
13 Lucky Racing Tips For Your Next Personal Best

Pacing and Race Strategy from
Elite Coaches, Boston Qualifiers,
and All-Americans

STRENGTH
RUNNING



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Introduction – Welcome!

Hey there, thanks for downloading *13 Lucky Racing Tips for Your Next Personal Best!*

How often have you told yourself...

"This race is going to be different"

"I should figure out how to negative split a race"

"I just need to be tough during the last 10k of my next marathon"

Runners have the unique ability to ALWAYS think they can do better next time. It's what helps us continue to improve and run faster.

But instead of just "trying harder" next time, it's more helpful to have a plan. But who should you trust? What advice *really* works?

I decided to ask some of the top coaches and runners about their favorite race strategies. You'll hear from former elite runners, professional coaches, cross country All-Americans, and Boston Marathon Qualifiers.

These race strategies work because they've been tested on thousands of runners – from pro marathoners all the way to beginners just getting started. Some are fun, some are aggressive. But I know you'll find one that'll work for you.

In this guide, you'll learn pacing tactics for short races like the 5k and long races like the marathon. Each strategy has been battle tested and proven to help runners run personal bests.

Who knows, maybe you'll run *your* next big PB with one of these racing tips!

To your running success,

- Jason.

<http://strengthrunning.com>

Can't Check the Clock Till I Make Another Roadkill

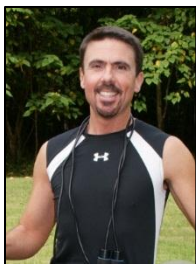
Racing, particularly endurance relays, is just as much mental (if not more) than physical. One such strategy I use that helps pass the time, keep my mind off the pain of running fatigue, as well as keep my pace on cue is what I like to call my "Can't Check The Clock Till I Make Another Roadkill" strategy.

Pegging a runner ahead of you to try and catch is a pretty common race strategy. It helps keep you motivated during a race, but I've found that adding an additional stipulation works even better, particularly in an endurance relay.

When running a long 10-mile leg up Grandfather Mountain during the 208-mile Blue Ridge Relay, in the middle of the night, pitch black, no sounds but the crickets and other sounds nearby that I didn't want to think about, I decided that I couldn't look at my GPS watch until I caught up and passed the next runner (roadkill).

If you've ever participated in an endurance relay race you're familiar with the fact that often in these races, you're alone as the runners get spaced out. Having no mile markers on the leg, the desire to constantly check the distance covered on my GPS watch was strong.

So, to help keep my pace and mind strong up this long steady incline, I held fast to my new rule--no pace or distance check on the GPS until a road kill was made. During that long isolated stretch, I managed to keep my pace on cue despite the steady incline as well as rack up 5 road kills! This is a strategy I plan to keep!



About the author:

Thad McLaurin writes [RunnerDude's Blog](#) as well as being a contributing writer for Active.com. He's also the owner of RunnerDude's Fitness in Greensboro, North Carolina. He has personal trainer certifications from NPTI and ACSM, as well as running coach certifications from RRCA and USA-Track & Field. Thad's greatest reward is helping others live healthy, active lifestyles.

Tighten the Screws

Tightening the screws is a racing tactic I like to employ for distances from 5K to half marathon. It's a strategy that can be used in the marathon as well, but for most runners it's not worth the risk.

How do you do it? It's as simple as throwing in a series of surges during a race when your competition least expects it. The goal is to take an opponent out of their rhythm in an effort to get away from them before the finish line.

As a general rule, the shorter (i.e. more intense) the race, the shorter the surges. For example, when racing a 5K, throw in a hard 15 to 30-second surge (10-20 seconds per mile faster than you averaged for the first mile), then return to your race rhythm. Didn't shake your opponent? Do it again at mile 2. Is he still there? Throw in one final short surge with half a mile to go to try and take the finishing kick out of their legs.

In a 10K or half marathon race, since the overall effort level is less intense than it is for a 5K, stretch the surge out a bit to a minute or more. After three to four well-timed surges you'll wear your opponent down and leave them wondering where you went!

Don't wear a watch while racing? Pick points along the course and surge to the next light post, or stop sign, or some other landmark. Explode when you're coming off a turn, or kick it into high gear after cresting a hill. The idea is to keep your competition guessing all the way to the finish line.

Of course, don't try this tactic without practicing it first! Rehearse surging and recovering during tempo runs and long runs so that it doesn't backfire when you try it in a race.

Next time you're having trouble shaking your competition, try tightening the screws on them!



