Chapter 9
Racing 5's and 10's (Part 2 of 2)

The Wednesday before the Sporting Life 10K Malc and I talked strategy. My plan was to "Do a good warm-up and run how I feel." The course was a point-to-point and net downhill. Malc told me to go with an open mind and not to get stressed if I looked at my watch and found I was going at a faster pace on the downhill, using gravity, to keep my cadence up on the downhill, so that I would not be breathing too hard. Malc said, "Don't think about the finish time, but just run as fast as you can."

Malc and I were very pleased as to how the week's training went – I saw the value of a good warm-up and also how the fartleks went – 20 × 3 minutes faster pace / 2 minutes slower pace. Malc thought that as I was able to complete these, I'd be probably running faster than I think I could. Today's question came from Sue in Cochrane. Sue happens to be my wife, and she'd noticed, when I was running the strides along the pathway outside their home, that I don't use my arms and she wondered if this made a difference.

Malc's response was that the arms create momentum, the body works as a linked system, and you can affect the body both up and down. He added that parts of the body can resist rotation and torque and hence store up energy and release it in opposite directions. Sprinters use their arms a lot. You can still achieve a high energy output without a lot of arm swinging, if you manipulate the energy from your upper arm to create movement and torque, but it's a lot easier if you have a longer "lever" and use your hand.

I shared with Malc the genesis of the "Martin Shuffle." This is a running gait that I use on my ultras, with little upper body, arm movement. It had evolved after I met one of my running heroes, Australian Cliff Young.

Cliff Young

In 1983 Cliff Young, an unknown potato farmer, ran Australia's ultra-tough 875-km endurance race from Sydney to Melbourne. Usually the race was run by athletes who trained long and hard for the ordeal. Cliff showed up, took his number and explained to curious media reporters that his training came from rounding up sheep on foot, sometimes running for three days in a row over the 810 hectares of his family's ranch. He figured he could run the race.

Some were skeptical, especially when they saw the way Cliff ran: shuffling along like an old man. The pack was ahead of him at first. But, while the others took six hours to sleep before they started running for the day, Cliff didn't stop. He didn't know he was supposed to sleep, and slowly he inched ahead, eventually passing the pack of athletes. By the last day he was well in the lead.

Cliff won the race and broke the record by nine hours; he finished in five days, 15 hours and four minutes. He was 61 years of age and an instant hero. His distinctive shuffle-run is now called the Young, or Cliffy, Shuffle, and endurance racers have adopted his technique.

My young cousin, Mary, fell in love with Cliff as she watched him run and win the race and then give his prize money to five other runners. She said to her mother, "I'm going to marry that man." And she did.

Malc says that running is a bit like dancing: if you have naturally good co-ordination, technique comes more quickly, and this is in small part why East African runners run well. They have fantastic rhythm, whereas people who don't, waste a lot of energy and effort to get this. Dancers are very co-ordinated and their brains are more naturally predisposed to picking up efficient movement quickly. They aren't necessarily born that way but may be able to learn it from childhood and develop a rhythm. Whether its nature or nurture is debateable – perhaps it's little of both.

I was up early the morning of June 16 and ready to race. I like running downhill, and for the first 5 km of the Sporting Life that is exactly what I got. The second half of the race flattened out but I managed to keep up my momentum, crossing the line at 45:03.

I felt this was a real breakthrough. Still not at my PB level of 42:00 but a good step towards it.

I was always looking ahead to the next race and that was the Mountain Equipment Co-op 10K on July 21. After the Sporting Life 10K I settled into a good training regime. My long runs were going well. I was pleased that I had held a 5-minute pace for 1½ hours. Malc noted that despite ups and downs, there was, overall, a trend of improvement. It helped that some workouts were consistent, so that Malc was able to track progress.

In mid-July Sue and I took a break and headed off on a road trip to Victoria. We stayed with our friends John and Jo-Anne, did a little bit of running, biking and swimming. It was nice to change things up and I hoped it would give my running a boost when I got back.

