

Use Summer Training to Make the Jump

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written for Running Times

June 9, 2011

The summer is arguably the best time for a high school runner to produce the gains that will make the difference between running on the junior varsity, the varsity or possibly in the state meet. But as simple as summer training may initially appear—run every day, run some of those miles fairly hard, don't get hurt when doing the first two—the modern reality is that many athletes overtrain in the summer or get hurt in the summer. The overtrained athlete starts the competition season stale and depleted, while the athlete who incurs an overuse injury during the summer starts the season behind everyone else.

The good news is there's another option, the summer training experience that every high school athlete gets up early to make happen: It's called "The Jump." It occurs differently for every athlete but the outcome is the same: After The Jump that athlete is a different runner, running further up on the depth chart on their team and/or within the hierarchy of the state and national ranks.

The Jump includes four key elements: 1) General strength and mobility (GSM) every day that you run; 2) Increased volume: more miles than you've done in the past; 3) Fartlek running as a way to improve your aerobic capacity and learn where your anaerobic threshold is; 4) A special element you want to work on—it could be hill running, it could be a weekly long run, it could be adding double runs—you get to choose. That's it, four things: GSM, volume, fartlek, special.

Finally, consistency is the theme for the summer as the cornerstone to good training. The most basic key to becoming the best runner you can be is to be consistent in your training. You must embrace consistency as the path towards realizing your potential as a runner.

READ THIS FIRST

Before we delve into the specifics and recommendations for making The Jump, I need you to evaluate what type of program you're in and how that situation affects your reading of this material. Broadly speaking, there are two high school scenarios: One, you're in a school with a tradition of distance running where the coach(es) have had years of success with teams and individuals. If that describes your situation, then the best way to make The Jump is to go into the head coaches' office and ask them how the athletes who've come before you have made The Jump. Get ready for simple, straightforward answers; they might ask you to attend morning practice five days a week, run once on the weekend and take one day off. Simple. But as Thelonious Monk said, "Simple ain't easy," as things like vacations, summer jobs, volunteer obligations or just plain summer-heat induced laziness can keep you from getting in that run ... the run that your coach said was the key to making The Jump. If you need extra motivation during the dog days of summer, just remember that the running you do this summer will pay off in the fall.

The second scenario goes something like this: Your cross country coach is a great person who cares about each athlete on the team, but he doesn't coach track and you aren't going to run with the football coach writing your workouts. You're the most serious person on the team (congrats on that, by the way), you're dying to get better and you're frustrated because you know you can run faster. If this describes you then I've got good news and bad news. The good news is you just follow the instructions below and there's a good chance you'll make The Jump. The bad news is that simple-ain't-easy rule still applies, perhaps more so as you'll likely do a majority of your work alone.

The final issue that we need to address when discussing summer training is the role of injuries. Many athletes will have a minor injury at the end of their track season that they were running through. If that describes you make sure you're honest about this before trying to make The Jump; if you don't try to fix the weakness, imbalance or asymmetry you're going to get hurt again. While some injuries go away with rest (especially with younger athletes) you and your coach shouldn't assume that time off will be the magic bullet. For this reason I want you to seriously consider how you're entering the summer so you can find that balance of increasing volume while staying healthy. Maybe running the same volume as last summer, but injury-free, is the way to go. The bottom line is, if you had an injury at the end of track, don't assume that two weeks off will cure all ills.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS

1) GSM: Think of general strength and mobility as your insurance policy against injury. No guarantees that you'll be injury free, but if you do the GSM daily, valuing it as much as you value running, you'll be amazed at how much better you feel. What exercises and routines should you be doing? Prior to your run you should be doing the lunge matrix warm-up, which comes from the world of physical therapy, specifically therapist Gary Gray. The lunge matrix warm-up helps you get back to neutral if your hips or posture is out-of-whack, before you run and make it worse. Following your run you'll do a series of GSM exercises that are bundled into routines. We've created an eight-week progression of these GSM routines that you can follow, complete with videos here. The bottom line with GSM work is this: You either did it or you didn't. If you do it, the chance that you'll have a great summer and make The Jump greatly increases.

2) VOLUME: Running more miles (or more minutes) than you did in the previous track and cross country seasons has long been touted as the way to make The Jump. And I agree—rarely do athletes make The Jump without running more than they have in the past. But in this day and age we see more stress fractures and overuse injuries than ever before—athletes even fracturing their femur, the largest bone in the human body—so something's wrong. My view is that as long as the GSM is in the program and as long as there's a logical progression to the mileage buildup the athlete should be able to both run more miles and stay healthy. When increasing your volume, run easy on most of your runs; you have plenty of opportunities to run fast once practice officially starts. Run just once a day to get to the volumes we've laid out; if

you're ready for more, then start adding a second run just twice a week. A weekly long run that is 20 percent of your weekly volume—so a 6-mile run if you're running 30 miles a week or a 10-mile run if running 50 miles a week—is also important. Finally, consider taking a day off each week as a day for regeneration and recovery, knowing that you can still hit the progressions we've laid out for you.

