

Youth Running: Keep it Simple, Make it Fun

At the beginning of any youth program a “base-line” should be established for each runner. This can be determined by a “time trial.”

Depending on the number of factors including: age, sex, physical condition, experience and natural ability - basic training programs can be set up by the coach! These programs will vary according to ability in the following areas:

- 1) Distance (miles per week)
- 2) Amount of running time (number of workouts)
- 3) Pace of each run
- 4) Rest between workouts

Time trials can help a coach divide his or her runners into training groups. Running with others of similar ability can make running fun for kids.

After groups are defined, reasonable goals should be set and recorded for each individual runner. This should be a joint decision between runner and coach. Break these goals down into reachable times to shoot for as the season progresses. (ie. 10 sec./mile improvement by the second meet.) Coach may have to help keep young runners focused on their long-term goals and not just on the next workout or meet.

Training - General Guidelines (9 week program)

Phase One: (The first third of the season.)

Build endurance: Distance is the primary workout. This will help build a base (strength) for later development. Beginners should build slowly. It is tempting to run too much too soon. The coach should work young runners up gradually over the first three weeks of the program. This is the time when young runners are injury prone.

Phase Two: (The second third of the season.)

Transitional Phase: Prepare for faster paced running. The tempo of distance runs should pickup. Short time trials and long intervals can be run during this phase. (ie. 1 mile time trials for Bantams, up to 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ miles for Midgets and Youth divisions. Intervals can vary from 400 meters for Bantams to 800 meters for Youth. No more than 3-6 intervals should be run during any one workout.)

Time trials and intervals should be considered “hard days.” It is recommended that young runners do no more than two hard days per week. Each hard day should be preceded by and followed by an easy day or rest day. Easy days will vary from runner to runner.

It is important to warm-up properly before any “hard” running is done. It will usually take 10-15 minutes of jogging and stretching before a young runner is prepared for a hard workout. An equal amount of time should be spent warming down after a hard workout.

Phase Three: (The final third of the season.)

Speed and quickness: Intervals are shortened and more emphasis is put on quickness. After a proper warm-up, intervals can be run at approximately half the distance runners were doing in phase two. The pace should quicken with a hard kick the last 100 to 200 meters. The number of intervals should also be cut in half.

The total distance run per week should be cut by about a third the final week before the big meet. Phase three should prepare runners for the final meets of the season. The Junior Olympic meet will be a good time to see if the goals set at the beginning of the season were obtained.