Unfortunately this was not the case, as I ran the Mountain Equipment Co-op 10K in a time of 46 minutes, 15 seconds. Very disappointing. On July 20, Sue and I headed out to Morley to volunteer in a fresh food market.

There are no major grocery stores in Morley, and accessing fresh produce can be even more challenging to those without a vehicle. The LeftOvers Foundation, which has helped bring in fresh groceries in the past with the help of Stoney Nakoda members, decided a market might be a great way to continue the conversation on the importance of having access to fresh fruit and vegetables. The market was made possible with the help of the Rotary Club of Cochrane and the Stoney Nakoda Health Services.

Sue and I were then pretty excited about daughter Kristina and grandsons Nathan, aged 8, and Matthew, aged 4, coming to visit from Sudbury, Ontario. I knew we'd be having a very active time and I would have to make a conscious effort to make sure I stuck to my training schedule. Little did I know that the wheels were about to come off the bus.

Malc

Martin reported back on the previous weekends' runs – he did one hour at a 6-minute pace on the treadmill, with no after-effects. It was still too icy to run on Cochrane pathways – very slippery. Martin talked about this being the start of running season – coming out of winter and looking at race schedules. He'd also been talking at the new Running Room clinics for 5K, 10K, half marathon and marathon.
The following Monday would be the Boston Marathon. This is not an official record-setting course as, despite the well-known uphills, it obviously has several downhills. I'd be looking out for two Canadian runners, Eric Gillis and Reid Coolsaet. Two weeks later was the London Marathon and I'd been coaching someone for this event. London always has an incredible lineup – better than Boston – with more prize

money and better organizers. Also, it's in a better time zone for the elite Kenyan and Ethiopian runners. It gives the opportunity for world records to be broken.

We had a question from Norman in Moose Jaw: "Will the sub-two-hour record be set this year?" With regard to breaking the record, I didn't personally think it would be broken this year, but it's worth mentioning how we came to think of this as a possibility. The first murmurings of a project to achieve a sub-two-hour marathon time came in October 2013, in the UK. Famed Ethiopian runner Haile Gebrselassie first raised the possibility when he was working with Yannis Pitsiladis, a world authority on the study of East African runners and their genetics, based at the University of Brighton in the UK.

The project was called "Sub 2 hours" and was originally linked with Adidas because Gebrselassie was sponsored by them and became the face of the project, as were all the other runners in the world who were thought capable of challenging the existing record. However, little progress was made and it wasn't until 2015 that a statement was issued by Sandy Bodecker, a long-time Nike employee, that Nike were going to create the project and the company believed that, in order for an athlete to be able to run a sub-two, it was all about the shoe. By 2016, Nike had begun developing prototypes for the Vaporfly shoe. Brad Wilkins was put in charge of the project. In 2017, a record attempt was made in Italy, but failed. In the end, Kenyan runner Eliud Kipchoge clocked a 2:00:25.

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Martin's next focus was the Calgary 5K in May. It was late April, the snow was gone, and Martin was now able to go out and run on the pathways. He was feeling a little rusty but glad that he was now able to go back to Plan A and do the training that I had previously set for him, before the ankle injury. Fortunately, thanks to my coaching regime, Martin had been able to maintain his strength level during recovery from injury.

We discussed the London Marathon, which had been run on a hot day. We talked about running in hot weather. It's best to train early in the day, when it's coolest. Later in the day, your head gets very hot and sends signals to the brain. The brain doesn't like it and starts to regulate and adjust, and the ceiling drops and affects performance. Evening is not very good, as the ground and air are still fairly hot. For the 5K it would be best to hydrate on the night and morning before the race. For other distances, hydrate before and during the race. Also, pour cups of water from the aid station over yourself to keep heat away from your body, or use sponges, if available. If running more than an hour, use an electrolyte drink, e.g., Gatorade.

