

## **Banishing the Performance Blues – Part 2**

In part 1 in the last issue we talked about planning our training, and some of the things we can do to help ensure we are in peak fitness and raring to go as we pull up in the car-park on race day. In part 2 we look at how we should approach race day itself.

### **Target Race Pace**

It is important to have a clear idea in your mind about what time you are realistically aiming to achieve and what this equates to in terms of pace (per mile/km). Your target pace will usually be based on what you have run previously for the distance, adjusted for how well you have been running recently and also possibly for race conditions (if there is a high wind for example). Most people have a pretty good idea, if not your coach should be able to help - prepare to be a bit bold with your target but not totally unrealistic!

It is also a good idea to make sure you do a bit of research on the course beforehand (look at race web-site or, if you have run the event before, your Garmin/Strava records) to allow for any hills. For example, at the Great Baddow 10, mile 3 and 4 both have significant uphill sections, so be prepared to be slightly under your target pace for these miles (and look to make the time back on miles 5 and 6, which are downhill).

### **A Little Warm-up Goes a Long Way**

It always amazes me how few people I see warming up before a race. Apart from the obvious risk of pulling a muscle, we do not perform to the best of our ability unless we are warm at the start of a race. We either run the first mile slowly or, more probably, use too much energy in working cold muscles so that we can run it quickly.

It doesn't have to take very long – in my experience 10 minutes is more than sufficient. Start by jogging slowly and in the last 3 or 4 minutes include a few short (eg 100M) bursts at race pace, just to get your legs accustomed to what you are going to ask them to do in the race. Aim to complete your warm up about 5 minutes before start-time – so you are still warm when the gun goes.

### **And They're Off**

Having worked out your target pace it is important to stick to it, and to try and run an even pace. The majority of runners at our level run the first half of a race too fast, and really struggle in the second half. Top level runners try and run an even pace and the great majority of distance running records are set off negative splits (ie second half of race is faster than first half).

However, it's not easy to do. The adrenalin is usually pumping at the start-line and it is very easy to get caught up, consciously or sub-consciously, racing other people. Whereas for a 5K race this may not matter (and, indeed, may even be desirable) for longer races you will end up paying!

Make sure you look at your watch once things have settled down a bit after the start of a race. At the latest this should be at your first split (ie 1km or 1 mile into a race). You will be running much faster than you think and almost certainly faster than your race pace. That's OK up to this point, indeed you have put some time in the bank, but it is important to make a real conscious effort over the next few kms/miles to slow down and stick to your target pace. This is not easy to do –at this stage your mind will be telling you that you can run faster – ignore it, otherwise again, you will pay later in the race!

## **The Later Stages**

Once you get to the last 30% or so of a race (eg the last 3K of a 10K) take some time out (only mentally, make sure you keep running!) to review where you are and how you're feeling.

In the unlikely event that you are still feeling fresh and that you can go faster, now is the time to push on.

However, more likely, although you have stopped yourself running too fast, you will still be beginning to feel the pace a touch as you have been pretty much on your limit. As such it is important to try and think positively - a lot of running, and particularly at this stage of a race, is in the mind. One way I find helpful is doing a quick mental calculation of what I need to run in the closing stages to hit my target. For example, with 3K left in a 10K race, if I know I need to run 3 x 4min kilometres, I find it helpful to focus on this and reaching the finish line rather than how tired I am feeling.

Also, you should now be over-taking some of those who have gone out too fast – don't underestimate what a boost this can bring.

## **The Finish Line**

As I said at the start of the first article, everyone runs for different reasons, but we all know crossing the line is a great feeling. And it can be particularly rewarding if we feel we have run to the best of our ability and even better, got the time that we wanted. The sense of achievement that comes with makes the discomfort of those last few kms/miles worthwhile, and it stays with us for much longer. And, of course, it makes that first (not to mention the second & third) pint/glass of wine afterwards that much more enjoyable!