3) FARTLEK: If you're not familiar with it, fartlek is simply running a faster pace for a little while, then slowing a bit (but not slowing to a jog) and running aerobically until it's time to run fast again. This Swedish term means "speed-play" and I think it's a tremendously powerful tool for athletes and coaches. Fartlek runs teach athletes to feel threshold running better than an actual threshold run (aka "tempo run") because athletes will undoubtedly go out too hard on the first couple of reps in a summer fartlek, suffering the consequences later in the workout. Sounds harsh, but it's a great way to learn how it feels to be running hard, but within yourself, which is a key in cross country, where you're not going to get splits. I like the simple fartlek of 1 minute at cross country race pace, then 1 minute "steady." One minute at cross country race pace is not hard — you likely be doing between 15 and 20 minutes during the season — so the key is really keeping the "steady" running honest. I love that you can do this workout alone since you go off of effort, and I love that fartlek workouts can be done anywhere (e.g., when on a family vacation).

4) SPECIAL ELEMENT: There's something you need to work on this summer ... and I have no clue what it is. OK, Maybe you'll have lots of hills on your state meet course and you need to start practicing now, or maybe you tend to fade mentally after the 2-mile mark and need to learn to concentrate when you're starting to hurt. Or maybe a physical therapist has told you that you have weak hips and a poor core (most high school athletes do) so you simply need to do all of our GSM plus the work they assign. Some athletes need to work on their running mechanics and if your coach will meet you a few times a week (three or four ideally, but two is fine) you can make significant changes in one summer. Whatever you choose, know why you're choosing it and have a plan for implementing it in your training as you make The Jump.

HOW MUCH?

An easy formula to determine your summer mileage

How much more running should you be doing in the summer? Calculate the average weekly volume you ran during the previous track season and make it a goal to get to that volume in week two or three of your summer training. Then take that number, multiply it by 20 percent and add that to your total to get the approximate weekly volume you should be able to reach in the summer. For example, if you were running 50 miles per week during track season, you'll be shooting for 60 ($50 \times 0.20 = 10$ additional miles) by late summer. You can probably reach that number four or five weeks out from the start of school, allowing you to "soak up" a nice month of training at that volume before the rigors of academics begin. Be sure to ramp up gradually and be aware of any aches or pains as you ramp up to that mileage.

The following sequence is a bit more aggressive for younger athletes, then hits the 20 percent recommendation exactly during the transition from junior to senior year:

BOYS

Freshmen	30 miles
Sophomores	40 miles
Juniors	50 miles
Seniors	60 miles

GIRLS

Freshmen	25 miles
Sophomores	30–35 miles
Juniors	35–45 miles
Seniors	45–60 miles

Why the lesser volumes for girls? In addition to running, I think young women should be in the weight room and will greatly benefit from doing high-quality lifting twice a week, coupled with daily GSM. I'm not talking "core" or the latest aerobic step class, but serious work such as squats and box jumps. This will increase bone density, increase testosterone and human growth hormone, which will help prevent injury and strengthen the weak abductors and adductors that are problematic for all but a few female athletes.

A final thought for both genders: If you love running, run more. But don't run more at the risk of losing all your athleticism, and don't run more without continuing to make a good portion of that running fast.

TWO WHO MADE THE JUMP

MEGAN BRUNETTE

Class of 2013, The Classical Academy, Colorado Springs, CO

The Volume Jump: Megan Brunette didn't run cross country her freshman year, but she ran 2:50 for 800m during track. As a member of The Classical Academy Titans cross country program, 2:50 for 800m wasn't going to move her into the varsity since her team is a perennial state powerhouse that has also qualified for Nike Cross Nationals (NXN). After healing from a little injury at the end of track she took up the Hal Higdon half marathon plan (unbeknown to her coach), upped her volume, and ran a half marathon at the end of the summer. Megan has one of the best coaches in the country, Alan Versaw, guiding so once she had put in the work she simply had to follow his direction. By the end of the year she became one of the best runners in her division at the state meet, finishing 13th in the 3A division, running 20:28 for 5K (at altitude) and running 19:47 for 5K at the NXN-SW meet.

STEPHEN RICE

Class of 2013, Peak to Peak Charter School, Lafayette, CO

The Strength Jump: As a freshman, Stephen Rice was the eighth runner on his team, recording a PR of 18:42 for the year and finishing 36th out of 73 runners in the league championship (times run at altitude). During the summer he focused on building a foundation, running tempo runs and fartlek as part of that base phase devised by his coach, Dr. Richard Hansen. His mileage grew to 50–55 miles two weeks before the start of school. The next year as a sophomore, he fluctuated between second and fourth man on the team, but by the state championships he

was the team's top runner as he took his 5K PR down almost 90 seconds to 17:16. He has a bright prep future with two more years to train and improve.

Good luck this summer. When in doubt, slow down, run easy and remember that staying healthy and getting in the run will help you make The Jump.

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