

## Running, is Hard

A favorite movie scene: good cowboy gunslinger finds himself surrounded in a dusty town bar by four bad cowboys aiming to kill him. As the four approach him with evil intent, he holds up his non shooting hand to stop them. They pause. "Taking down three of you is easy; four is hard." With that, he grabs the closest villain, throwing the surprised bad guy out the saloon window, the bad guy now out of the fight. The remaining three attack the good cowboy, who quickly dispatches of them, one by one. All three now in various stages of ache, suffering, and unable to attack him, he looks down upon them, reiterating, "Four is hard, but three, three is easy."

A few years past, the vast majority of my runs were solo efforts, the why's not being all that important. Running on my own, at my pace, I began adding daily doubles three – five days a week, the second run being on the treadmill at a lesser pace than what I ran outside earlier in the day. That added 12-20 miles to my weekly totals. Did this for weeks, upon months, my racing pace quickened dramatically. For the first time in over two decades, I qualified for Boston, placed in my grandmasters age division in local, regional, and a couple of national-level races.

And, I could keep up with the running kids.

Then, I didn't run doubles. I ran lots of miles, but I didn't get the same bang for my training buck. The effort in achieving the same race results slowly dissipated, slow-paced frustration replacing the pleasure running fast gave me. I could start a run with the running kids but I couldn't hang, seeing them again at the post-run meal. I farked out.

Once again running solo, I fell upon a day when my work was caught up and the chores were done. I had time . . . I hopped on the treadmill for that day's second run. I ran s l o w l y, not certain how it would turn out. The next morning was a planned workout. I ran it, hitting my goals easily, with an average lower heart rate than I expected. That afternoon, I ran another slow double on the 'mill. Three weeks later, I had made my doubles a staple of my workday runs, three to four days each week.

More importantly, I noticed an intrinsic but palpable increase in my running strength, in my stamina, in my turnover, and in my power on workout days. I also

grew taller, more handsome, became rich and famous, but those are different stories for a different day, and none of that is true.)

There are no secrets to improved running; no one has a new mousetrap to spring upon us. You want to be better at running? Run. You want to be a faster runner? Run more and run slower, except for those days when you have planned to run faster. (My favorite quote on this topic is from a New Zealand runner, who offered up after having run the majority of his runs for two years at a slow pace, with only one fast workout each week, when it was time to run fast, “run blooming, fucking fast.” There’s a lot to that.)

Run, run, run, run, run. And when you choose to run solo, and no one is looking, run slower than they would. Given time, you will become faster relative to your age and your training. Your running is about yourself, not a comparison to others’ training. We’re not a patient lot. We would rather consume coffee from a prepacked cup that is mixed with heated water, than actual ground coffee mixed with the same water, the latter done to our particular taste. Running as a goal is no different.

We convince ourselves that shorter runs, done daily at a quicker pace than slow, will make us better and faster runners. We convince ourselves of this every day, every week made up of those days, every month made up of those weeks, before too long, we’re years into our belief with no way out. It’s that damned horse to water thing. Sleek training plans for runners won’t make you faster. Shoes designed to go fast won’t make you faster.

You need to run. That’s all. Just run.

When I first ran daily doubles, included longer and easier-paced runs, I purchased a pair of the magic shoes. I took them out for a spin. I dropped the hammer. My pace quickened so fast and was so sustained that I surprised myself with splits I hadn’t experienced in over a decade. I ran a 5-mile race, a half marathon, and a marathon all within two weeks’ time, again, racing times I thought were in my past. I BQ’d. I mowed the lawn. I received race trinkets. I had fun, again.

I want all that back. How do I get it all back? Were you not paying attention? Don’t make me repeat the obvious to you. Better yet, go for a run, and then another. Keep doing that. Really. Now wave back as you run past.