

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

Hello, this is Jay Johnson and welcome to the Run Faster podcast. Today is a Q&A, so if you don't like Q&As, you can fast forward. If you do like Q&As, that's great. I hope you'll enjoy this and that means that there's no guest today. It's just you and I. Okay? Four questions came from a reader. Jim. This was in response to a newsletter and I really appreciate these questions.

They're rooted in a really good understanding of the information I've been putting out via the newsletters. I believe Jim has read [Simple Marathon Training](#). If he hasn't, I would be surprised given that these questions are in some ways rooted in the information in that book. I am going to come back to [Simple Marathon Training](#) at the end of this podcast in a little bit of a plug but more, and I'll use this as an example.

I'm working with a couple new people who aren't running the marathon and yet all of the things I believe in that apply to distance running, whether you're a high school athlete training for the 1,600m or you're an adult training for ultra marathons, it's still the crux of it is in the [Simple Marathon Training](#) book. The marathon training is obviously different in that the focus on the long run and needing to utilize fat is important.

Okay, but I digress.

Here's the four questions and we'll see if you're interested in listening further.

First question. 'Do you always prescribe minutes to even advanced runners? If so, why?'

Second question. 'Can you run your easy days too easy?'

Third question. 'During your fundamental phase, do you see value in hill sprints as well?'

Forth question. 'During your fundamental phase, do you see value in starting to progress a moderate speed long run in distance to prepare for marathon-specific training?'

I'm going to go down here. I actually asked him and he actually does have the book. I asked him before I went into the Q&A if he would give me some of his feedback what he thought the answers would be. I don't know if I'm actually going to read this. Here's his, what he added if he was going to answer the question 'Do you always prescribe minutes to even advanced runners? If so, why?'

I said, "Maybe the better question is if you do prescribe in minutes, does mileage per week take care of itself?" That's a great place to start. I coach an athlete, Amy Feit, who's getting ready to run CIM. I'm recording this on Tuesday, November 28th. CIM is this weekend. It's December 3rd. CIM if you don't know is the California International Marathon in Sacramento.

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

One of the fastest courses. Net downhill, but some rollers as part of the course. With that net downhill, it is a fast course. Obviously, Northern California in the winter should have good weather, although they had some horrible weather back a few years ago. Anyway, today was her last workout. It was three miles at marathon pace, a half mile at what we call fun fast pace, and then three miles at marathon pace.

There's about a 30 second difference between marathon pace and what that half mile fun fast was. She felt good, knocked it out. For those of you who are familiar with [Core X](#), you can look up [Core X](#) on YouTube, that's what she did today as part of her easy general strength. It's very realistic for people who are in their 30s and 40s and 50s to get to a point where they can do [Core X](#).

We've got kids at the [Boulder Running Camps](#) who can't do core x when they first show up to camp. That level of general strength is part of why an athlete like Amy is successful. Anyway, I digress. Coming back to minutes, her mileage kind of takes care of itself in the last eight weeks of this training. There's been about, I believe an about three weeks where you're going to lower the volume but keep intensity high to taper for the marathon.

Some weeks look really weird because she does something where she's on a 14-day cycle where it's a Tuesday workout and then a Saturday long run, then a Tuesday workout, then an easy Friday workout, and then a Sunday long run. When you look at it on the calendar, there's going to be a week where it starts with Sunday, at least in the software that we use it starts on Sunday and it goes to Saturday, and there's two long runs.

There's a week where she had 22 miles on a Saturday and 20 miles on a Sunday. That's obviously 42 miles in two days, but in between those was not a lot of running, okay? Here's the bottom line. I like minutes for all the easy days because I think if you're going to go out for a 50, what almost all my clients get is 45 to 55 minutes with strides. Okay?

As you know if you've been reading my newsletter and listening to the podcast, I believe you need to do strides as part of the run. At 45 to 50 minutes of running, you can do 5 x 20 or 25 or 30 second strides, just at 5K pace. Again, for somebody getting ready for anywhere from the 5K up to the marathon, doing some strides at 5K pace.

