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Mileage History - and Me Being an Idiot

Last week I posted a short [analysis of 2010](#) and several of my successes and failures. What you're reading is going to be more detailed but more importantly, will include actionable steps you can take to improve your own running. Ready to train more effectively?

First, I want to give you an overview of my running history so you can understand my annual mileage in context. Let's look at the yearly totals and my notes:

2005 started with a plantar fascia and toe injury in my left foot, but otherwise was a good year in terms of weekly mileage. I ran 2,762 miles in 2005 - or an average of 230 per month or 53.1 miles per week. Highlights include my 8k cross-country PR of 26:19 and a 16:06 5k PR on the track.

In 2006 I continued a similar pattern with a foot injury in March, but otherwise remained healthy. I ran 16:02 on the track for 5k and then took June-August to train for sprint triathlons so my running volume was reduced. I still ran exceptionally well in the fall - debuting at 10k cross-country in 33:41 and lowering my mile best to 4:33. I was *really* impressed with my fitness gains despite running 30-50% less during the summer. Now I'm a big proponent of runners doing a 2-3 month triathlon cycle if they want to. It's likely they'll gain fitness, and race faster, even when running less.

If you're interested in diving into a triathlon program (even if it's just to become a better runner), check out Patrick McCrann's [Competitive Triathlon](#) program. It's legit.

2006 was still my best year so far even though I was running less in the summer - I ran 2,772 miles in total. A whopping 10 miles more than the previous year! This works out to be an average of 231 per month or 53.3 miles per week.

I was killing it in 2007 until late summer. In hindsight, I was just working too hard and making silly mistakes. Take this one workout from my training log:

"1:45 / 15 miles to the MIT track, 2 x mile with 600m run recovery, then ~1.5 mile warm-down. Ran the interval miles in 5:17 and 5:12. Felt fatigued, hot, slightly hung over, felt like death for 2nd mile and warm-down."

That's 19 miles in total, with two *very* fast miles at the end in the heat (It was in August) when I was hung over. How stupid was I? **Obvious tip of the day:** don't run an interval long run in the heat when you're hung over. In fact, don't run any challenging workout when you're hung over.

Fast forward 3 weeks: I tweaked my lower back so hard it hurt to walk. I didn't run for 6 weeks, instead opting to gain weight and "look huge." After gaining 16 pounds around my mid-section thanks to a lot of protein shakes, I decided to get my ass in gear and start running again. The rest of the year was low mileage bullshit running as I tried to lose all that weight. I still ran 2,825 miles in 2007 - 235 per month or 54.3 per week - thanks to my monster spring and summer. Here's **a good lesson:** don't give up on your training if you're injured. Extending your time off will only post-pone future fitness gains.

2008 was when my real problems started. I overcame a minor achilles injury in the spring and a weird quadricep pain in the fall to run the New York Marathon in 2:44:38. Unfortunately, my training wasn't the best leading up to the race and I suffered through 6 months of a serious IT Band injury afterward. With only a handful of miles in November and no running in December, I ran 2,639 miles in '08. This is an average of 220 per month or 50.8 miles per week.

That's the injury that changed my life. I decided I wasn't going to get injured anymore. Sure, little things happen, but I was going to avoid 2-6 week lay-offs and massive injuries that cause multi-month interruptions in training. **Consistency is king.** I learned a lot from a ton of research, other coaches, and physical therapists. After a year of solid training, I launched Strength Running to help other runners.

2009 was a building year, as I slowly started running in early May. I didn't run any mileage higher than 50 until mid-September. The total mileage for 2009 was 1,128 - 94 miles per

month or 21.7 per week.

What Can We Learn from 2010?

Now you know where I'm coming from - and how frustrated I was at always fighting back problems, achilles issues (those actually go back to 2002), ITB injuries ('08 wasn't the first time - '03 was), and weird quadriceps pain I couldn't figure out. I knew I just needed to run consistently without taking big periods of time off.