About the Author:

[Mario Fraioli](#) is a senior editor at Competitor Magazine. He was a cross country All-American at Stonehill College and has personal bests of 4:09.77 in the mile, 14:39 for 5,000m and 2:28:25 in the marathon. He coaches the Prado Women's Racing Team in San Diego and was the men's marathon coach for Costa Rica at the 2012 Olympic Games.

The Cute Butt Strategy

The hardest part of racing for me is continually pushing beyond what I think I'm capable of. It's exceedingly easy to settle for running X-minute miles simply because I've always run X-minute miles. To combat this, my favorite race tactic (besides "don't stop") is the "[cute butt strategy](#)."

It's pretty straightforward:

1. Find a cute butt of a fellow athlete that's ahead of you.
2. Give yourself 100 yards to catch up to them.
3. Catch up to them before the 100 yards is up.
4. Maintain that pace while catching your breath.
5. Find another cute butt ahead of you and repeat.

Although it's fairly simple, there are a few caveats you should keep in mind:

- Don't let anyone you've passed pass you. That defeats the point.
- Don't stare, drool, or make comments. It's plain rude and will mostly distract you from the goal – catching them.
- Know your pacing. You don't want to destroy yourself too early in the race and have to walk. Start at your normal pace and implement the strategy once you hit the halfway mark. Start earlier in future races if you need to ramp it up a notch.

Of course, it doesn't have to be a butt – you can pick out a telephone pole, shirt color or something equally arbitrary, but the goal is to give you a third party measurement and motivation to pick up your pace and actively keep up your pace.



About the Author:

Joel Runyon is a triathlete, marathoner and athlete who focuses on pushing himself to his limits and doing the impossible. Find out more at [Impossible HQ](#) and [subscribe to the blog](#).

Surge to Get Back on Pace

A common racing mistake I'm guilty of myself, and I see athletes I coach make, is slowly letting the pace slip during the middle of a race, often without realizing it. As your legs tire and your breathing becomes labored, maintaining goal pace gets more difficult. More specifically, the effort required to run goal pace during mile 8 of a half marathon is exponentially harder than the first mile.

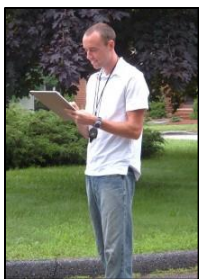
The solution is to analyze your splits from previous races at the same distance and identify where this natural slow down occurred. If you have the data from your previous three to four races, you can usually find a common point in any race distance where you start to fade. If you're new to the race distance, a good tip to remember is that the average slowing point will occur just after half way – usually between half way and three quarters of the race. For example, the slow point in a 5k usually happens at 3000 meters.

Once you've found your slow spot, surge at this exact moment in your next race. It doesn't have to be that much faster than your goal pace, but consciously thinking about your pace when you normally have trouble will be a mental reminder to not let your it slip. This doesn't necessarily make it easier to keep pushing yourself, but it helps prevent unintentional pace creep that's so common.

How to implement in training

Like any racing tactic, you don't want to rely on a new strategy without practicing it in training first. So, include a few 60-90 second surges during your next long run or try inserting a [hammer](#) during your next track session (a hammer is running the second to last repeat of your interval session as fast as you can and then returning to normal interval pace for your last repeat).

Both of these workouts teach your mind and body to increase its effort during a workout similar to your goal race. You're training your body to dramatically increase the effort level as the workout goes on and will be more prepared to do so during the race.



About the Author:

Jeff Gaudette is a USATF and RRCA-certified running coach, two-time Division-1 All-American in Cross Country while at Brown University, and a former professional runner for the Hansons-Brooks team. He is an Olympic Trials qualifier in the 10k (28:46 PR) and marathon (2:22:02 PR) and is the founder of [Runners Connect](#).

Monopolize On Your Own Vanity

Let's face it. We are all at least a little vain. My favorite race tactic during an endurance race is to monopolize on my own vanity.

Nothing puts pep in your step or gives you focus like knowing someone you want to impress is waiting around the corner.

After several marathons and dozens of failed tactics, the most effective way I've found to get myself out of the mid-race slump is to get as many friends and family on the course as possible. There is simply no better feeling than having the support of loved ones after putting in so much time and effort training.

Unfortunately (for them), just having spectators show up at the start and finish line isn't enough. The key is to make sure your fans are just as tired from running around the course as you are from running the actual course. Map out as many places that they can find you as possible, write down your splits so they know when to expect you, and provide them with transportation information so they can easily navigate the course. The more work you put in yourself, the more success you'll have on race day.

Once you have all the spots mapped out, memorize them. The anticipation that builds as you near one of those spots alone will boost your spirits well before you actually see them.