You have to be able to do some of that running (at 5k pace) if you're going to run a good 5K and obviously a marathoner needs to be competent at the 5K distance as well. We just do those off of minutes. You might run 30 seconds a mile slower on a day you feel horrible. You might run 30 seconds a mile faster on a day you feel fantastic and the weather's good or a day when it's rainy and windy, you're going to run a little slower.

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

I very much believe in running for minutes on those days. The flip side is, and we use the half marathon and the marathon as examples, I really believe that the long run should always be done as miles. Not always, but for most runners should be done as miles definitely for the half marathon and the marathon.

If it's your first half marathon, getting up to 10-, 12-, and then I think at least one 14-mile long run is nice because then you know you can complete the race distance. If you're serious about half marathon training, and I don't know if I just said half marathon or marathon, what I meant to say was half marathon. For half marathon training if you're new, 10-12 and then one 14-mile long run.

For serious half marathon training, I think it's a lot of 12s, a lot of 14s, and a lot of 16-mile long runs. If you've listened to this podcast, go back and listen to Mark Hansen talk about his evolution as somebody who's racing the half marathon. He derived a lot of confidence from those 14- and 16-mile long runs. What's nice about those is a 16-mile long run doesn't lay you out for the rest of that Saturday or the rest of that Sunday when you do it and that's nice.

For the marathon, this is in *Simple Marathon Training*. *Simple Marathon Training* the book has a 20 week training cycle. There's four 18-mile runs, two 20-mile runs, and one 22-mile run. That's the focus. You have to get in those runs. Now granted, if something pops up in life where you have to move things back a couple weeks, you miss a couple weeks because of work or a child is sick or just something comes up in life, the progression might be such that you only get the two 20 mile runs and you have to miss the 22-mile run.

The bottom line is I definitely don't agree that 16 miles is the longest run you should be doing to properly train for the marathon. There are obviously other training programs out there that will explain that. If you want proof that Simple Marathon Training works, just go to Amazon and [read the reviews](#). We have all kinds of people reviewing the book saying, "This is a strategy. This is an approach to marathon training that has kept me healthy and helped me run well."

All kinds of people have qualified for Boston since the book has been out by using the book. The bottom line is where it gets a little messy in minutes versus mileage is let's say you're somebody who's going to focus on 5Ks and 10Ks. I think it's nice to do the long run via miles. I think it's nice to know you're doing a 6- or an 8- or a 10- or 12-mile long run and maybe even 14 and 16 for 10Ks and 5Ks.

It's just nice to know that, "Hey, for 10 miles, I can run X" or "For 12 miles, I can run X". For high school kids, I think they get a lot of - and obviously college athletes too - they get a lot of confidence derived from saying, "I can crush 10 miles at this pace." A lot of the long runs, no, I shouldn't say a lot, almost every long run I'm assigning to most

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

athletes will say you can speed up at, and then fill in the blank distance.

If it's a 12-mile long run, run the first 9 miles easy and then if you feel good at the 9 mile mark, you can speed up, which means the next 3 would be a little bit faster. That's the way we approach that. In marathon training, a 20-mile run might have anywhere from 8 to 12, it could even be a little bit more, but 8 to 12 at marathon pace. Just to use an example, that's the thing that Amy did, Amy Feit did recently that has us pretty excited about her marathon is that she in the middle of a 20 mile run did some good marathon pace running.

Okay. 'Can you run your easy days too easy?' That's question number two.

For if you're new to running, the answer's no. You can't run your easy days too easy. If you're a type A personality, the answer's no. You can't run your easy days too easy. If you're a high school kid and you're new to running, no. You can't run your easy days too easy.

The flip side is if you've qualified for Boston three times and you're trying to run faster and you're anywhere from 25 to 55 years old, there might be a time over a 20 week marathon training program where maybe 12 weeks in where you don't have to run quite as slow as you maybe did when you weren't a Boston qualifier. Okay? This one, there's no black and white answer to this one.

If you have PRs for your easy day loops, you are not training correctly. You have to trust this, folks. You got to keep your easy days easy so your hard days can be hard. There's a little asterisk of yes. If you're somebody where your long run pace is 7-minute pace and you can do that for 16 or 18 or 20 miles and you're running 9:30-10:00 minute pace on your easy day, that's probably a little too slow.