We also discussed the issue of over-hydrating, technically known as hyponatremia. The body needs to maintain certain levels of potassium and sodium. If you drink too much water, these levels can be diluted and become dangerously low, causing hyponatremia. Fatal hyponatremia in athletes is very rare, but it has claimed the lives of marathon runners and military recruits. However, it is important to keep the risk of "over-hydration" in perspective. For example, one study of "higher-risk" athletes who developed symptomatic hyponatremia were participating in distance running events of 42 km and triathlons lasting 9–12 hours. In these events, symptomatic hyponatremia still only occurred in 0.1–4 per cent of the participants.
Martin asked me about the difference between tempo runs and threshold runs. The official difference is that a tempo run is any run where you apply the same effort level or pace, continuously, for the duration of the run. For many runners, this is at around their marathon pace, a fast, aerobic run. A threshold run is done at the point where an aerobic run becomes anaerobic, generally faster than tempo runs.

In the post-race analysis of the Calgary weekend (May 27th), Martin's time for 5 km was 24 minutes. From the coach's perspective, I felt Martin could have given more – there appears to be an issue with Martin getting his heart rate above 152, and we will focus on achieving this by adapting training towards this goal. I explained that the deep part of the brain, the hypothalamus, controls this and is being affected by Martin's many years of long, slow running (ultramarathons). The 5-km races are meant to be redline races, where you just keep hanging on until the finish. Martin commented on the fact that the race start was noon. it was a hot day and he's not good in the heat. I pointed out that even if it's not that hot, if you're in direct sunlight, the radiation can still affect you.

Martin's goal now was to keep his energy levels up and stay motivated. He would now shift focus and concentrate on the 10-km and half-marathon distances – maybe return to another 5K later on. Although his 152 heart rate didn't help in the 5K, it could be beneficial on longer runs. I talked through the changes to training and explained that, for a younger runner, I would make the training more aggressive and take him to the track – but for Martin, being an older runner, it would be less aggressive.

I introduced strides to the training regime, at the end of Martin's workouts – when there's less chance of injury – twice a week. Strides involve 100 m of fast running (not a full-out sprint), walk and repeat four times. Also, during fast training sessions, we would work on the type of warm-up Martin does before the longer races, aiming to increase his heart rate before the race.

We talked about "progressive runs, sometimes known as the 20-yard runs. I explained that these have been done for decades in East Africa and are similar to the shuttle run tests I did in the RAF. They were part of my physical assessment. I had to run backwards and forwards between two points and finish running before hearing a beep. The time between the beeps gets closer and closer, so you have to run faster and faster. The idea of these runs is that you start out at a casual pace and then get faster and faster – this helps the coach calculate pace. If you get through them, the training stimulus is huge because you are getting faster, while the body is getting more tired. It teaches body to recover from one run before going on to the faster one. Martin did blocks of 20 minutes. I told Martin that during these progressive runs, the data showed that his pace had improved – averaging around 4:30 – and his heart rate was just under the anaerobic threshold, which indicated that Martin was still on course.

For the next week there would be no taper – less volume (distance) but no let-up on pace. Martin would have to keep the intensity up and not drop cadence. We were heading towards the Sporting Life 10K (June 16), for which Martin's PB stood at 42 minutes. Martin said he was going to "do a good warm-up and run how I feel." The course was a point-to-point and net downhill. I told him to go with an open mind and not to get stressed if he looked at his watch and found he was going at a faster pace on the downhill. He should use the gravity and keep his cadence up on the downhill, as this reduces impact and minimizes the risk of injury. I told him not to think about the finish time, but just run as fast as he could.

Martin ran the 10-km race in 45:03. I was pleased to see real progress. At the beginning of the year, Martin was probably running a 52/54-minute 10K. This showed that he'd moved a long way towards his goal, and he still had six months to get there. Martin had experienced some soreness in the calves and quads and some fatigue, but the ankle held up – no further injury. In a post-race assessment, a coach will look for specific areas of pain or anything out of the ordinary, and when I did this for Martin everything was fine. The key element is to keep body at a point where it is pushing it, but not breaking down.