Don't be afraid to recruit people to cheer you on. Good friends know what you put into training, and they will want to be there to celebrate the accomplishment. The more people you add to the cheer squad the better.

And finally, show your supporters that you care. Make them their own race bag, packed with snacks, water, maps, and sign-making supplies. Throw in a cowbell for some added excitement. The more fun they are having, the more fun you will have.

Most people would tell you that running is a solo sport, but achieving an endurance race finish should be a celebration. Embrace the support from others, and they will help carry you across the line.



About the Author:

Doug Hay's addiction to endurance running started in 2008 with his first marathon. Every marathon and ultra since has taught him new lessons and tricks, which he shares on his Washington, DC-based running blog, RockCreekRunner.com.

Why You Should Expect the Worst

When most of us visualize race day, we conjure up perfect conditions: The sun is lightly peeking out from behind the clouds, the air is cool, and the wind, if it even exists, is a tailwind.

That alone will set you up for failure.

No matter what the race website promises or the weather trends have been for the last 25 years, don't expect perfect conditions on race day. In fact, expect the opposite. Sure, it sounds pessimistic, but it's also realistic. If you're expecting the weather to be perfect on race day, it becomes that much harder to get yourself out the door for a training run on the days when the weather is less than stellar.

Preparing for the worst will also save you a lot of drama when, a week before race day, the forecast has raindrops instead of a smiling sunshine. Freaking out, checking the weather forecast every 20 minutes, and praying to the weather gods wastes a LOT of energy. Train in every condition Mother Nature throws your way, so you're prepared to race in every condition.

I say this because the best race-day advice I ever got was from my partner, Neil, after I was told of a piss-poor weather forecast for an upcoming race. While whining about how horribly I was going to suck that day, Neil matter-of-factly took my hands and dished out the tough love:

"You're not special. You think you've got it harder than everyone out there? You don't. Every single person on that course is dealing with the same wind, the same rain, and the same chill. You're all suffering. Take it like a champ."

Take it like a champ, indeed. Even on the rainiest of days, you can still shine.



About the Author:

[Susan Lacke](#) does 5Ks, Ironman Triathlons, and everything in between to justify her love for cupcakes (yes, she eats that many). She is a columnist for Competitor, No Meat Athlete, and Triathlete.com. Susan lives in Phoenix, Arizona with three animals: A labrador, a cattle dog, and a freakishly tall triathlete boyfriend. Her website is [SusanLacke.com](#).

Stick to the Plan!

When I ran my first marathon, I was told over and over again “not to go out too fast.” So I promised my running pal numerous times I wouldn’t run faster than an 8:30 pace for the first 10 miles — something that seemed completely feasible during my two-week taper period.

However, once I was out on the course, I quickly learned how hard it is to fight adrenaline and the roaring crowds (an 8:30 minute pace felt like I was walking) and had to fight every urge in order to keep my promise.

Negative splitting — running the second half of a race faster than the first half — is a common race tactic among marathoners. And after my first 26.2, going out slower and picking up the pace may very well lead to not only a strong finish, but an enjoyable run along the way.

In the moment, I worried whether running conservatively in the beginning would ruin my chance for hitting my goal-time. But I convinced myself that going out controlled and conserving energy would lead to finishing with strength and speed, which is exactly what happened. (I ended up reaching my finish goal and then some!)

In a race, it’s easy to go out too fast and end up paying for it later, especially in a marathon. At mile three, you may feel incredibly awesome and want to test your speed, push boundaries, and break world records. But don’t forget you have 23 more miles to go, and those faster miles will catch up with you.

So if you want to have an awesome race experience, go out slower than your goal pace and pick up the pace steadily throughout, up until the point when you’re using every ounce of energy for those final miles and leaving absolutely everything on the course.



About the Author:

Laura Schwecherl is the Outreach Director at [Greatist](#), and writes about running, living in New York City, and traveling in between at [Camping Out In America](#). She recently ran her first marathon in upstate New York and is gearing up for the Eugene Marathon in April (to hopefully BQ!).

Layered Half Marathon Pacing

My favorite distance is the half marathon and for this distance, I use a layered strategy.

For the first 1-2 miles, I focus, quite literally, on putting one foot in front of the other, keeping a safe distance from those around me, and not weaving in and out of people. A PR for 13.1 miles is not going to be made or broken in the first 15 minutes of your race.

After the first 5k, I ask myself a few important questions that help determine my strategy for the rest of the race. What's my current pace? What would I need to do in the final 10 miles to reach my goal? Do I need to slow down for just a bit? Do I feel good enough to step up the pace a little bit?

