

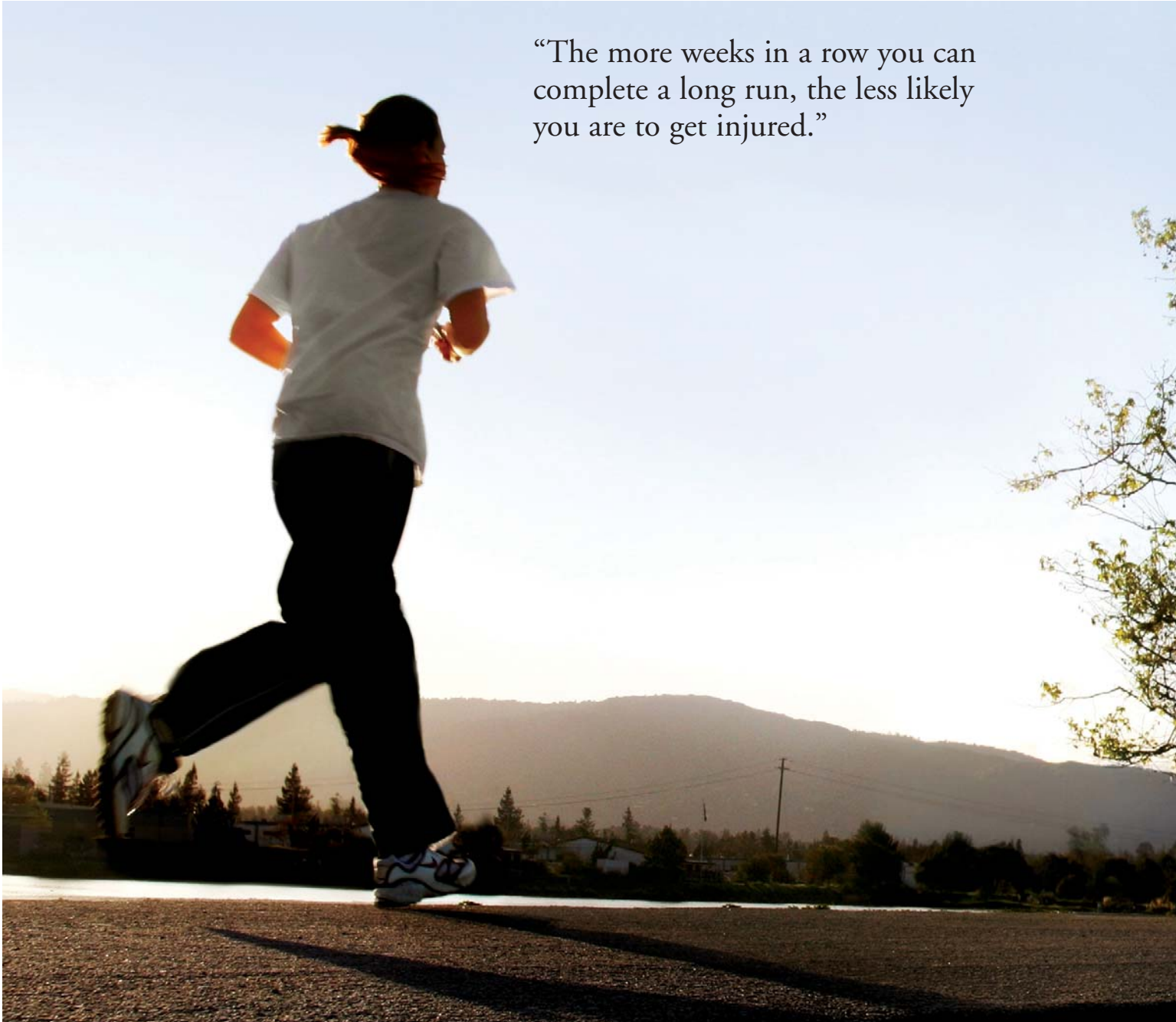
THE VALUE OF

Has there been a topic more vigorously debated, discussed, dissected, and studied in the field of middle distance coaching than the 'long-run?' – I doubt-it. If I could record your definition of a long run and/or your perspective of the value of the long run I would have hundreds of differing interpretations and views. Let's accept that there is no single answer as to the definition of 'the long-run' and no perfect view as to the value of 'the long run'. To quote John Lennon, lets just Imagine there are many, many answers and nobody is more right or more wrong.