Martin then asked about the exercises he had to do between workouts – on the mat: Jane Fonda / clamshells / reverse clamshells / glute bridges / heel lifts; and others (not on the mat), including

Superman / walking lunges. He wanted to know why he needed to do them. I explained that this was Competency Training – to achieve competent movement – and offered the Car Analogy.

The Car Analogy

Analogies are sometimes used in coaching in order to paint a picture for the athlete. The chassis is the body, housing the engine as it is the framework. You connect the engine and the suspension and everything else to it. In running you have to consider injury prevention and, to some degree, performance and deal with the forces that have a reaction on the body, e.g., in a racing car the stronger the chassis the better it can deal with those forces. Developing a strong chassis is like developing a strong body.

An example of this is "Lug nuts." If one becomes loose and you ignore it, then the wheel will shake and the other lug nuts will become loose, causing huge problems. In the body, if you ignore one minor injury it can affect other parts of the body, lead to other injuries and develop into a major injury, like the wheel falling off a car. The heart, muscles etc. are the engine, which delivers horsepower.

The exercises are to keep pace with what's happening in workouts. Many people go out and run faster and faster and getting fitter and fitter, which is great, but they are also putting higher forces and exertion on the body, and that's when things go a bit "wobbly" and joints get soft because the body can't handle it. The heel raises and "pogo" bounces create stability. By doing the exercises, Martin was keeping pace in the gym and at home – he needed to do the exercises three times a week to make sure his body stayed strong and to keep flow and momentum going.

If you run a time within a race that beats your PB in another distance, it counts, officially, e.g., if you run a PB 5K within a 10K. Martin keeps a running journal and, for all his runs, tracks distance/time/heart rate/temperature and type of run, which enables him to look back and compare. Martin asked whether, if he hadn't been injured, he would be ahead by now. The answer is yes; the body takes time to go through adaptations and Martin's would have gone through at least two by now, if he hadn't been injured. But there is no "perfect plan."

Adaptations

As the body gets stronger, it adapts and gets ready for the next level. The heart, muscles, oxygen intake and co-ordination all start to improve, and some runners adapt more quickly than others. There may be smaller adaptations, at two to three weeks or more significant adaptations around six weeks. This is why it's advisable to wait different lengths of time between races, depending on the distance.

I added another short run to Martin's schedule, bringing him up to five runs a week – Tuesday/ Wednesday/Thursday/Saturday/Sunday – the aim being to get the body to react appropriately. I knew what Martin needed and the response I expected to see. The training had become much more consistent since Martin's recovery from injury. The previous Sunday, Martin had done his best workout to date – a two-hour run at a 4:50 pace.

In training, I keep some workouts the same so that the coach can judge progression and change some so that they are challenging the runner's body at the improved level. Martin asked why I recommended a two-hour run. A two-hour run would just push his body enough for now, but eventually Martin would be doing 2½-hour runs. Martin was going to Victoria, on Vancouver Island, for a 12-day holiday and asked about training when on holiday/travelling. The good thing was that Martin would have done his two-

hour run the day before he left. I suggested he keep up with his easy runs as some consistency helps prevent injury.

Martin returned from his road trip to Victoria and then ran the Mountain Equipment Co-Op 10K, in a time of 46 minutes, 15 seconds, which left him feeling very disappointed. To help him put this into perspective, I reminded him that he had been out of routine, despite doing some runs around a lake and a 20-km run on a 600-m gravel track. The race course was flat, whereas in his previous 10K he had some downhills. The weather was much hotter. Martin would much rather run in the cold – and he had been running very early in the mornings.

Coming up to the Edmonton half marathon – a big leap from the 10K. Martin mentioned that he had been doing some cross-training and that swimming had really relieved some tightness in his back. That was probably helpful, as Martin is an older runner, but, generally, if training is going well, a runner is in their groove and not dealing with any issues, e.g., recovering from injury, cross-training isn't necessary.

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