From there, I try to develop an even, comfortable pace to the halfway point and do another quick analysis. I ask myself: is my goal within reach? If yes, keep going. If no, can I make up time? Or is it time to just make it a long training run and not risk my long-term health?

Then, it's on to mile 10. With just 5k to go, I know how much I have left in the tank. If my goal or PR is within reach and I feel good, I drop the hammer. I do not look at my watch anymore.

If my goal isn't realistic, I either reset my goal for a reasonable 5k or back off. Much of this strategy depends on my long-term goals, so plan accordingly for your race!



About the Author:

David Hylton is a social media copy writer in Richmond, Va., and blogs regularly at [Running Because I Can](#). He is the co-creator of the popular [#RunChat](#), a twice-a-month chat on Twitter.

The Restraint Racing Method

For me, every race I run is a test of restraint. So many times when I was a new runner, I started too fast and crashed, 10 miles into a half marathon or 18 miles into a full. Even since I've found the discipline to pace myself properly, I still need to keep my head in check, because I believe that in an endurance event like a marathon or ultra, I'll be relying on my mind to keep me going strong during the last quarter of the race.

It's so easy in the moment to convince yourself that today is different, that there's something special about how you're feeling in this particular race, and you'll be able to maintain a pace that's way beyond your ability. This is adrenaline trying to fool you. Now, before I get to the starting line of a race, I have a pace in my head that I will not exceed, no matter what. Only once I get to mile 20 of a marathon will I allow myself to speed up if I still want to (note: this has never happened).

I also pay a lot of attention to the mental energy I'm expending, just as much as the physical. I avoid caffeine before the race, because although there's a known endurance benefit, I know that it gets my mind racing as well. And when that happens, it's always followed by a crash, just like you bonk when you put forth too much physical effort.

So for the first half of a marathon, I do everything in my power to relax -- I try not to focus, I glance at my watch as little as possible, and I do what I can to enjoy the scenery and think about things other than running. I'll check my form now and then and make sure I'm running efficiently, and often, I pay attention to my breathing. If it's relaxed and my breaths are long, I know I'm not running too fast.

Essentially, I do whatever I can to forget that I'm racing. Too many times I've gotten myself all amped up at the beginning of a race, only to find that by mile 15, I'm mentally exhausted.



About the Author:

Matt Frazier is a vegan marathoner and ultrarunner living in Asheville, North Carolina. He writes the vegetarian running blog [No Meat Athlete](#), where he offers a [free, 10-part e-course](#) on plant-based nutrition for endurance training.

The Marathon Starts at Mile 20

Pacing is essential for every marathoner and something that most experienced runners take for granted. It comes with experience.

But pacing is equally important for novice runners, especially those running their first marathon.

For your first marathon, here are two simple tips to finish strong. These helped me finish my first marathon four years ago.

Start Off Slow

Adrenaline and excitement is difficult to control during the early stages of your first marathon. Your body is telling you to go fast! But don't listen. Back off and control the urge to pick up the pace.

Your goal is to complete your first marathon, not kill yourself. By conserving energy early on in the race, you will have fuel in the tank grind through those difficult last few miles.

The Marathon Starts at Mile 20

Treat your first marathon as two races.

1. The first race is 20 miles long. Running 20 miles is no small task. Your training and preparation will get you through it.
2. The final 6.2 miles is race #2. It's less than half the distance of the first race, but much more difficult. Your top goal is keep those sore legs moving. The smart conservative pace you ran the first 20 miles will be your saviour.

Running your first marathon is an amazing experience. One you should enjoy and remember fondly. Give yourself the best chance possible to finish your first marathon by starting slow and respecting the last 6.2 miles of the race. Good luck!



About the Author:

Mark Kennedy is a fitness junkie, former Kinesiologist, and co-founder of [Healthynomics](#), a blog providing fitness tips, nutrition advice, gear reviews, and athlete interviews. Connect with him on [Google+](#).

Know the Course and Do Your Research!

My favorite pacing strategy is something I call *incremental pacing*.

Instead of just calculating the average per mile pace I need to hit to meet my overall goal time, which is all I used to do when I first started running, I now spend a lot of time looking at the specific race course and I make a pacing plan for each section.

I try to be as realistic as possible about what my needs will be for the first two miles vs. the last mile, for example, and how those needs will change based on how hilly a certain section is, etc. When I go into a race as familiar with the course as possible and armed with a plan of which paces I'll aim to hit for each section, I feel more confident - and that's definitely reflected in my performance.

