

Thursday

I do not like Thursdays.

Most people abhor Mondays, but for me it is Thursdays I detest. I do not like workday Thursdays. I do not like nice sunny days that are on Thursdays. I do not like dark, cloudy, stormy days that include Thursdays. I do not like Thursdays. Like Arthur Dent, I never could get the hand of Thursdays.

It is Thor's Day, the Norse god of thunder. While it is officially the fourth day of the week where I live, Thursdays are more than the day after Hump Day Wednesdays and the day before Thank God It's Fridays. For different religions, Thursday is observed as a day of cleaning, the giving of money, a day of voluntary fasting, the reading and observance of meaningful holidays, weekly meetings for discussion of local issues are held on Thursdays.

In the mid-70's falls, for high school football teams, Thursday was the day between the last hard practice and the day before the week's big game. The following spring, it was a quiet day for baseball practice before Friday's doubleheader. For me, it was a recovery day, either from being beaten up during three prior days' in full pads or from playing the Tuesday ballgame followed by a full practice the next day before competing in the 440 and the mile relay in the weekly Wednesday dual track meet.

As an adult, Thursday was always a self-disciplined day of first, getting out of bed on time, leading into arriving to my job on time, completed by being productive on a day whose very existence I loathed. I accomplished my dreaded tasks on that day, weekly, year after year.

Lactate threshold is the maximal intensity that a runner can maintain for an extended period of time with little or no increase in lactate in the runner's blood. Which means what to me?

When I was in college, my dad and I were unloading groceries we had purchased at the grocer store. We got to wondering aloud what was meant by groceries, so I grabbed the four-inch thick Webster's Dictionary, turned to the word groceries, learning that groceries are something a grocer sells. So. we looked up what a grocer sells. Groceries. You can't make this up.

In the Meriam-Webster Dictionary, the primary definition is a salt or ester lactic acid. So, I know lactate in this context is the not milk secretion, which is the second definition in the big book. Lactate acid is a colorless syrupy organic acid produced in the muscle tissues during strenuous exercise. To exist in a healthy state, we gotta have it: the acid is integral in cell respiration, glucose production, and molecule signaling.

Lactate acid is the byproduct of anaerobic respiration, the process by which cells produce energy without consuming oxygen. I don't know about you, but I breathe air - real air - when I run. Wait. There's more. Lactate acid builds up in the body's blood when running. Run long enough or at a pace fast enough, the lactate acid concentration increases because the muscles are working, hard. But, run just below or at lactate threshold, the ability to hold running pace improves.

We're told to embrace lactate threshold training by keeping out lactate acid production made during our run at a controlled level, allowing us to maintain faster paces the more we practice, because we are running at a pace that doesn't spike the lactate levels but maintains those levels, increasing our body's efficiency in running at a slightly faster rate. Run at our individual lactate threshold pace consistently in training allow the toleration of longer periods of higher intensity in pace over time.

I'm a simple man: you tell me that I need lactate threshold runs regularly, if not weekly, I'll include lactate threshold runs in my training. But I am a simple man. I neither need nor want lactate acid testing, though I do want to keep my milk from secreting. It's a personal thing. I could use heart rate training, but that's a lot of arithmetic when I just want a run. I know with a quick glance at my watch what is my pace and how long I've maintained that pace. Give my lactate threshold to me in time.

Oftentimes I feel like I'm back to future in that, when I started running in college, we hit the track once a week, we hit the roads hard, weekly we ran long or raced. Including tempo runs is merely a hard road run at a slightly more humane pace, but the concept is the same.

I can run longer. Doing that will increase my lactate threshold. In running further and longer, I become more efficient in my running stride and in my use of oxygen, pushing up my lactate threshold, allowing me to race faster. how long is longer; how far is farther? More than I want to run. I run 8-10 hours each week. Longer would make my running a fulltime gig. You decide for yourself; you're an adult.

I can run track intervals, running a set distance with a long recovery time, going over my lactate threshold, encouraging ("ahem") my body to increase its efficiency when using oxygen, pushing up my lactate threshold so that I may race faster, training my muscles to clear lactate acid faster. in the summer, I hit the track one day each week. But I find I can only run my 5km pace, which is my 3km pace, which is my 10km pace, which is my 15km pace, which is just slightly faster than my half marathon pace. Hmm . . .

I can run repeats of a set distance or for a set time, a steady drumbeat of a pace, continuously for miles, a tempo if you will. Listen to the drummer in a song you like to hear. The pace is the pulse of the song, repeating the same defined beat throughout the song. That is your running tempo. I always wonder if my tempo pace is a Stones' song, or, a slow love song. Depends on the day. So, what is the right pace?

It's race pace.

For a 10-mile race.

Or for a half marathon race.

Or, or for a 5kilometer race pace, plus 25-30 seconds, if you run under 6:00 per mile race pace, 10-15 seconds per mile for those racing the distance over 40 minutes. I just raised my hand; my sub 5:00 per mile race days have long since passed me by. But the experts want that pace to be held for 20-30 minutes. On my own, that's a bitch to accomplish.

But wait! Behind door number two is an almost bearable alternative. I can break up the 20-30 minute tempo run in to shorter segments, say, run tempo for 5:00, rest for 1:00, repeating the effort five more times. I can manage that without going home feeling sorry for myself. There's more!

My long runs are on Saturdays because I want the company of other runners. No matter that they are each train faster than I do or that I'll be alone for much of the run. Joining with them most Saturdays is reason enough to crawl out of bed in the dark. We gather in the parking lot of the day, choose the course, slog a slow first half-mile, at which point they collectively accelerate away from me. I give a big wave from behind that they never see. I take longer to get moving.

But over the years, I've learned a secret that I use to my advantage. They find reasons to pause: a restroom break, a water stop, a wrong turn. Kindly, they usually wait for me. I catch up but I don't receive the chance to pause. They are off and running. Remember that a continuous tempo run is only 20-30 minutes? Once warmed up, I can hang onto the trailing running kid for that long. Not next them mind you, or even within range to carry on a conversation. But close enough to see them and follow in their wake. Long enough to accomplish the mission.

I may loathe Thursdays. I may not be a fan of tempo runs. But I detest my inability to keep up with the big kids on a longer run, to share in the running conversation. We have out and back courses. I wave to them when they pass me going back to the start, me not yet to the turnaround. We have winding courses that only we know how far they are. I know those routes, enjoy the scenery in my seeming solo effort, returning the cars to see them all in various states of recovery, changing their

clothing, or sipping post run coffee. I crumple into my car. Mostly, these runs are an opportunity for the running kids to show each other how fast they can push the pace and for how long.

One will drop the pace hammer early in the Saturday morning run, others quickly covering the move, and the meaningless race is on. Up a hill and over a dale, they don't give each other an inch until there is a restroom/water break. Then, just as colts bolt from one end of the ranch to the other, the running kids are off again, faster this time, steam coming off their shoes, sweat pouring into their clothing, their energy expended on breathing with talking a distant memory. I miss those days.

At those moments, I take stock in my own pace, making certain I'm not a runner full of sloth, which I am not. I settle into my own rhythm, pushing myself against myself, admiring the view the morning's run offers. I would only be in their way if they were forced to run my steady but slower pace. That's not their job and doesn't meet their standards. There is always Saturday's post run breakfast.