



TIP #11: TRAIN WITH TUNE UP RACES!!!

Half or Full Marathon training doesn't mean you have to abandon racing in favor of long runs and lactate threshold workouts. As you approach your spring marathon or half marathon take a look at how a tune up race can be integrated.

Occasional "tune-up races" are a recommended part of any training program. They serve as benchmarks of your fitness and prepare you mentally for racing. Tune-up races are all-out races; they are not races you use merely as tempo runs or pace runs. One word of caution: when doing tune-up races while "training through them," it is important to remember that your times will be slower due to the fatigue of training even when racing all out. It is not unusual for a 10k time raced under training fatigue to be 1 – 1 ½ minutes slower than one raced when you are tapered and rested. This can provide a false indication of true fitness level. Also, don't run tune-up races any closer than 3 weeks prior to a half or full marathon at which you are trying to optimize performance, PR, qualify for Boston, etc, etc.

Before running a tune up race, try the mini-taper. This is where you cut back slightly on the "hard" workouts a few days before the race. Your time will be a closer indication to your true fitness level. Just how many days rest and/or easy run days do you need? It depends on what and when your last "hard" workout was. VO2 max workouts are the most taxing workouts of all. After running these 5k race pace intervals, you should allow at least 5 days recovery to allow the fatigue to lift before racing. A 5k race can also be used to replace a scheduled VO2 Max Workout. Long runs and tempo or lactate threshold runs require 4 days of recovery in order to race without the fatigue of the workout. Keep in mind, this is the amount of time it takes for the fatigue to lift, not the amount of time it takes to reap benefit from a particular workout.....this can take as much as two weeks!

Tune up races are generally shorter than the distance you are ultimately training for. The idea is to get you used to the stresses of racing and measure fitness level without prematurely running the full distance. For the Half Marathon, an 8k – 10k is an ideal distance for a tune-up race, and for the Marathon 5 miles – 25K. Any longer than that, and the recovery required will negate the benefits of the tune-up race!