



Part 4: 'RACING the Marathon'

By Steve Manning

Now that you have done all of the training it is time for the race itself. If the training has gone well you should have the confidence, skills and fitness to achieve your goals in the marathon.

Some runners who are well prepared do not achieve their goals. This is usually because they do not have a realistic idea of what they can do, or they use poor tactics in the race itself. The months of great training are a waste if you do not run properly on the day.

You must have a race plan that is both realistic and flexible. It is important that you have a very good understanding of your plan. That way you can think on your feet in the race itself. Everything will be under control and you can focus on getting the best out of yourself instead of dealing with your mistakes.

Follow the advice in this article and it will be a major step in racing the marathon well in Sydney.

PREDICT YOUR GOAL TIME:

After running a personal best in your last 10km race before the big marathon you wonder about how fast you can realistically run on the main day. It is unrealistic expectations that generally are the major cause of despair in the longer races.

It is impossible to think that you can continue your 10km pace for a Marathon no matter how much mileage you might have done beforehand. In a race endurance becomes a secondary issue to anaerobic thresholds and efficiency. Setting a realistic goal for the marathon will help you succeed. An accurate prediction of the probable slowdown between different distances may save you grief. A proven formula is to take your 10km time and multiply it by 4.666 to get your Marathon time. This marathon time can then be divided by 2.1 to give you your half marathon time. The chart below gives you some comparison times for various common target times.

A word of caution for these predictions is that they may vary considerably and are dependent on a number of important factors. You must have done the necessary long runs to be able to achieve your marathon times, and the speedwork to achieve your 10km times. The targets are still challenging goals and must be adapted to cope with varying conditions and type of courses. The other thing to remember is that many races are not measured accurately. Predictions and goals with a margin for error can give you the confidence to go for your best time on race day.

Use the following formula to determine if you have set yourself a realistic goal:

$$10\text{km time} \times 4.66 = \text{marathon}$$

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half marathon time x 2.1 = marathon

You can predict your half marathon time from a 10km race by converting it to the marathon first and then back to half marathon.

10 km Marathon Half Mar.

x 4.666 ÷ 2.1

1:04 **5:00** 2:23

1:00 4:40 2:13

51 **4:00** 1:54

50 3:53 1:51

45 **3:30** 1:40

40 3:07 1:29

38 **3:00** 1:25

36 2:48 1:20

[RACE TACTICS AND STRATEGIES](#)

The most frequent mistake made in a marathon is starting too fast. The excitement and atmosphere of the race makes it feel easy running fast. The greater number of runners around you is also confusing for your pace judgement. If you started behind the start line and had to weave your way through other runners, then the first kilometre split may be slow even though you have expended considerable energy. Be cautious at the start, many marathon efforts are ruined in the first five kilometres.

Some people believe that a time cushion should be created to insure against the inevitable slowdown in the last ten kilometres. Physiologically this is a dangerous method as too much glycogen is burned initially and the runner can never recover the balance of fat metabolism. Throughout every race there is a combination of anaerobic and aerobic energy being used at all times. The faster you go the more of your glycogen stores are used. In short races it is not so important, but over marathon distances it is possible to completely deplete your glycogen reserves. When this occurs you will slow down considerably. For this reason it is preferable to burn as high a percentage of fat as early as possible. The slower you start the greater the concentration of fat metabolism.

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So the best way to pace yourself is to start slower than goal pace, run 5 to 30 km slightly faster, and finish at pace. This means that you are behind time until 30km but by then you are travelling faster than goal pace and can still slow down and achieve your goal. It is also a lot of motivation to be passing people later in the race and physically much easier to handle. Consult the race plans below to create your own ideal pacing strategy.

The most important part of pacing is to make sure you have a realistic idea of how fast you can run. You should adjust your goals and your pacing based on the conditions and how you feel on the day. Keep a record of your splits during the race so that you can identify if you have done something wrong and learn how to run better next time.

[THE RACE PLAN](#)

5hour Marathon = 7:06/km

0 to 5km @7:30 = 37:30

5 to 30km @7:00 = 2:55:00

30 to 42.2 @7:10 = 1:27:30

4hour Marathon = 5:41km

0 to 5km @5:50 = 29:10

5 to 30km @5:35 = 2:19:35

30 to 42.2 @5:45 = 1:10:10

3:30 Marathon = 4:58/km

0 to 5km @5:10 = 25:50

5 to 30km @4:55 = 2:02:55

30 to 42.2 @5:00 = 61:00

3hour Marathon = 4:16/km

0 to 5km @4:30 = 22:30

5 to 30km @4:12 = 1:45:00

30 to 42.2 @4:18 = 52:27

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[SYDNEY COURSE FEATURES](#)

The celebrating sport Sydney marathon has a few special features that should be considered when creating your race plan. The first one is that over 5000 runners will be at the start and this will make it a little bit more difficult to run freely in the beginning. There is a wide start area so it should not take too long to pass the start line but it may take up to a kilometre to run freely. If you struggle to wind your way through the crowd to keep on pace then it will be a much greater effort than it should be. It is a downhill start so this alone may make you run too fast anyway and requires special caution. The best thing to do is start in the pack where you should be, be patient, and do not worry about your splits until you are able to run freely.

The Sydney course has a net elevation drop in the first half with some difficult hills at the end. This means negative splits will be difficult. If you run too fast in the first half to be ahead of pace you may totally blow up when you hit the hills. Make sure you have plenty in the tank for the final 10km.

