

Tapering for the 24 hours race Stadtoldendorf

By Michael Irrgang, May 30, 2009

Only 3 weeks until to go until this year's highlight for many of us in Stadtoldendorf. What to keep an eye on in the remaining time?

The term "tapering" is used to characterize the reduced training effort immediately before a race to achieve a "peak" performance. In this phase, your body should recover from the demanding workouts, to repair potential minor injuries, and to load up your energy stores...yet without losing the excellent shape you are in!

Obviously, you should try to show up at the starting line of a 24 hours race well rested and "without blisters". But to take a full 3 weeks completely off would not be correct, either. Thus you have to find the right compromise between resting and running.

Below you will find tips for these questions:

1. How should you train in the last three weeks?
2. How can you prepare yourself for the race itself?

1. Training during the last three weeks

As already mentioned in the article "...Training for 24 hours...", the most effective training stimuli are demanding workouts, done in really clever sequence. Again, as mentioned there, for rough orientation I would like to define three categories of runners:

A: marathon in 3 hours, 24 hours 240 km; weekly mileage 120km

B: marathon in 3:30 hours, 24 hours 200 km; weekly mileage 90km

A: marathon in 4:15 hours, 24 hours 240 km; weekly mileage 70km

Here a last, hard sequence which might be run on a weekend 3 weeks prior to the race:

| Day | Cat A (MRT 4:15min/km) | Cat B (MRT 5:00 min/km) | Cat C (MRT 6:00 min/km) |
|------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Friday | Crescendo 23 km | Crescendo 23 km | Crescendo 23 km |
| Saturday | 60 km at MRT+30sec, (pretty fast) | 50 km at MRT+30sec, (pretty fast) | 40 km at MRT+30sec, (pretty fast) |
| Sunday | 60 km at MRT+90sec, (pretty slow) | 40 km at MRT+90sec, (pretty slow) | 35 km at MRT+90sec, (pretty slow) |

The Crescendo over 23 km works like this: 5 km in MRT+60sec, 5 km in MRT+30sec, 5 km in MRT, 5 km in MRT-15sec. MRT is marathon pace currently possible. E.g, this being 5:00 min/km, the 5km legs would be run in 6:00, 5:30, 5:00, 4:45, and finally for cool-down in 6:30 min/km, respectively.

Alternatively, on Saturday you might race a swift marathon or 6 hours run. Followed by a run reduced by 10 km on Sunday. Last year, I ran a 12 hours PB three weeks prior to the 24 hour championships. 100km races or 12 hours runs may be at the edge of being counterproductive and are only recommended for those few who are in really superb shape and have an excellent capability to recover.

The headline for the next week is recovery:

| Day | Cat A (MRT 4:15min/km) | Cat B (MRT 5:00 min/km) | Cat C (MRT 6:00 min/km) |
|------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Monday | Rest | Rest | Rest |
| Tuesday | Rest or 5km in MRT+90sec | Rest | Rest |
| Wednesday | 5km in MRT+90sec | 5km in MRT+90sec | 5km in MRT+90sec |
| Thursday | 7km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations | 7km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations | 5km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations |
| Friday | 7km in MRT+60sec | 7km in MRT+60sec | 7km in MRT+60sec |

One week of rest would not result in complete recovery, but definitely in losing power. For this reason, a few training triggers like those accelerations are in the plan. Here, the acceleration takes place in steps: 30secs faster every 50 meters; i.e. the third quarter is run at marathon pace and the last one as fast as possible. 50 m is only approximate, you could also do the stepwise acceleration e.g. every 30 secs.

Those who did not do the “heavy duty” weekend will not need such a reduced training week and should arrive pretty fresh for the next weekend.

From this point, each workout should feel easy, i.e. you feel you could always run faster or longer. The focus now should no longer be to increase your performance level but to sustain it.

Two weeks before the race you can put in another tough workout. In many training plans for 100km this is where the longest training run takes place, similarly for a marathon race the LSD with the longest “acceleration to the end”. For the 24 hours race, you might still run a marathon but not all-out, maybe 15 minutes slower.

| Day | Cat A (MRT 4:15min/km) | Cat B (MRT 5:00 min/km) | Cat C (MRT 6:00 min/km) |
|------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Saturday | 20 km at MRT+75sec, 30 km at MRT+30sec | 20 km at MRT+75sec, 20 km at MRT+30sec | 20 km at MRT+75sec, 15 km at MRT+30sec |
| Sunday | 15 km at MRT+60sec, | 12 km at MRT+60sec, | 10 km at MRT+60sec, |

On Saturday, the first 20 km are run in “24 hours race pace” and the rest some 45 to 60 sec. As already said, don’t run the fast part all-out.

The following week is a typical tapering week: few kilometers, but several speed injections. In addition you might do a few form drills to loosen up your running form.

| Day | Cat A (MRT 4:15min/km) | Cat B (MRT 5:00 min/km) | Cat C (MRT 6:00 min/km) |
|------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Monday | Rest | Rest | Rest |
| Tuesday | 9km in MRT+60sec | 7km in MRT+60sec | 5km in MRT+60sec |
| Wednesday | 7km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations | 7km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations | 5km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations |
| Thursday | 11km intervals: 4 x 1000 m fast | 11km intervals: 4 x 1000 m fast | 11km intervals: 4 x 1000 m fast |
| Friday | Rest or 30 min jog | Rest or 30 min jog | Rest or 30 min jog |

The intervals run on Thursdays are not really fast: they are only used to get you out of the “slow shuffle mode”. The 11 km are best aequenced like this: s-s-f-s-f-s-f-s-s (s=slow, f=you bet...) Slow: MRT+60sec, fast: MRT.