One of my biggest concerns is always that I'll get caught up in the excitement of the race and start out by going too fast, which leads to burn-out later in the race. But I've found that if I decide in advance which sections of the race I'll allow myself to really open it up and go faster, I'm more easily able to rein myself in early on.

Seeing the race as a whole, but being familiar with the smaller segments that make up that whole, really helps me keep a steady pace. Additionally, knowing which sections of the race course will be the toughest helps me to feel mentally prepared, and I like knowing that I won't wind up being surprised by an unexpectedly big hill at mile 11 in a half marathon if I've done my research in advance.



About the Author:

Nicole Antoinette is obsessed with cutting the bullshit from daily life and she uses her blog, nicoleisbetter.com, to help real people ditch what they think they "should" want in pursuit of what they actually do want. She's an aggressive nap taker and self-proclaimed green smoothie aficionado, and you can find her real-time (and often caps-locked) thoughts on Twitter at [@nicoleisbetter](https://twitter.com/nicoleisbetter).

How to Race a Negative Split...Every Time

Unless you're running an 800m race (where slight positive splits are likely best) or you're running a marathon (where you can argue that even splits are preferable) then a negative split race is definitely the way to go.

At the elite level most distance running world records have been broken running negative split races; at the recreational level most PRs have been run when an athlete executes a negative split race.

So, what is a negative split race? Simply this: a race where the second half of the race is faster than the first half. That doesn't mean that at the halfway point you need to speed up. Instead, you just have to, at *some point* in the second half of the race, speed up.

A great way to put this into practice is to try to run the last 10-15% of the race faster after having run even splits up to that point. For example, in a 10k race you could run the first 5 miles at an even pace, then speed up for the next mile and then put in a kick for the last 0.2 miles of the race. That would be a great execution of a negative split race plan - running the majority of the race at an even pace, then having two pace changes in the later stages of the race.

So if you're looking at your GPS watch data or looking at splits online after a race and you see that you decelerated in the second half of the race, make the change and go out easier the next time you race. If you do that you'll have a good chance of speeding up the second half of your next race and running a PR.



About the Author:

*[Coach Jay Johnson](#) has a MS in kinesiology and applied physiology, is the director of the Boulder Running Camps, and a contributor to *Running Times*, *Active.com*, and *Nike*. He has coached three athletes that have won US national titles in indoor track, cross country, and road racing. He is also the co-founder of [RunningDVDs.com](#).*

Let Jesus Take Over

Starting your race conservatively, being realistic, and planning for a negative split are all great strategies.

But sometimes, you have to go all in. There comes a race where every runner needs to take a risk and start fast. *Very* fast.

When I was in college, I used to joke with my teammates that whenever I ran a short race like the Mile, I would run the first half much faster than my average goal pace and then “let Jesus take over.”

Why would I start significantly faster than my PR pace and simply *hope* that I didn’t crash and burn? Simple: sometimes it’s the only way to find out what you’re made out of. Race breakthroughs don’t happen if you’re always conservative.

When you’re in really good shape then you can afford to take a big risk and start a race faster than you think you should. So if your PR in the 5k is 21:42 (or 7 minutes per mile) and you’ve had an amazing two months of training, it’s time to gamble.

For this hypothetical scenario, run the first two miles in 13:30 (or 6:45 per mile) and then hang on for dear life. If you’re successful, you could end up with a 46 second PR! That’s enormous in a short race like a 5k.

Now, the cautious among you might be asking, “But, won’t I slow down, feel terrible, and run slower than my PR?” Sure, that could happen. And it’s more probable than you having a breakthrough race.

But with no risk, there’s no reward. The next time you’re in very good shape, take a gamble and “let Jesus take over.”



About the Author:

*Jason Fitzgerald is the founder of [Strength Running](#), a USATF-certified coach, and author of [101 Simple Ways to be a Better Runner](#). He’s run 2:39:32 in the marathon and his coaching advice has been featured in *Health Magazine*, *Lifehacker*, *Active*, *Yahoo*, and the *Huffington Post*.*

Want More Proven Running Advice?

I hope you've enjoyed this short guide on race strategy and pacing – my goal is that you'll use it to run your fastest race yet.

Thank you to all the contributors who helped make this ebook possible – all of you rock!

If the authors here are new to you, please check them out on Twitter or their websites to learn from their experience and expertise.

If you're interested in more tips on racing – plus injury prevention, motivational case studies, and training advice to help you run faster – you can get updated instantly when I post a new article on Strength Running [here](#).

Don't forget to *practice* these strategies during training, and then *implement* them during the race!

Here's where I'll show you even more running tactics: <http://strengthrunning.com/subscribe-rss/>

Best,

- Jason.