Coaching the 800m

Unique Event, Unique Athletes, Unique Challenges

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Introduction

- The “Art” of Coaching ➔ Adapting what we all know to fit our environment

- Success at Sacramento State
  - Developed a culture of middle distance running
  - Embraced “The Orphan Event”

- What are the Challenges?
**Introduction**

- Success in the MD events can be cultivated by taking a systematic approach

**The Four Key Variables**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Unique Athletes</th>
<th>Unique Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Identify the Right Athletes for 800m</td>
<td>3. Train Athlete for Uniqueness of 800m</td>
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<td>2. Create the Right Environment for Success</td>
<td>4. Understand/Master the Tactics of the 800m</td>
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Identifying Athletes for the 800m

- Who is an 800m Runner?

More than just “speedy distance runners”

→ 800m runners have a unique skill set
Identifying the Right Athlete

- One Up/One Down Rule
  - 400m/1500m Ability
  - Red Flags
    - 200m > 1500m
    - 3k/5k > 400m
- IAAF Scoring Tables/Purdy Points
## Case Study

### '96 HS 1:46.45
- 46.15; 21.35
- 1:47.67
- 400m Runner

### '96 HS 1:52
- 46.90; 3:44
- 1:45.81
- 2xNCAA Champ
- 800m Runner

### '96 HS 1:49
- 3:35; 14:35
- 1:46.20
- 1500m Runner

### Deficiencies – Reflection of Training or Ability?

- Coach’s job → put athlete in right event and keep the scale balanced
Creating the Right Environment

- Developing a culture of MDR
- Embracing “The Orphan Event”
Creating the Right Environment

- Managing “The Force Field” for athlete

**Internal Forces**
- Motivation
- Self Efficacy
- Confidence
- Talent
- Fear

**External Forces**
- Facilities
- Weather
- Resources/Support
- Family/Peers
- Living Situation
- Team Environment
- Preparation
- Financial
- Training Load
- School Work
- Competition

CHAMPION

Coach can help manage all of the forces and by doing so can be a MAJOR positive external force that gets athlete moving in the right direction.
Creating the Right Environment

How does this relate specifically to the 800m/MDR?

- Create/Foster a culture of MDR in your program → Make MD athletes comfortable and confident in their environment
  - Recruiting
  - MDR Group Identity
  - Separate, but don’t segregate (Fall is key!)
  - Embrace “The Orphan Event”
Training the Athlete for the Uniqueness of the 800m

A balance and diversified approach
3 Training Zones to be Systematically Developed

- Speed
- Endurance
- The Combined Zone
Planning the Year

- Summer (Recovery/Transition → Base)
- XC (Aerobic Development)
- Winter (Recovery/Transition → General Track Prep)
- Indoor (General Track Prep → Specific Track Prep)
- Outdoor (Specific Track Prep → Race Sharpening)
A Balanced and Diversified Approach

Training Principles

1) We address all pace zones in every phase of training (at least once every 14-21 days).

2) In terms of emphasis, we work from peripherals to specific.

3) We try to resist urge to get too specific too soon.
   a) Athletes are naturally strong and comfortable here and will push for it
   b) System can get overloaded \(\rightarrow\) burnout!
   c) Races are workouts
## Endurance Training

**Easy Aerobic**
- Easy Runs, Long Runs
- Soft surfaces

**High-end Aerobic**
- Steady Runs, Progression Runs, Tempo Runs, Tempo Intervals, Long Hill Reps, 10k or XC pace Intervals, XC Races
- Continuous or short rest (3:1 or 4:1 work-rest ratio)
- Almost always off-track and on soft surfaces
- Must be creative here, as this is most difficult type of training for MDR

**5k/3k Pace**
- 600-1000m Intervals (v=4-7k)
- Equal rest (or 3:2 work-rest ratio)
- Grass, Track, or Trail
- Hill sprints

## Combined Zone Training

**1500m Pace**
- 300-600m Intervals (v=2-4k)
- 2:3 work-rest ratio
- Almost always on track
- 300m hill reps
- 1500m races

### 800m Pace
(is there such a thing?)
- 100-500m Intervals (v=1-2k)
- 1:2 work-rest ratio
- Broken distances with shorter rest for lactate tolerance
- 800m races

