Natali, VM XC Blues winner 2006 and 2007

Great reference: Steve Backley knows what he’s on about...

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/athletics/skills/6615335.stm>

CUH&H – MY GOAL



MY GOAL FOR THIS TERM:



WHAT I NEED TO DO TO ACHIEVE GOAL:

1. TRAINING – PHYSICAL AND MENTAL
2. NUTRITION – 5 A DAY, HIGH PROTEIN, HIGH CARBS, WATER!
3. INJURY PROOFING – WARM UP, CORE-STABILITY, LISTEN TO MY BODY
4. REST! – 8 HOURS SLEEP, REST WHEN TIRED/UNWELL

Two quotes:

“My greatest power in life is my power to choose. I am the final authority over me. I make me.”

- Dr T. Orlick

"Talk less, run more."

- Dr Mike Turner