During the six months I wasn't running, I went through a period of complacency and thoughts about retirement. But then I snapped out of it and saw physical therapists, spent hundreds on massage, and did a creepy boot camp three days a week at six in the morning. Some things helped, some didn't.

I combined some of their strategies with a lot of my own, thanks to countless hours of research. Since I started running in mid-2009, I haven't had a major injury. I won 4 races in 2010 while running more than I ever have. I'm preparing to dominate my 10 mile PR of 54:50 at the 2011 Cherry Blossom 10 Miler in DC. I want to share with you the two training strategies that I use that can make you more resilient, consistent, and faster.

Hills, Hills, Hills

One of my favorite workouts that I do 4-5 days every week is running a roller coaster run. These may sound familiar if you've read my workout guide [52 Workouts, 52 Weeks, One Faster Runner](#). I don't run structured hill workouts that frequently, but almost every day I include a mile or more of climbing during an easy or moderate run.

Hill running is running-specific strength training that's helped me keep my legs strong enough to prevent injury. If you don't have hills in your area, try increasing the incline on a treadmill to 4-6%, finding bridge overpasses (that are safe to run on - and make sure you have ID like [Road ID](#)), or doing short sprints that mimic the muscle fiber recruitment of hill running at slower speeds. Not convinced that hills are one of the best training tools you have? [Read up](#) on how the Kenyans use them to dominate and the best coaches in the world recommend them.

Since reading Brad Hudson and Matt Fitzgerald's [Run Faster](#) training book, I have implemented [hill sprints](#) into my training program. They include many of the same benefits of roller coaster runs, but to a greater extent. They recruit a huge pool of muscle fibers, strengthening your legs like you're doing squats, except it is exceptionally specific to

running. And specificity is critical.

Start slow with hills because they will put a lot of new stress on your body. Run one roller coaster run per week and include a short hill sprint workout of 2-3 sprints a few days later. Gauge how your body feels and don't be afraid to take a day off or very easy afterward. With anything in running, patience is critical. You can add one sprint rep every week and add another roller coaster run after about a month.

Distance Runners Need to Sprint

Distance runners don't sprint enough! I can't stress this enough. I don't care if you're training for a 10k or a marathon, you need to sprint at least twice a week. It doesn't have to be hard, but it needs to be done.

I started doing more frequent strides, hill sprints, and surges during the end of my runs when I started running after my ITB injury. I'm convinced it has played a big role in my consistent health. Sprinting reinforces good running form because it's hard to run sloppy when you're going at a maximum effort. Like hill sprints, other types of sprint workouts also recruit a large pool of muscle fibers - giving you a larger pool to work with. You'll be more efficient because of better running form and your legs will be stronger. Win!

Besides hill sprints, my two favorite sprint workouts are strides and surges. I think strides are easier so you should start with these. After an easy run, do a ~100m acceleration on your street (or on a well-manicured field, ideally) where you start at a jog and gradually increase to a sprint. Hold that for a few seconds and then gradually slow down to a stop. Take 30 seconds to a full minute of walking recovery in between each one. Start with 2-3 and work up to 6.

Surges are similar to strides except they're done during your run near the end. I like to do them based on time rather than distance and keep the effort more constant. During the last mile or two of an easy run, do 2-4 surges that last from 20-30 seconds. You can run them at 5k or faster pace. Take 30 seconds to a full minute of *active running* in between each surge. Have fun!

Core and General Strength

I'm doing more core routines and general strength workouts than I ever have. And I'm running more. By building a stronger body, you can run more miles without breaking down. And if you can run more (some of it faster), you're going to run faster races. I

recommend doing a core or strength workout 2-3 times every week, with mobility or flexibility exercises 5-6 days every week.

Last month I sent a monster strength guide to my newsletter readers. If you haven't received it because you signed up after that, then reply to this email and I'll forward it.