The course is on major roads with little protection. Luckily the sun will be at our backs in the final third of the race. This increased exposure might require extra protection like a lightweight cap and sunglasses. Dehydration is also likely to be a major factor so drink frequently.

Running marathons is about efficiency more than power or speed. Try to run at an even effort level regardless of the terrain. Do not surge the downhills too hard. Run the uphill with the goal of protecting your reserves as much as possible. Aggression has little place in the marathon. Intelligence is what is needed. Do not attack the hills at the end just because you are feeling good. It is possible to go from feeling great to walking within just a kilometre. No matter how good you feel it is nearly impossible to run faster in the last 10km of the race unless you have been running well within yourself or you are a world class athlete.

[CONTINGENCY PLANS](#)

It is important to focus on the positives during the race. Negative thoughts will just slow you down. The time to think about what can go wrong is before the race. You should consider what to do, and visualise your response, to a variety of problems you might encounter in the race.

With a large field it is more likely that you might be tripped and fall over. You should think about protecting yourself as much as possible as you fall and getting to your feet as quickly as possible after you land. If you have thought about your response beforehand then it will become automatic and you will not have to think about what to do when it happens. This means a quicker response as well as a better response.

Missed drinks, toilet stops, bad pacing and vocal running partners can all contribute to negative thoughts and use up precious adrenaline. Think about what to do in each situation in order to cause the least worry and emotional tension. Sometimes just knowing that there is nothing that can be done and getting on with the job is the best thing for you in the long run.

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Blisters, cramps and stitches can all cause pain and force you to slow down. Have strategies to deal with these issues so that you lose the least amount of time as possible.

Injury and illness are not something to be ignored. Sometimes the best decision is to pull out. I know of many cases of people running a marathon with a slight injury and not being able to run again for months if ever. Illness can be even more dangerous. Some viruses cause an inflammation of the heart muscle. Strenuous exercise particularly in hot conditions can cause permanent damage to the heart. There are quite a few cases of young normally healthy people who have died because of a slight virus that affected their heart. While this marathon may have been a goal for over a year it is not worth the end of your running or your life.

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[MENTAL STRENGTH AND FOCUS](#)

Marathons are a challenge. You will be pushing your body beyond what it is designed to do. Hopefully your training will mean that you are well prepared to explore your physical limits. But no matter how well you have trained, there will come a time in the race when you start to struggle. It is at this time that the strong are separated from the weak. The strength that is required is mental strength. It is a factor of determination, concentration, courage, focus, pain tolerance, control and intelligence.

Some of these factors are innate and can not be trained. Speedwork and other races can help you learn that you can push yourself and that the pain is temporary and you will survive. But nothing like a marathon can give you the experience required to keep pushing when your whole body aches, every step is an effort, your brain is telling you to walk and it feels like you are starving to death.

The main thing is to keep positive and focus on things that will keep you going rather than the things that will slow you down. At 35km when it starts to get tough think "it is only 7km to go, not even the distance of my easy runs, I have run this heaps of times before'. That is much better than thinking 'how am I ever going to make 42km?' Draw strength from all the training you have done.

[RACE NUTRITION AND HYDRATION](#)

Hopefully you have started the race well hydrated and carbo loaded. Marathons are too far to get through without some added help. Dehydration is the most likely cause of slowing down. You should start to drink early as possible and as frequently as possible. This does not mean stopping to have two cups of water at every aid station. Your body can only absorb 150mls every 15 minutes in the best of conditions. The reality is that you can probably only get down two gulps of water at each aid station. More than this and you will get bloated, your stomach may shut down and you will get dehydrated. The goal is to drink smaller amounts more frequently.

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Your body has enough energy stores to run more than ten marathons without eating. Most of this energy is fat. When running glycogen is the fuel of choice. Many runners will have inadequate stores of glycogen in the muscles and liver. Supplementing these reserves with a sports drink or carbohydrate gels may make you feel better for longer by making these reserves last. Do not (I repeat DO NOT!) try anything new in the marathon. Try these supplementations in long runs first to make sure you can cope with the taste and the strength. Otherwise you may be vomiting on the side of the road instead of running on strongly.

RACING SHOES?

Racing shoes help you run faster by reducing the weight you have to carry over 42.2kms. They also have less cushioning so they allow you to transfer more of the power from your stride to the ground. The down side is they have less protection and stability.

Only a few runners are able to run in a marathon with racing shoes. They are usually faster and have better biomechanics. A good rule of thumb is that you should be running faster than 4:30/km (3:10 marathon) to get a benefit that is better than the risk. And this is only if your running form is good. Most people will lose more time from the loss in efficiency from pounding and lack of stability. It is also good to remember that racing shoes let you run faster but cause more damage. If you are carrying an injury do not wear racers. There are many lightweight training shoes that are more appropriate for most people to wear in the marathon.

Marathons are wonderful experiences. It is because of the difficulty of running them successfully, that you get so much satisfaction when you complete them. Make sure that you enjoy the experience. Do not worry so much about what you must do in the race that you miss the excitement and joy out of running in it. Cross that line with a big smile for the camera. Too many people finish with their head down looking at their watch. No matter how you run or whether you have achieved your time goals, remember that just finishing is a great achievement in itself.

Steve will be pacing a group to finish under 3:30 at Sydney so you are welcome to introduce yourself at the start and join his group.