Again, let's say you had a child who was up throwing up all night and let's say you had three nights of that and now it's day number four and you're going out for your easy run and your normal easy day pace is 8:30, don't look at the watch. Don't look at the Garmin. Don't look at pace. Just go for an easy run, okay?

I would give the 80/20 and I'm not using that principle correctly. I'm just saying for 80% of you, you can't run your easy days too easy. Maybe there's 20% of you out there where you should monitor it over the course of four weeks, six weeks, eight weeks and say, "Can I run my easy day a little bit easier?" Think of the semantics and the terminology we're using. We're calling it an easy day, so it has to be easy.

Okay. I really liked this question by Jim. 'During your foundational phase, do you see value in hill sprints?' I do see value in the eight second hill sprints that Renato Kanova talks about, in the US, Brad Hudson talks about. I think running hills when ... Again, when I was

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

coaching this group in Boulder, we would do hills. About every other week, there was this long hill.

When I was coaching 1,500m runners in Boulder, we had a hill where you could run 1,500m pace up for 150 meters. Folks, hills aren't a part of my coaching when I'm writing a book or when I'm coaching somebody long distance because I don't know the grade of the hill, I don't know if it's a consistent grade over that length of the hill, and then I don't know the length of the hill. Okay?

I think what you're doing with hill sprints is you're introducing something metabolically that's totally different than just doing the aerobic running and doing some good challenging aerobic running that bleeds into threshold running. When you're blasting these eight second sprints up a steep hill, you're doing ... that's what they would call a lactate type activity.

For some people with fast twitch fiber, their body loves that. You can argue that people with slow twitch fiber, that their body's going to love that as well. I think there's other ways to get at that. Jim, I'm going to assume that you're somebody in your 30s or 40s.

I think that it's so easy to read about hill sprints and not to think, "Wait, is this, am I hearing about training that people in their 20s who are semi-professional or professional runners doing and am I hearing about it from my local high school coach or a college coach?" Not to say that a 35 year old or a 45 year old can't be doing hard hill sprints, they absolutely can, but it's you need to have a better foundation of general strength.

You need to have good hamstring flexibility. You need to have done, and I know we don't have all the same videos out now, but strength and mobility. Once we just got done recording the audio for [SAM](#) phase four and phase five today. There's a lot of plyometrics in [SAM](#) phase five. That's the foundation before doing hill sprints. I really like to cook and I'm trying to think of a cooking analogy.

It's like playing with cinnamon or nutmeg or something. You have to know what you're doing with it. Does that make sense? It doesn't mean that it can't make a dish really unique, but for most of you out there, I don't think you need to be worrying about hill sprints. The flip side is you must be doing strides on your easy days. Just look that concept up on my blog 'Strides During Your Easy Days' and again, do them as part of your easy days.

So many of you have heard that you need to do strides, but they're assigned at the end of your easy day and then you don't get them done because you're rushing and you have to get off to work or you have to be back home. Okay. All right. Jim, this is what's throwing me off. Jim's using the term 'fundamental phase'. The term I want you to use is 'foundation'.

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

When you're laying a foundation, if you think about building that skyscraper, something that's going to go really high, you've got all that rebar in there. You've got something more than just building a base. Base training I think too often has been something that people use just in terms of a lot of mileage and a lot of slow running.

Anyway, Jim says, 'During your fundamental phase, do you see value in starting to progress a moderate speed long run in distance to prepare for marathon-specific training?' Absolutely. If you read, and he has read the *Simple Marathon Training* book, but I think if you really pay close attention to that, what happens is you'll do a 16-mile long run one week and then you do a 16-mile long run the next week where the last 4 miles you're supposed to speed up.

You don't speed up mile, mile, mile, mile. You just transition at the 12-mile mark to a faster pace for which you maintain that faster pace for the next 4 miles. I really think that doing some marathon pace work in the context, and I really do think the 20-mile long run is the magic number. There's something that some people like to say that to get ready for a marathon, you got to be able to do a 20-mile run and you got to be able to do 10 miles of that 20 at marathon pace.

The way I usually split that up for athletes is to do 9 miles easy, or excuse me, 8 to 9, maybe transition for a mile, but then get your 10 miles in and then give yourself a half mile or a mile to cool down. Jim is somebody who's doing a lot of 20 mile runs. I'll share this. He said, "I tend to throw in short segments after each marathon targeting a 10K race and run 80 to 90 miles per week", so he's running a ton during those segments.