## Speed Training

**400m Pace**
- 100-250m Reps (v=600-900m)
- Full recovery
- Broken distances with shorter recovery for lactate tolerance
- 400m races, 4x400m legs
- Hill reps

### Sprint Work
- 40-100m reps
- Full recovery or in/out
- Track or turf
- Hill sprints

## Strength Training

- Stability, Agility, Mobility
- Very general in summer/fall
- MD-specific in winter/spring

## Neuromuscular/Biomechanical

- Drills
- Focus on quick feet; knees up; minimize back-side
## Training the Athlete (cont)

### Summer
- Aerobic
  - Long Runs
  - Progression Runs; Fartlek
- Sprint Work
  - Short hill reps, strides
- Strength Training/Neural Muscular Exercises

### Cross Country
- Mileage Peak
- High-end Aerobic running
- Interval/Fartlek Training
- Speed/Sprint work
  - Hill sprints
  - Grass 200s/150s
- General Strength Training

### Winter
- Similar to Fall/XC
- Convert some of the H-E Aerobic stuff to track work
  - 3k/5k/10k pace work on track
- Speed/Sprint work
  - Hills!!!!
- Begin MD-Specific Strength Training

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Breakthroughs in the spring are often traced back to breakthroughs in the fall!
Training the Athlete (cont)

- Indoor Track Season
  - Most critical training phase (all training pieces coming together)
  - Maintain Fall/Winter Volume
  - Emphasis on High-End Aerobic Running and Intense Speed/Sprint work
  - Begin developing “combined zone” with indoor racing and moderate 800m/1500m workouts
  - Strength training in full gear
Training the Athlete (cont)

Indoor Track Season (Sample 21-day cycle)

Jan 17-23

**Mon:** Sprint Work – “Gauntlet” Drill on turf
3x(40-60-40)
**PM:** Easy Endurance Run

**Tues:** Easy Endurance Run
(weights)

**Wed:** Speed work – 6x150m
**PM:** Easy run

**Thurs:** Easy Recovery run
(weights)

**Fri:** Pre-Meet Run + Drills/Strides

**Sat:** Boise State
400m – 56.5; 4x400m (55.x)

**Sun:** Easy Long Run
70 minutes

Jan 24-30

**Mon:** H-E Aerobic – 9 Mile Progression Run
(weights)

**Tues:** 1500m pace – 8x400m @ 72 (90sec)
**PM:** Easy run

**Wed:** Easy Recovery run
(weights)

**Thurs:** Pre-meet Run + Drills/Strides

**Fri:** UW Invitational
DMR – 4:45 (1600m)

**Sat:** UW Invitational
800m – 2:05.4

**Sun:** Rest

Jan 31-Feb 6

**Mon:** Easy Endurance Run

**Tues:** H/E Aerobic
8.5 mile Progression Run
(weights)

**Wed:** H/E Aerobic
6x1000m @ 3:25 (60sec)
**PM:** Easy run

**Thurs:** Easy Recovery run
(weights)

**Fri:** Speed Work -- 4x250m Hill
**PM:** Easy Run

**Sat:** Long Run
75 minutes

**Sun:** Easy Recovery Run
Training the Athlete (cont)

- Outdoor Track Season
  - Volume drops some
    - More a casualty of competition than a training adjustment
    - Must monitor to avoid “the slow leak”
  - Emphasis on:
    - 3k/5k (V02Mx) session
    - Combined Zone sessions
    - Speed Work/Lactate Tolerance sessions
- Racing!!!
- Continue to tap H-E Aerobic Zone and Sprint work
- Strength training peaks → sharpening
Training the Athlete (cont)

Outdoor Track Season (Sample 21-day cycle)

Lea Wallace (April 18-May 8)

**April 18-24**
- **Mon**: Recovery Run
- **Tues**: Easy Endurance Run
- **Wed**: 3K Pace – 5x800m @ 2:32ave (2:30rec)
  - PM – Easy run
- **Thurs**: Easy Recovery run
- **Fri**: 1500m Pace – 3x(4x300m) @ 49ave (1:00/5:00rec)
  - PM – Easy run
- **Sat**: Easy Recovery Run
- **Sun**: H/E Aerobic -- Tempo Work
  - 3xMile (1:00rec)
  - PM – Easy run

