

## THE KEY TO YOUR BEST RACE IS PROPER PACE!

All the “great” training in the world won’t make up for a poorly paced race. Go out too slow and you may not be able to make it up if the race is shorter, and go out too fast and you’ll pay dearly for it and not finish anywhere near what you would run for your best time. So this makes it sound like a fairly fine line doesn’t it? It is!

To understand pace better, I want to explain what goes on in the body, physiologically speaking. I’m going to focus on the latter problem, going out too fast, because I believe this is more problematic. Our bodies desire what is called steady rate. This is the point at which the supply is meeting the demand, aerobically speaking. Oxygen is being supplied, and the working muscles are using this oxygen at the rate it’s being supplied. Life is good. All is happy. We can maintain this pace as long as we are hydrated and fed.

Oxygen deficit is the enemy of steady rate. Some oxygen deficit is always necessary and normal. But the more we put ourselves into oxygen deficit, the more we’re going to pay the price. Oxygen deficit basically means that the supply is not meeting the demand, aerobically speaking, and your body is having to “borrow” from anaerobic sources to pay for the cost until the aerobic system gets caught up. We always start off with a little deficit, as I stated, because it takes about 3 minutes to reach steady rate, so our bodies are using anaerobic properties until the aerobic system can take over. The problem is that the more deficit we put ourselves in, the more we will pay later. The body will have to repay these systems it borrowed from, and it has to slow down to do so. We have to remember that the aerobic system is very forgiving. The anaerobic system fatigues very quickly. It is essential to develop the anaerobic system if we want to run faster, but it has to be eased into and manipulated.

How does this affect our racing. We’ve all been there. We start a 5K and we “feel fine”. This is faster than we usually go, but we “feel okay”. No you don’t. If it’s a faster pace than you can hold for the entire race, the feeling fine is a big lie, and you’ll pay it back at the end. If you know you can run and hold a 7 minute mile for 3 miles, and this is your best effort, and you run the first mile at a 6:30 pace, you will not be able to regain a 7 min pace. You’re pace will drop slower than 7, and in most cases, much slower, and you will not finish the race strong or at your best. What happens is that, in time, probably around the 10 minute mark or maybe sooner, your body begins to repay the deficit it owes, and it slows you down to do so. You can’t cheat the system. If you can run a 7 minute mile for 3 miles, you can’t just all of a sudden run a 6:30 mile and “feel good”. You may be able to do it for a mile, but that’s not what you’re doing!

Know your pace and know you’re Rate of Perceived Exertion. When you start a race, do NOT get swept away with the crowd. We all know that a good 10% or more of the people in a local 5K will go out way too fast, and if you paced correctly, you pass them by the ½ mile point and you’re picking up steam, and they’re already slowing down. That’s the dramatic case. But we can also have this happen at the ½ way mark if we go out just a little too hard. The key is to back off. If you race a lot, chances are you need to remind yourself to pull back within the first minute. Due to the anaerobic system we’ve built up in training and the adrenaline from racing, it may “feel good” when we start. There is no doubt our bodies

CAN do it for a few minutes and it feels good. You have to be smart and back off. Focus on your form and turn over and allow yourself to dial it back. It's an art and it takes practice. If you race somebody in the first mile and it's not a mile race, you lost! Chances are they are NOT racing you. They have their own game plan.

You can practice this in training. I like to do negative splits when I train. I do believe we'll race the way we train, so if you want to race better, practice this in training. I write about things I experience. I've make this mistake too many times. And when I do, I have a race that's not satisfying. So I hope that my mistakes can lead you in a direction of having more fulfilling race times!