

The 12 Week Minimalist MARATHON Program:

By Steve Manning

PART 2 SPECIFIC PREPARATION

The goal of the five week specific preparation phase is to lay down the main training base for the marathon. The previous four week Base Training phase is focused on getting you settled into a routine so that you can train hard during this five week phase. The focus has been shifted from building up the training load to actually training harder.

Because the frequency of sessions is less under the minimalist training program you are able to train with a little more intensity for some sessions. The extra recovery from the days off leaves you more rested for the actual training days.

Consistency is an important factor in the specific preparation phase. If you must be dedicated to any part of your training this is it! It is harder to absorb breaks in training and missed sessions under this type of program. You should try to put some importance towards training during this time. The necessary sacrifices can be rationalised by saying that it is only 4 sessions a week for about a month.

The training macrocycle involves two strong weeks followed by a recovery week with a race and then two more strong weeks. The final two strong weeks will be the hardest two of the whole program. If you can get through this phase without problems then you can be confident in your ability to have a very good marathon.

The same type of sessions are done during each phase of training but the way they are done and their difficulty is what changes. It is hoped that you will be comfortable with training consistently after the base phase and be able to run some really strong sessions.

LONG RUNS

In the long runs during the base phase the focus was on completing them rather than worrying about any particular pace. Now in the specific preparation phase you should no longer be worried about making the distance and can now focus on running them stronger. The way to pace the long runs is to start slowly and after 5km pick it up to between 40 and 60 seconds a kilometre slower than half marathon current PB pace. The final 5 to 8km should be run at marathon race pace giving you some specific marathon race pace training.

It is important that you buy some new shoes before this phase as it has the highest injury risk and running in old shoes will just increase your chances of breaking down.

RACE

The only race during this phase is a half marathon. It is the longest race of the whole program not including the marathon itself. Coming at the end of the recovery week you should be well rested and able to run a good time. If the conditions and course are similar to your marathon goal race you should be able to use the result as a predictor race.

To work out a realistic time for the marathon take your half marathons time and multiply it by 2.1. First time marathoners should add five minutes to the calculation.

You should pace this race similar to your long runs. The first 3km should be at a slower pace (10 to 15 seconds/kilometre slower than the final average), and then the bulk of the race should be at a consistent but strong effort. In the final 3km you should try to run 10 to 15 seconds/kilometre faster than the average. It is very important to get the splits for the kilometres if possible to properly evaluate how you are going.

This race should give you confidence in your training and your ability to finish the marathon comfortably. If you are not able to run faster in the final 3km then it is a sign that you have to be more conservative in your pacing plan for the marathon. If your kilometre splits are all over the place then you need to focus on learning pace judgement in your speed sessions and race pace training sessions. If you have not run this race to plan then it will be impossible to use it as a predictor race.

If you do not have a half marathon race five weeks out from your goal race you can run another distance race but it should not be any shorter than 15km or further than 25km. If there is a race in one of the other weeks then you should switch the whole week and all it's sessions with week eight, seven or five. Do not try to run this week in week four as this is too close to the marathon.

SPEEDWORK

The speed sessions during this phase are as challenging as running a strong race. The total distance of each week's sessions is around 15 kilometers. The recoveries are now 1km at a steady pace, which is similar to what you would train at in a long run. The shortest repetition is 1km with two sessions with 3km repetitions. Pace judgement is vital to even completing these sessions. You must learn to run strong without going too fast. A good way to achieve this is by focusing on the total session and making it a priority to always finish with the last repetition as the fastest.

Week 8: Rhythm kilometres involve running up to eight kilometre repetitions at different paces. Before the session you should decide on the pace you want to run for each one. The idea is to run about five seconds faster every rep until you can not get any faster. For example if your best kilometre ever was a bit under 4 minutes you might decide that 4 minutes would be the pace of your final repetition. This means you start at 4:35 then run 4:25, 4:20 on down until you try to run 4 minutes or better for the final rep. If you run too fast or too slow at any stage you still stick to your pace plan. For example if you run 4:20 when you were supposed to run 4:25 you aim for 4:20 for the next rep.

If you get to the point where you run 10 seconds or more slower than the plan because you are struggling then you should quit while you are ahead.

Week 7: The Pyramid Session is again a varied pace judgement session. The main goal is to run the first two repetitions slower than the final two repetitions. You should try to run the first three repetitions at five to ten kilometre race pace. This means that you will not be slowing down even though the distance of the repetitions is increasing. The final two repetitions are at less than 5km race pace and you should try to kick in the last 100M of the final repetition.