Alternatively, you could do a 3 hour LSD on Thursday.

Now, the last 8 days:

| Day | Cat A (MRT 4:15min/km) | Cat B (MRT 5:00 min/km) | Cat C (MRT 6:00 min/km) |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Saturday | 35 km at MRT+75sec | 30 km at MRT+75sec | 25 km at MRT+75sec |
| Sunday | 10 km at MRT+60sec | 9 km at MRT+60sec | 8 km at MRT+60sec |
| Monday | off | off | off |
| Tuesday | 7 km at MRT+60sec | 5 km at MRT+60sec | 5 km at MRT+60sec |
| Wednesday | 7km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations | 7km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations | 5km in MRT+60sec incl. 4 x 200 m accelerations |
| Thursday | 5 km at MRT+60sec | 5 km at MRT+60sec | off |
| Friday | off | off | off |
| Satm | RACE DAY | RACE DAY | RACE DAY |

Summary: in my plan, “short workouts” are really short and “rest or off” means to not run. You might insert a bit of bicycling here. It remains important in the tapering phase to vary both pace and distance considerably, i.e. to run a longer run and a faster run each week. In a 24-hours-race, anaerobic threshold is of no relevance, thus it does not get trained at all. The short and medium intervals are just in the plan to maintain a bit of variety in your running capabilities. Those who always run slow will pretty soon lose their ability to run fast, too.

In addition to reducing your running mileage you should use some time for strengthening your back, abdominal, etc. muscles. Who does not no what to do here exactly might consider to participate in one of the training camps DUV offers.

2. Preparation for the race

To run is only one part of the preparation. Other important activities which require immediate attention if not done before are:

- entry application/payment
- plan and book how to get there and back from there, plus accommodation
- organize and prepare your support crew

I will write about the support in the next article which focuses on immediate race planning and execution. For preparation, you might sit together with a bunch of runners and supporters and talk about e.g. what to shop. To do this only on the trip to the race and to hope that the shopping might be done the very morning of the race will suck up mental energy unnecessarily.

So you need to get clarity and a to-do list about these things two weeks prior to the race:

- what kind of food do I want to get before, during, and after the race?

You should check with your last workouts what tastes and digests best for you here – the latter being more important for the race.

- what dress options?

Consider shoes, underwear, singlets etc during various scenarios like day and night, if the sun shines or if it's raining, if it is warm/hot/cold? In this case too, it makes sense to use the last long training run to check out the options.

One week before the race check off on the following then:

- pack your bag

- purchase your nutrition/food/goodies

You can usually count on a rich supply of food provided by the race organizers. So you really need only any "special" food for yourself and for your supporters. On the race website you may find out what is offered for supporters. Think about what is missing from the menu. For some meals, you may have to sign up in advance.

- get plenty of sleep

Sounds dull, but it is not: you should show up at the starting line extremely well rested.

- define your race tactics

Really? A very difficult topic. I believe you should not calculate and plan too much ahead, especially if the race is your first or 2nd 24 hours run. One important indicator for your race tempo is to run the last long unit consistently at about 70% of your max. pulse rate. This is your maximum speed during the race!

Simply projecting this to 24 hours will result in the maximum distance you are capable to cover, if you don't take any breaks, show no episodes of temporary weakness, etc. So I would subtract 10% of this max distance and call it the "optimally possible performance". Which race tactics might be most appropriate to realize that potential I will describe in the next article.

In general, the race tactics are pretty simple: you have a simple base plan, which structures the race like e.g. "run 10, walk 1 km" or "a marathon every 5 hours", plus an emergency plan.

Define your base plan pretty short-term to accommodate minor shape or weather impacts. The emergency plan is established well ahead – what could go wrong, and how would you react. E.g.

1. If it starts to rain a little, I will wear my yellow cap
2. If it starts to rain heavily and gets cool, I will put on my red anorak
3. etc.

Really write down your emergency plan and let your supporter know about it to avoid discussions in the "crisis situation" and to let your supporter act on your behalf, come up with suggestions, e.g. "could it be it is getting colder now" whereas the runner does not notice yet.

Absolute caution in case of medical or orthopedic problems. Whether your trusted diarrhea medicine will actually work after 20 hours of racing remains to be seen...

If you identify potential "problems" and develop a response plan prior to the race, you will be much less worried. During the race you can keep your cool, e.g. blister under the

foot? Pinch, disinfect, band-aid and continue to run. The worst problems are those which you are not prepared for.

You should try to avoid the negative connotation of these "special items". In a formula-1 race a blown tire is no big problem, just another box stop.

It is important to talk yourself strong during the following weeks:

"I can do it, and I will do it! I have trained well and I am optimally prepared. The other people and the excellent atmosphere to be expected will enable me to deliver an out-of-this-world performance, which I will be proud of my whole life."

Who talks like this, has the victory (over your self) already pocketed.

I wish you much fun with your training and preparations until race day!

Michael