**April 25-May 1**
- **Mon**: Recovery Run
- **Tues**: H/E Aerobic – 7mi Progression Run
- **Wed**: 400m work – broken 400s
  - 3x250/150 @ 33/21
  - PM – Easy run
- **Thurs**: Recovery run
- **Fri**: Light rhythm session
  - Straights and Turns
- **Sat**: Pre-meet run + Drills/Strides
- **Sun**: Payton Jordan Invitational
  - 1500m -- 4:11.73

**May 2-8**
- **Mon**: Recovery Run
- **Tues**: Easy Long Run
  - 80 minutes
- **Wed**: Sprint work on turf
  - 3x60-40-60
  - PM – Easy Run
- **Thurs**: Easy Recovery run
- **Fri**: Easy Recovery Run
- **Sat**: 800m Target workout
  - 2x(2x400m) @ 57-59
- **Sun**: Rest
Understanding/Mastering the Tactics of the 800m
Tactically, 800m is most unique event on the track

- Shortest and fastest event that does not finish in lanes
- Only race to start in lanes but not finish in lanes
- All other non-lane races follow similar tactics 1500m-10k (even pacing/accelerate to finish)
- 800m is raced like a long sprint with constant deceleration – but done so in traffic unlike 400m

“Food for thought”: Could the event be improved by using either the 2-turn or 3-turn stagger?
To “Get Out” or Not?

- Physiological research says:
  GET OUT!

- Beyond the physiological data, getting out fast reduces rhythm breaks as you run in less traffic and from a purely spatial perspective makes sense.
  - Logic: If you have 8 runners of equal ability and they all fight for same space, the athlete that ends up in the #8 spot is challenged with the task of overtaking 7 other runners of equal ability and the space that they fill.
Championship Race Data

- 2001-2011 NCAA and US Champs 800m Finals:
  - Ave finishing position of 400m leader:
    - Men – 3.875
    - Women – 1.75
  - Ave finishing position of 600m leader:
    - Men – 3.833
    - Women – 1.33
  - Ave position of race winner at 400m:
    - Men – 5.0
    - Women – 1.75
  - Ave position of race winner at 600m:
    - Men – 4.166
    - Women – 1.50
  - Interesting notes
    - the 400m and 600m leaders are almost always the same
    - Very few men and no women won from beyond 5th at 600m

Race data indicates that front-running on the men’s side does not work, but it does work on the women’s side.
The Coaching Nerd’s Playlist

- 2 hours of the greatest 800m running the internet has to offer!
- Caution: watching this may be counterproductive to one’s social life

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4F9D8D4B21EC99E1&feature=viewall
# The Cost of Running Wide

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Courtesy: Walt Lange, Jesuit High School
Developing Your Approach

Considerations
- Men vs. Women
- Winning vs. Making a team
- Championship running vs. time trialing
- Strength/parity of field
- Athlete’s individual economical threshold (+4 second 400m rule)

Coaching Points

1. Teach the start and the break
   * Run intervals in practice out of lanes
2. Teach athletes to “fill up” the lane (especially indoors!)
   * Run 150s/200s with a partner in practice alternating position
3. Race position is more important than pace; teach the subtleties of gaining position
   * Going out hard vs. establishing good position
   * Making a move vs. “sliding up”
Developing Your Approach

- When it’s all said and done, the runner has to have a strategy that they are confident in based on:
  - Ability
  - Preparation
  - Comfort

The 800m is a unique event with a unique and diverse group of athletes, there is no “right” way to run the race….however:

**Successful 800m runners know their race and run their race**

You have 1 bullet in your gun, you have to decide how and when you are going to use it and have confidence/faith that it will get the job done!
Final Takeaways

- Success in the 800m requires a systematic process of development:
  1) Put the right athletes in the event
  2) Build an environment/culture of middle distance running
  3) Maintain a balanced training approach that targets the continuous development of the endurance, speed, and combined zones
  4) Think critically about the tactics of the event and work with athletes to hone their competitive approach

Questions?