

The Eternal Debate: Tights or Shorts?

Written by Tiffany Bonasera



Are you an enthusiastic tights wearer? Or do you swear by shorts? Tiffany Bonasera considers the age-old dilemma of what to wear when you're running.

Many would argue runners are a peculiar bunch. And who can blame them? Our lives are dictated by the number of kilometres we clock up, our often single-minded determination to achieve personal bests and our willingness to voluntarily push our physical and mental limits in our journey towards reaching our goals. Running, on the surface, is quite a straightforward endeavour: it's the action of putting one foot in front of the other in the pursuit of becoming fitter and faster. But when it comes to running attire, our attitudes can be poles apart.

Comfort counts

I must confess; I tend to be a tights-wearer (long tights in winter, short in summer, of course). But let's focus on the summer variety, otherwise known as bike pants (or is it just me that calls them this?). There's no complicated or scientific reason behind my preference for tights. I just like them. I've always liked them. I find them to be comfortable and unrestrictive when I run despite the annoying way they can ride up your legs, which makes for a particularly unattractive look.

Admittedly, pulling on a pair of tights requires a certain level of self-confidence because, let's face it, you're not leaving too

much to the imagination (especially when they ride up your legs). But for me, the comfort factor overrides any insecurity I have about running around in skin-tight apparel. (I just hope those training around me don't take too much offence to this!). Understandably, tights are not everyone's cup of tea. For those shorts-wearing converts out there, I am sure comfort is also one of your main reasons for wearing them. I can certainly appreciate the appeal of the free-flowing nature of shorts, which are more conducive to air circulation. For the self-conscious, shorts also tend to be more flattering because they hide parts of our bodies that are supposed to be private! Whatever your preference, there's no right or wrong answer to this one. Running is a very personal pursuit and what you wear while you're doing it is a very personal choice based on what you find more comfortable.

Peer pressure

Despite favouring tights, I've always felt "real" athletes wear shorts, at least in the distance running scene (sprinting, however, is a different story). Let me explain. I returned to the competitive arena after a long absence almost two years ago and I distinctly remember standing at the start line in road races surrounded by shorts-wearers.

Naturally, I was apprehensive about racing after being on the sideline for ages and here I was, among experienced competitors, feeling really self-conscious because of my attire. Should I exchange my tights for shorts in an effort to look the part? Should I ditch my cupboard full of tights and embark on a shorts-buying spree? While I am not the kind of person to conform, I concede I seriously contemplated a switch. It was a fleeting thought and no, I wasn't swayed. And neither should you be. Stick to your guns on this one. It doesn't matter what people are wearing around you, the only person you have to please is yourself. As far as 'fitting in' is concerned, few shorts-wearers are going to frown upon their tights-loving friends, or vice versa.

Around the world

A look at athletes from around the world confirms my initial observations that shorts are the bottoms of choice for the elite, at least in Africa. The Africans are without question the world leaders when it comes



to distance running. I am yet to see one wearing tights during competition (though I stand to be corrected). Do they know something we don't about the benefits of shorts? Or is the availability of shorts the deciding factor for these athletes? I can't answer this. But I'd sure like to tap into what makes the Africans such awe-inspiring athletes! Tights-wearers, however, can breathe a sigh of relief because it appears they're favoured by the great Paula Radcliffe. Based on the



images she's posted on her website (www.paularadcliffe.com), I am pleased to report she likes her tights.

What we like our blokes to wear

I concede I was previously a little dubious about men wearing tights. Okay, call me harsh but from a female's perspective, I've never found them to be particularly attractive on a typical male distance runner (generally speaking). But after consulting with my husband about this, he was quick to inform me that the advantage of men wearing tights is the chaffing factor. In his opinion, sweating and shorts don't mix. In fact, it can sometimes be quite a painful proposition, though some fabrics are more conducive than others.

Now, I have a better understanding of the drawbacks of shorts, I am all for men turning to tights. I suspect chaffing can't be too pleasant. But it would seem (and I can only speculate on this) wearing tights is quite a brave proposition for men, for obvious reasons.

Finally...

The great thing is, just like running gives us a sense of freedom, what we wear when we do it is about freedom of choice. While the tights-versus-shorts debate is an age-old one and everybody has a difference of opinion, the most important aspect is we're

all out there doing the hard yards on trails, tracks, beaches and parks trying to live life to the fullest. Though I think tight-wearers may enjoy things a little more, just jokes! Enjoy.



Shorts

More flattering than tights because they cover up the upper part of the leg (a part of the body most women dislike) Airflow is better when wearing shorts, particularly beneficial when racing or when training in warmer climates. Shorts are more durable. You can wash them over and over again and they're less likely to lose their shape.

Tights

They're snug which allows for unrestricted movement when running. When overused tights can stretch out of proportion. Unfortunately some people don't replace them at this stage. It could be argued tights are more readily available in Australia and there doesn't seem to be a huge variety of shorts available for women.