I have been asked by R4YL to bang-out 1,000 words as to my interpretation of the 'long-run' and to try and explain my view as to the value of it for middle distance runners. It is of course only one view, and I would like to point out there is no science to be found in this article, not that I devalue science, it certainly has its place in our sport, it's just I am no scientist. For most coaches a discussion or tuition on the interpretation on Vo2max, glycogen storage, lactate threshold levels, capillarization, etc. can be most valuable. I have certainly learnt a lot from listening to the likes of Dr Dick Telford, Dr Kenneth

Graham, and others, however aforementioned I'll leave the science of the long-run to the experts.

My coaching philosophy and use of the long run has been formed in-part by experience, reading, listening, learning from mentors, and by researching and experimenting with best-practice, plus a little of my own spin. In other words, I am intuitive and pragmatic in my approach. Quite coincidentally I was chatting with Steve Overtt only a few weeks ago and we discussed his background, and Steve's very simple approach to training and coaching was that we all do very similar things in

A photograph of a person running on a paved road. The person is seen from the side, wearing a white t-shirt and dark pants. The background features a hazy mountain range under a clear sky. The lighting suggests it might be early morning or late afternoon.

“The more weeks in a row you can complete a long run, the less likely you are to get injured.”

THE LONG RUN

By Ken Green

training (including the long-run) it's just we all don't train as hard. In this discussion Steve reinforced the value he placed in being very fit and staying uninjured. It is the very fit piece that I like, as doing a long run week-in, week-out is a safe, enjoyable, sure-way to get very fit. If I can indulge also the long run aids in getting the athlete very strong. It is from being very fit and very strong your speed and speed endurance can improve, more on this later.

The *long-run* can be 60 minutes for some to 2.5 hours or more for others. It all depends on type. In saying this, typically the 800/1500 athletes in my squad would complete a weekly *long-run* (Sunday) from April to October varying between 60 minutes and 2 hours, and they build-up over time. Starting in April at much less than 60 minutes or 2 hours but as we move through the winter the longer runs kick-in. It is inadvisable to jump straight into 2 hours, or straight into what is designed as your ultimate

long run. The true 800 types might only get to 75 minutes but the key is the *long-run* is done each Sunday - week-in, week-out. The 1500/5000m types might get to 2 hours. Quite obviously 5000/10000m it's longer again perhaps 2 hours 20 minutes or more. One undervalued feature of the *long-run* is when you have a squad of athletes it does not matter what their pet event/distance is, you can all meet and start your long-run together and peel off when your time is up. The value I am talking about is '*enjoyment*'. We all need to enjoy training and this can be accomplished by meeting friends, training partners and even competitors, for a long run. If you are going to be successful at middle distance running you have to enjoy what you are doing more often than not.

Let me discuss the week-in, week-out comment made just above. The long-run done at a reasonable pace, but not race-pace, is a repetitive exercise. Like all disciplines repetition develops skill, whether this be ball skills, or knowledge skills. The repetitiveness of the long-run, over time and if done regularly, prepares your body for more demanding training, it up skills you and readies you for interval work, fartlek, speed-work and hill work. You are building a base, you are getting fit and strong in three key ways (i) cardiovascularly, (ii) skeletally, and (iii) muscularly. If you can complete your *long-run* every week over several months you will get very fit and very strong. I have touched on the training benefits of the long run but I also share a view that the more weeks in a row you can complete a *long-run* the less likely you are to get injured. As you are building on your strength across the three key areas mentioned you are in fact mitigating injury.

The *long-run* is best completed over terrain which includes grass and/or soft dirt trails, with periods of unevenness, and over a course which is undulating. The soft ground makes you lift your legs and a little unevenness spreads muscle use, this builds lower leg strength and flexibility. The undulations makes the run a little harder and gets your heart rate working, all whilst completing a run which is low impact, and at the lower end of the stress scale.

From a very fit and very strong position you are ready to do those hard, intense track sessions, hill sessions and fartlek sessions that all middle distance athletes do in one way or another. The aim of these sessions is to improve speed-endurance, and also basic speed. To maximize the effect of track training/sessions (middle distance specificity) and to just simply improve your personal best times, the winter long run is mandatory.

We will all continue to debate the value and interpretation of the long-run. You have probably gathered I am a strong advocate of the benefits of a weekly long run for middle distance runners. If managed well by the coach and athlete you will build a base of improved fitness and strength, which can only lead to higher quality sessions, and hence race results. The long run if done as a squad is fun and enjoyable; furthermore the long run, if done sensibly, is a good strategy for injury prevention.

