



Annual Planning

One of the difficulties that many coaches have with endurance athletes/runners and especially road runners is actually ascertaining what targets the athlete/runner want to achieve, it is often as vague as “I want to run a PB this winter” or “I want to run some fast times/get a higher position this year”. The only time that most know what they want is if they are looking to run a marathon. They will then train for the 12-16 weeks building up to the race and then revert to type and not look beyond that (see the coaches club article on marathon training).

I am sure that as coaches that you have plans already in place however perhaps the information below will act either as a reminder of the importance of planning or to prove that you are doing it right! The plan that you set for your athletes/runners will depend on a lot of other factors such as whether you are looking to peak more than once in a year or period and what type of goal that you might be working towards together.

Preparing an annual plan.

Why an *annual* plan? Unless you are an international athlete looking to run in an Olympics or other major competition (where you would maybe work a four year cycle) it makes sense to use an annual cyclical plan broken down into weeks, months and other phases which fits generally with your athletes lifestyle and aspirations (Macro, Meso and micro cycles). The first step would be to consider where to start and finish your plan and this will all depend on what the targets are. Your plan doesn't have to start and stop in January/ December, in fact it would make greater sense if you are planning the winter and summer road races or spring/autumn marathons that your annual plan would work from June to June perhaps with a double peaking target?

The starting point for preparing a plan will be to discuss what your athletes goals are and if the athlete is new to you to get some background to what their capabilities are, what time they have available to train and preferably a record of the training that they have done and are currently doing. Of course if they have been with you for a while you should already have this information to hand. This information is crucial to enable you to review if the goals are attainable and realistic and if they are how you are going to tailor the training to reach those goals.

Once you have the specific goal or goals/targets and when this is going to be achieved WORK BACKWARDS to when the plan will start, this way you can fit in the various phases or periods and work out your plan progressively back towards the goal/target. Remember also that you should also look to introduce “bench mark” targets along the way to chart progress. This will enable you to check progress when planning in the future and is a perfect check of fitness at any specific time.

Setting out a plan

So with the specific goals and targets set out along the way, how do you start? The plan shown below is an outline example of a year which has been planned out and is based on three training sessions per week with the major goal(PB) being in period 5. The duration of each phase could be broken down as follows but can be flexed to suit. Bear in mind though that you are building a pyramid of training so the “base” training needs to be the biggest otherwise you have nothing to build your training on. The plan can of course start at any time depending upon when the goals are, however common practice is for period 1 to be over the winter months, though having said that, with many of the competitive and selection races taking place during the early part of the year it might be wise if you are targeting this period to move your plan to begin accordingly. This outline plan follows common wisdom and can be adapted to road, track or with further adaptations any athletics event.

Period 1 - 16 weeks. General development of strength, mobility, endurance looking at basic technique. This could include doing a progressive circuit session on a weekly basis. A weights session to improve strength and introducing a regular stretching and flexibility session. Longer runs. Working on hills both up and down, and again looking at better technique.

Period 2 - 8 weeks. Development of specific fitness and advanced technical skills, moving on from the “base” work you would now start to look at more specific fitness based upon the target event whilst continuing to hone the skills that your athlete/runner has begun to develop.

Period 3 - 8 weeks. Competition experience – achievement. Whilst continuing with the periods as above you will be looking at gaining experience at your preferred distance or event for a PB.

Period 4 - 8 weeks. Adjustment of technique, preparation for the main competition. Looking at how things have gone (Reflecting with the athlete/runner using the diary) what strengths and weaknesses that are evident and how these strengths can be brought to the fore to achieve target or goal.

Period 5 - 8 weeks. Competition. This will be the period where you will have the targeted races or events. This period has lower intensity as your charge may be racing quite regularly. There is no need to be training hard when, racing hard!

Period 6 - 4 weeks. Active recovery – review and planning preparation for next season with your athlete/runner. The way that your body is able to adapt and become stronger is to have it fully recovered. It would be an ideal time to have two weeks off and do something else less impacting whilst still maintaining a level of general fitness. This is the time to reflect over the season/ year and review what went well and what went less so. For the things that went well, how can you continue to build on these for next year, for the things that went less well what do you need to change? Where targets hit?s, if not why not? Injury? What caused it? Was it something within your control as a coach? Do you need to include more strength (injury prevention) work? Analyse what you have done and how you are going to develop as a coach along with your athlete. This is your time for beginning to plan for the next annual plan.

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