

Middle Distance Training

John Gondak – Penn State University

- 1995-1996 Graduate Assistant at Georgia Tech
- 1996-1998 University of Toledo
- 1998-2006 University of Kentucky
- 2006-current Penn State University

COACHING ACCOMPLISHMENTS



- 2 NCAA Champions – Isaiah Harris (2017) and Danae Rivers (2018)
- 44 first team All-Americans at Penn State
- 54 Individual Big Ten Champions
 - **11 of the last 13** Big Ten Indoor 800m Championships for the Men
 - **8 of the last 11** Big Ten Outdoor 800m Championships for the Men
 - First 4-time Champion in the Women's Indoor 800m (Rivers 2017-20)



Mindset of the Athlete

- Focus of the program is to help athletes become the best competitor they can be, not focus on a specific time – why?
- Athletes need to feel like they are being successful in practice everyday
This is a key role of a coach
- Continue to reinforce the training they have done has prepared them to compete – as much as we believe they are ready they must believe!
- The athlete needs to trust you as a coach and believe that you are not going to set them up for failure
- An athlete that is 70% fit but believes will always compete well vs an athlete that is 100% fit but does not have faith in themselves

Competition Schedule

- Identify the competitions that you want to focus on and work back from there
- Do not race your primary event every meet or every weekend! Mix it up
- Try to have your 800 runners compete in the 4x4 at the end of every meet even your 1500 runners if it makes sense. Great way to work on speed development.
- Do not race just to race – there needs to be a purpose.
 - Also – do not be afraid to race - middle distance athletes can race more than long distance athletes
- Most important job as the coach – seed them appropriately at competitions or else you are setting them up for failure

Training



The Summer & Fall Conditioning Phases

- Summer training is the key to success – any athlete I have witnessed make a big jump in their performances invested in their summer training
 - Distance runs in June
 - Steady runs in July
 - Tempo and Fartlek in August
- Steady paced runs are a key to our training
 - Men around 5:45 to 6:00 minute pace, women 6:45 to 7:00 minute pace
- Train middle distance runners aerobically – either run cross country or do cross country type training in the fall
- Cross Country workouts in the fall build great strength – the strength to finish the race
- Adjust the workouts for the caliber/age of athlete



Transition from Cross Country ➡ Indoor Track

- Our transition occurs after the Big Ten XC Championships – during the fall the middle distance runners support the XC team
- Continue XC style training but start to build in speed at the end of workouts
 - Example - 200's, 300's, hill sprints
- Start to incorporate more hills into workouts
 - Longer hills for strength (60-80 seconds)
 - Shorter hills for speed (25-35 seconds)
- Continue with the steady runs and keep the mileage up – take a break around Thanksgiving
- We stay off the track as long as the weather is nice - why??
 - Kids will start to measure and put a time to themselves and believe they need to be faster each workout



Competition Phase – Early Dec to middle of Feb

- Start to incorporate more pure speed work into the equation for 800m
 - 5 x 300 cut downs with increased rest
 - 600 – 2 minutes - 400
 - 1000 at pace – then 3 sets of 3 x 200 with 60 sec rest/5 min
 - Running 4x4's is great speed work
 - 10-10-10 warm-up for these workouts
- Still continue strength work as well for both 800 and 1500/Mile
 - 3x2, 2x3, 4, 2x3, 3x2 (R = 90) at 60/70 second pace per 400
 - 2 sets of 5 x 300 with 90 sec rest/4 min 45 sec for men, 50 for women
 - 5-6 x 800 at 2:30 for men, 2:45 for women (R=60)
 - We always run 3x150's or 200's after these workouts
- Continue to do steady runs on Monday & Thursday (if not racing on the weekend)
- Make sure the athletes are building confidence by racing successfully

Championship Phase

(I do not really use the word “peak”)

- Start to lessen mileage and aerobic work – but not too much – want to “freshen up”
- If in the weight room – start to cut back
- Most workouts are pure speed based for 800
3x200, 3x200, 600 all out
400-200-300-200 fast with unlimited recovery
3 x 300 or 3 x 400 with unlimited recovery
- Workouts for the 1500/mile are at pace with some speed
2 sets of 800 at pace, 400 fast with unlimited recovery
4 x 400 at goal pace with 60 seconds rest followed by some fast 200's
- Tune up their mind – make sure they believe they are ready



Indoor ➡ Outdoor

- Take a break – usually a week of easy running/days off
- Need a mental break
- Usually 2 weeks of cross country style workouts again before returning to the track
- Outdoor the focus is on the end of the season since you race your way to the NCAA finals

Take Care of the Little Things

- Always work on core strength and flexibility
- Strength to finish a race comes from distance running, not the weight room
- Weights are excellent, as long as they supplement the running
- Stay healthy – weeks of consistent training is the most important thing
- Stretch, Stretch and more stretching – AFTER THE RUN
- Do all the little things and you will achieve BIG THINGS
- Diet and rest are critical
- Make it fun!!!
- The common theme for all of our successful athletes – they believe in themselves and want to be champions



Questions?

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