Week 6: 3 to 4 x 3km, 1km steady recovery. The distance of each repetition makes this session a mental challenge. You must try to run a consistent pace through each repetition. Do not try to pick up the pace at the end of each repetition but save a kick for the end of the last rep. Do not be tempted to run too fast in this session because it is a recovery week and the real focus is running a good half marathon on the weekend.

Week 5: 4 to 5 x 2km, 1km steady recovery. While the total distance of the fast bits is the highest in this session at 8 or 10 kilometres you should not run any faster than what is planned. The main reason for this is you will be recovering from the half marathon race. In fact if you are feeling a bit sore or tired you should cut back on this session. You will gain much more out of recovering well from the half marathon than you will get out of any speed session.

Week 4: 6 to 8 x 1km, 1km steady recovery. The pace now drops down to 5km race pace and you should be able to run very strong in this session. You must stick to the proper pacing strategy of first rep slowest and last fastest. Give yourself another minute of a standing recovery before the last repetition to ensure that you can do it faster.

RACE PACE TRAINING

This is one of the only sessions that will really progress during the specific preparation phase. Steady pace means starting slower for the first two kilometres before settling into a constant pace equal to what you hope for in the marathon. At the end of this phase you should be able to run 25km at this pace. Do not feel tempted to run any faster even if you can, as the main goal is to become comfortable at the pace you need to run in the marathon itself. Being comfortable at a faster pace will set you up to go out too hard and blow up. In week 6 this session is important as a tapering session for the half marathon race.

RECOVERY RUNS

The experienced marathoner continues to run easy 5km runs on the Saturday. The first time marathoner introduces this session in this phase. Remember that these sessions are only to help you recover so that you can run well on Sunday. There is no advantage to running further than 5km and turning these sessions into something more than for recovery. You must also run them easy even if you are feeling good. Save it for the sessions that are important.

ULTRAMARATHON

The Brisbane River Run this year is incorporating a double marathon of 84.4km. The Lest We Forget Ultramarathon is fashioned on the model of the Comrades Marathon in South Africa. The quality and profile of this event is sure to attract many novice ultramarathoners.

Ultramarathon training is not that much different to marathon training except the distance of the long runs must be longer. Race pace training becomes slower and the real aim is to get used to being on your feet for a long time. The Thursday session should be about 10km further and the Sunday long run should venture over 50km a few times. The longer duration of the long runs make it even more important to have the off or recovery days. Speedwork also maintains it's importance to prevent injury and staleness but the intensity of speed sessions should decrease.

The key component of ultramarathon success is mental strength to tell yourself to keep going when it gets tough. Like the marathon it is not always the ones who trained the most who race the best.

FIRST-TIME MARATHONER

Phase 2: Specific Preparation

Week	TYPE	Tues	Thurs	Saturday	Sunday
8	STRONG	Rhythm Kms x 6	Steady 15km	Easy 5km	Long Run 30km
7	STRONG	Pyramid 1/2/2/1	Steady 20km	Easy 5km	Long Run 30km
6	RECOVERY	3 x 3km@10k, 1km rec	Steady 10km	OFF	Race Half Marathon
5	STRONG	4 x 2km@10k, 1km rec	Steady 20km	Easy 5km	Long Run 30km
4	STRONG	6 x 1km@5k, 1km rec	Steady 25km	Easy 5km	Long Run 32km

EXPERIENCED MARATHONER

Phase 2: Specific Preparation

Week	TYPE	Tues	Thurs	Sunday	
8	STRONG	Rhythm Kms x 8	Steady 20km	Easy 5km	Long Run 30km
7	STRONG	Pyramid 1/2/3/2/1	Steady 20km	Easy 5km	Long Run 30km
6	RECOVERY	4 x 3km@10k, 1km rec	Steady 15km	Easy 5km	Race Half Marathon
5	STRONG	5 x 2km@10k, 1km rec	Steady 25km	Easy 5km	Long Run 32km
4	STRONG	8 x 1km@5k, 1km rec	Steady 25km	Easy 5km	Long Run 35km

The next phase involves tapering and sharpening. Less kilometres but greater intensity are needed to peak you properly for race day. Next month we will cover this as well as some last minute tactics and strategies to get you to the race in the best possible condition.

Steve Manning writes the footman column for Runners World. He is aiming for his 20th marathon next year and has a personal best of 2:33.