

## Hints

The sun still hid behind the trees, low in the early morning sky. The birds chirping the start of their day were making more noise than the limited few cars sallying forth. The air was thick with heat. It was a heavy heat with hints of oppression for later that day.

I stood just 10 meters behind the blue track's start/finish line, preparing for the first of three sets of speed intervals. A curve followed by a half-lap jog followed by a half-lap followed by a half-lap jog followed by a full lap followed by a three-quarter lap jog followed by a lap and a half followed by a full lap jog. Three times. The curve now had my attention, though I did notice the air was not moving. It was hot.

I jogged into the start, leaning forward at the waist ever so slightly, touching my thumbs gently atop my middle fingers, my hands curled, my arms relaxed and their swing short and crisp. Passing the finish of the curve, I pressed the lap button on my watch, then eased into the jog before a quick glance showed me I had run that distance quick. Really quick.

During the jog, I pondered the effect on the next repeat, as in could I retain the same quick pace for twice as long. This morning's session was designed to be quick segments, run very quickly, with recovery just long enough to reduce the heartrate to a normal brisk walking pace. Maybe the first one was just an accident. I could feel my singlet starting to stick to my skin.

I accelerated into the half-lap repeat, adjusted into my stride, and relaxed down the front grandstand straight and around the curve, hit the lap button, downshifted into my jog and looked. Damn if I didn't hit the same quick pace, only longer. Maybe this morning will redeem the long, sweltering day ahead. It was now clearly worth a shot. Of course, it could also be a hint of impending disaster. I hate speedwork on a sweltering day.

Accelerating into the full lap push, I sensed a hallelujah moment: I'd found my day's rhythm, easing through the thick, heated air, noticing the morning track walkers while spotting the next turn leading to the next straight, eventually finding the finish for that repeat. And, how about that. Same quick pace and in the heat.

This is the first day of the summerlong "bring back the joy of running really fast" summer for me. veteran runners of a certain age don't want to injure themselves with pushing the envelope violently. They'd rather become roly-poly in the middle, training for longer distances requiring a slower pushing of the pace. Who wants to run through chest-heaving fatigue on a hot June morning, knowing that the worst track workouts are yet to come? Me.

We all eventually lose our natural strength to age. We also lose our inherent speed, whatever that was. We can lift weights. We can strengthen our core. But our role models have long since ceased running. And for that, no one knows how to train us to be fast again. So, we avoid running quickly, like a child, until we feel our breathing labor and stop, like a child.

So, I looked back in time, to train myself to feel fast again. That training begins with shorter fast long runs, shorter but fast tempo runs, shorter but faster-paced segments, and short, gliding sprints. The latter work well in heat. I don't turn into a slow dancing puddle on the track's far side from the sweat pouring off me. Instead, I feel the thrill from forcing myself to be consistently quick, even when I'm alone in the heat.

Striding into the final lap and a half of the first set, the watch reading was now unnecessary and an afterthought. Lift and strike quickly with each stride. Pretend I am a hurdler. I reach out with my knees up keeping my arms from flailing out too far ahead. Stride as if you're running the 800, just short of all out. There's no one there to see you, much less you give a photo shoot. No one cares, except me and I have two more sets to accomplish in this heat.

Dynamic exercises when I wake up at o'dark thirty are now part of the routine. Short, gentle form drills are included in the workout. I look awkward now but not nearly as did when I first started. Tweaking is a good thing. Let's hear an "amen" for tweaking. Oh, and I keep a bottle of water and a sweat towel. Part of my life's experience.

This morning, there were no incidents and no accidents. My effort was pure, consistent, the hint of what is to come over this summer. This hot, soon to be humid, long summer. Solitary in my goal to discover something akin to speed once again, to feel power in building race strength through quick efforts. Get up early enough, start early enough, finish the morning program, and hints become factoids leading to full expression.

Running in the heat will do that to me.