"Therefore I rarely do a foundation phase, but I feel like I may be leaving some fitness on the table by not doing so. Instead of targeting a 10 week segment focused on a 10K and building mileage while doing so, I think my time may be better spent increasing my long run to 20 miles with 16 or so of it at about 85% of marathon pace before approaching specific phase with quality during the long runs. Would love to hear your thoughts."

Okay. I'm going to take issue with ... First of all, Jim, these are awesome questions. This is fantastic, so please don't take what is about to be my criticism of that sentence, don't take it the wrong way. You want to come up with 85% of marathon pace and I think you're overthinking it. Don't worry about percentages in marathon pace. Just say, "Hey, am I running easy? Am I running steady? Am I running marathon pace?"

Now steady. How do you define what that is? That's something Coach Wetmore at the University of Colorado, he didn't have a pace that he was telling us to do that. When you do a fartlek, you do an on pace and you do a steady pace, okay? People hate me as a coach a lot of times for

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

the first couple weeks that we work together because they'll do a fartlek or they'll do progression fartleks.

The on pace is just by feel. It's a challenging pace. Steady is faster than your easy day pace. I think doing 20 miles and then, Jim, probably saying, "Hey, I'm going to run the first 8 easy and then I'm going to transition for a mile or two and then at the 10-mile mark if I feel good, I'm going to speed up for probably ..." Actually, no. I'd do it a little different way.

I'd give yourself 12, 10 or 12, let's say 12 for this example easy, transition for a mile. Now you're at 13 and then give yourself 6 miles where you run a little faster and don't worry about if it's a certain percentage of marathon pace. Just make it challenging and then one mile cool.

Over the course of weeks, that's 6 miles. You can either do more miles, so you could start at the 11-mile mark and do something like 8 miles at that challenging pace and then one mile easy or you can obviously just stick to 5 or 6 and make it a little bit faster. Folks, another thing that, this goes back to the hill question. If I haven't made this clear, let me do so now. Hills are really important on your long runs.

Now there's some of you out there that live in places that are flat as a pancake and you don't have hills. That's fine, but most of you live in a place where there's hills and you don't want to do a hilly long run. I understand. It's hard, it's challenging. Do the hilly long run. A hilly long run is the type of thing that Arthur Lydiard really believed in.

It's something that hasn't changed in decades in our sport. Doing the hilly long run makes sense. Now go back to that long run where you're doing 20 miles with anywhere from 8 to 12 at marathon pace. Okay. When you're getting ready like Amy is for the California International Marathon, she and I have worked together long enough and she knows not to do this. She knows not to run the hilly long run course on for that marathon pace stuff.

Now we tried to get fancy potentially and tried to mimic the exact topography of that course with something in her area and we couldn't quite do it. That's something that you could do as well. For the most part, if you're going to run Chicago or you're going to run Twin Cities or CIM, places that, and I know Twin Cities isn't as easy but with Chicago and CIM, places that are really fast and really flat, you want to do marathon pace on the flat.

Over 20 weeks of the Simple Marathon Training program, there's only four or five long runs where you're running marathon pace as part of it. The rest of the long runs do it on a hilly course. Jim, just to go back to this question, I think I would ... One thing that we have to be honest about too is that when you're doing 10K type training and you're running those paces, is that fun?

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

Do you like going to the track and doing 6 x 1,000m? Or do you like going to the roads and doing 6 by a mile? I'm sorry, 10 x 1,000m? Or going to the roads and doing 6 by a mile and running that hard? If you like that, that's great. That's great training and you should do what you like to do. For some reason right now, I tend to have clients who really love crushing that long run.

Granted, they're buying into the type of training that I think is important, but there's nothing that says that marathon training has to be about the long run all 20 weeks. You're somebody who's putting in so many miles that a long run on tired legs that maybe isn't as long in that early foundational phase is absolutely fine. You should do it at what sounds fun and then the second point is don't worry about percentages of marathon pace. Just run by feel.