If that list seems a bit overwhelming or you don't know where to start, I recommend doing body weight exercises in the privacy of your home. The [Rebel Fitness Guide](#) can help you get started.

I'm Not Perfect - Here's Where I Screwed Up

Running isn't all flowers and puppies every day for me - don't mistake my success for perfection. There are setbacks. Let's look at my 2010 screw-ups.

I wasn't being consistent with core workouts in March, then I ran a 3k time trial in spikes on the track. I hadn't been wearing spikes so it was a new stress for me. Then I skipped my normal post-run recovery. Then I danced all night at a wedding in dress shoes while drinking. Clearly, I wasn't making the best decisions. The next day I had to cut my run short because my left arch was tight.

Lesson learned: realize when you're introducing too many new training stresses into your program and not recovering properly. You can't burn the candle at both ends.

Another moment of idiocy happened last September, when I was doing thirty second sprints on pavement in old spikes. I took the spikes out of the shoes, but the sole was very stiff. Several of the sprints were slightly downhill and I was going at max effort. It felt awkward but I pushed through it, ignoring the fact that I was *awkwardly sprinting in uncomfortable shoes downhill*. Doesn't sound smart does it?

I tweaked my left glute and IT Band that day, but with a very [aggressive treatment plan](#) I beat that small injury in a matter of days. Still, in hindsight I can be a total idiot.

Lesson learned: if you're doing something really hard or fast, and it's uncomfortable in a bad way, then stop! You have to live to run another day. You should always be thinking about your training using "the third eye" - meaning, think about it from an outsider's perspective. Would a coach support what you're doing?

If you make these mistakes, don't get down on yourself. Do everything you can to heal: sleep more than usual, cross-train if you can every day, strengthen the weakened area, take ice baths, use a foam roller or golf ball to massage the injured area, and eat as healthy as you can to give your body what it needs to recover. The more perfectly you can execute a recovery plan, the faster you'll get back to training.

2010 Mileage, Goals, And Some Stuff For You

This past year my total mileage was **3,018 miles** - 252 per month or 58.0 per week. I'm ecstatic I'm back on track and running more than I ever have thanks to making smart decisions and being diligent about core, hills, sprinting, and making better (but not perfect) decisions. I hope you can learn from my story and my mistakes to become a better runner. Use the articles and resources to your advantage.

I hope that 2011 will be a huge year for me. I have a few *very* aggressive goals, maybe too aggressive. But I want to piggyback on 2010 and continue improving. Here's what I want to accomplish this year:

- **Run 3,500 miles in 2011** - a significant jump, but what I need to do to run well in the marathon. I have to average about 67 miles per week. So far, so good!
- **Break 26 minutes in the 8k**, potentially the Shamrock Shuffle in March. This will be tough and is a secondary goal to the Cherry Blossom race.
- **Race 53:30 at the Cherry Blossom 10 Miler** in April. I need to average 5:21 per mile (my PR is 54:50, or 5:29 per mile). I've received a seeded entry, so I'll be in the first corral.
- **Have a monster summer/fall training block** for the 2011 Philadelphia Marathon. I want to average 85-90 miles per week for 2-3 months before the race. Yikes.
- **Break 2:40 at the Philadelphia Marathon** - and ideally run 2:37. This is my "A" goal for 2011 and is dependent on some of my other goals.

Maybe I'm crazy, but I know that I can do incredible things if I put my mind to it. I hope you come along for the ride and learn from my successes and failures.

If you've made it this far, congratulations. You're interested in taking your running to new levels in 2011. I am always open for new ideas for Strength Running and how I can help you achieve your goals. If you want me to cover a topic, have an idea for an in-depth guide I can write, or just want my opinion on something you can reply to this email. I read every message.

2011 is the year of ACTION. Be proactive about your running. Invest in yourself and make this year your best ever.

Happy '11!

- Fitz.

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