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**HOW TO ANALYSE YOUR BAD RUNS AND LEARN FROM THEM**

Despite the best laid plans, there are many times when training runs and races don’t go as you might expect. Even with months of careful preparation and textbook training you can turn up on race day and run a stinker.

Sometimes the reasons for this are obvious, like unexpected illness and injury, but sometimes the explanation can be a little harder to find. Hopefully the following suggestions will help you find the smoking gun and enable you to learn from any mistakes you might have made and turn an under achievement into an outstanding performance next time around.

Keep a training log

If you are really serious about running that PB or ducking under a certain time barrier for a particular race distance, then one of the best pieces of advice for you could well be to keep a training log. This is a quick and effective way of chronicling what you did, how you did it and how you felt afterwards.

In an ideal world your log should offer a comprehensive record of information, including meals/hydration/sleep and training for each day of your programme, including a rating for every run. Now don’t panic, it shouldn’t take long to jot down the relevant information for each day, but by doing this, you will be able to see how you performed on every day you ran.

For instance it might help you make an immediate diagnosis of what caused a poor performance, by establishing a direct correlation between what you ate/drank and how you ran. And by the same token a detailed log can also help you rule out diet/hydration as the reason for a bad run because you can see straight away that you drank enough and didn’t deviate at all from your regular diet.

Look critically at your pace

Indeed you might not even have to consult your log because one of the most immediate assessments of any run we can do, is to look at the pace. Did you go off too quickly? If it was a race, was the first half run at a pace that was just too hot to handle? Did you get involved in a mini battle with others runners at any stage and expend too much energy? Sometimes this is where the answer will lie.

What were conditions like?

Another thing to bear in mind is weather and running conditions. Was it particularly hot or cold? Was it blowing a gale or even worse a blizzard while you ran? Was the course hilly or did it have lots of twists and turns? These are some of the factors that can account for a slower time when you might have been expecting to run faster.

Enough recovery?

However if none of these factors offer an immediate answer, then delve back into your training log and check to see if your schedule has included enough rest and recovery days. Getting this balance right can be notoriously difficult and sometimes we are on the point of over training without even realising it. Too many miles or too much intensity can lead to training fatigue, which can feel like it creeps up on a runner. The reality is that it’s actually an accumulated problem. For most long distance runners a poor long training run is almost a rite of passage, so if it’s just one disappointing effort, then don’t panic. But if one turns into two or three in a row, then you might have a bigger over training problem.

Returning after an injury?

Remember also to keep a close eye on your training if you’re coming back from injury. The body takes time to recover from any lay-off and doing too much too soon can be another common trap to fall into.

Under stress?

Stress is another issue that’s less easy to define. If you feel you’re examining your training and not finding an obvious reason for a bad run, ask yourself some searching questions about pressure. Has work been difficult and distracting lately or are there any issues in your personal life that might be weighing on your mind? Did you put too much pressure on yourself by setting a target that just wasn’t realistic? Is there any other external stress factor in your life that might affect your training?

Getting enough sleep?

Sleep is something else that can have a massive influence on performance. Did you get enough sleep in the build up to your run/race. Sleeping well the night before a race can be notoriously difficult but if you have managed to get some solid sleep under your belt in the days before, then it should be good enough.

Having said all of these things sometimes there is just the unknown factor. We all have bad runs and sometimes it just happens. A little too much pressure can work its evil magic almost unnoticed and it’s not a huge issue as long as it’s a one-off. But if you’ve underperformed in a race after weeks of textbook training it is really important to find out why and more importantly learn from it.