I am going to wrap this up with [Simple Marathon Training](#). Running by feel is something that I can type out a long blog post about or I can send out a newsletter. At some point if you read Simple Marathon Training, running by feel is in there. There's all the things that I believe in with the small caveat of needing to teach your body to utilize fat.

Needing to learn how to utilize fat is important in the marathon because you have enough glycogen to run what most people would say is about 18 miles. Some people might say 20, some might say a little less, but you definitely need to have enough glycogen stored in your body, stored in your muscles and your liver to run 26.2. you have to get good at utilizing fat.

I firmly believe that it's the long run that's going to help you do that. One little asterisk to that is if you do the SAM work, and just look up SAM on YouTube if you haven't seen those videos, you do hard SAM work immediately after the long run, that's a long day. In that Simple Marathon Training book, you're going to do 18-mile long runs and 20-mile long runs and doing SAM hard immediately after, that's a long ... that stimulus is long.

When you do do the 22-mile run, you get a little break and then you do SAM easy. The point I'm trying to make is that even if you don't read the training, the first 45 pages of Simple Marathon Training lays out my philosophy about training. I'll close with this. I rarely work with high school students. I'm sure you can understand why. They have a coach.

Oftentimes, the athlete and the parent aren't happy with the coach, but they also don't have the courage to go to the coach and say, "Hey, we need some outside help." Honestly, most of the time, they don't need some outside help. There's so many great high school coaches and I'm fortunate to work with a lot of them via High School Running Coach. A lot of them come, bring kids to the Boulder running camps.

Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

That being said, there's a coach featured on [High School Running Coach](#) who said, "Part of the reason I'm so successful is that so many coaches are lazy." Okay? If Johnny or Sally has a lazy coach, I can't ... that's not my problem, necessarily. If Johnny and Sally absolutely love running, they can find a college where there's a passionate coach who's going to help them get better.

That being said, every once in awhile there's a situation where the coach wants help. In this situation, a young man reached out to me. His mom reached out. She said, "The coaches on board, they've never coached track before. We need some guidance. Can you coach my son over the winter? If it goes well, you can help him in track." The point is he's going to run the 1,600m and the 3,200m, but he still needs to run by feel.

He still needs to do strides as part of his easy days and he still needs to do fartleks. He still needs to do a weekly long run. All the things that are in Simple Marathon Training. I keep writing him these emails referring to things. There's a list of aerobic workouts on [coachjayjohnson.com](#). Just go to [coachjayjohnson.com](#) and type in aerobic and you'll see an introduction to aerobic workouts and then the four main aerobic workouts that I use with people who are in training.

Again, this young man will end up doing more race pace stuff and he'll end up doing more V02 max stuff. In these first few weeks working together, it's the stuff in Simple Marathon Training that he needs to do. I'm going to find a copy in the house, send it to him, and just say, "Read those first 45 pages."

If that applies to a young man running the 1600 meters, so four laps around the track and you're somebody who's running an ultra marathon or anything in between, I highly recommend getting that book. I'll close with this. I don't make much money off the book, okay? So me telling you to get the book, it's not financial as much as let's use the same terminology. Let's have the same understanding about training.

Fast forward two or three months from now into 2018, we're doing a podcast. We all are on the same page. Horrible pun. We're all on the same page talking about the same type of training. Okay, folks. As we always say on the podcast, if you can go to iTunes and rate the podcast, that'd be awesome. A bunch of people did that after the 51st episode. Really appreciate that. Thank you so much.

The biggest thing you can do to be part of what I'm trying to do as a coach is joining my newsletter. Just go to [CoachJayJohnson.com](#). It's Jay. [CoachJayJohnson.com](#). Join the newsletter. I'm figuring out what people want. I did a survey last week. Do they want more newsletters? Do they want more blog posts? Do they want more podcasts? I'll definitely have a plan for 2018 to try and meet everybody's needs.



Q & A from Run Faster Podcast (11.29.2017)

I've got some really fun information I'm going to share in the next podcast. I'm doing two clinics in January. When I say I'm doing the clinics, I'm the one hosting the clinics. These awesome speakers are coming in to speak and we're doing one for high school coaches and one on the marathon. More information on that in the next episode. We'll have all that information coming through the newsletter at CoachJayJohnson.com. Okay. Thanks so much. Bye bye.