

## HOW MANY MILES DO YOU RUN?

By Rob Maxwell, M.A.

How many miles do you run? Is that a question that you, as a runner, field almost every day? How about among your runner friends? Is it a topic of discussion often? Would you be too disappointed to know that **IT REALLY DOESN'T MATTER HOW MANY MILES YOU RUN?**

I hear all the time from fellow runners that they think they're ready for a certain race because they've hit a mile mark that they've been waiting to reach. They say they've hit their 100 mile weeks for two weeks in row, so they "know" they're marathon ready. I also know of runners who put that cap on their long run versus they're weekly mileage. If they can "hit 22" on the long day, they're ready. Well, this thinking is off base. It may be true that the more miles you've run the more endurance you may have, but it doesn't mean your performance will be up to where you want it. You see, physiologically, that just doesn't add up.

I'm not against running a lot. I think if a runner loves to run then it only makes sense that they run more. What I'm talking about is that the goal of the run should match the actual program. If you're thinking that more miles leads to better performances, you are wrong! If you're thinking that more running may give you more peace of mind and burn off more calories, then you are right! I hear of cross country runners being on a program of 100 mile weeks and 20 mile long runs, and they're event is an 8K. To me, that's just flat out wrong. Not only will this NOT lead to faster times, but it's really beating up some young joints for zero positive purpose. If you want a team to run faster, teach them how to run **FASTER**, not **MORE**.

To run faster or improve your performance, there are four things you can do: Improve your VO2 max, improve your anaerobic threshold, improve your strength-to-weight ratio (lose weight), and improve your running economy by improving your running form. The only one of these that has anything to do with running more miles would be losing weight, but there are more productive ways to do that than running too much. VO2 max is improved by running high end intervals at over 95% of your maximum. Anaerobic threshold is improved by running intervals at or above your anaerobic threshold (typically 85% of your max). Your strength-to-weight ratio is best improved by following a healthy diet and weight training, and your running form is best improved by running specific drills. So where do miles come in? Know this: Miles build endurance—they do NOT build speed. Yes, runners all need a base of miles to build and maintain endurance to get the most out of speed work, but you don't need nearly as much as most runners run or most coaches prescribe.

How many miles do you need? It really depends on the event you are training for and how many miles your body can handle. There really is no set number. For short course racing—5K to 10K—you really don't need to run that many miles. Again, I really can't give exact numbers here because everybody is different. I've successfully coached athletes that run that distance on 10 mile weeks to 30 mile weeks, depending on what they're bodies can handle. I also focus more on time versus miles, anyway, when I coach people. Marathoners need more endurance miles than short course runners. Marathoners do need to build up their skeletal system so their

bodies can take more of the pounding that the marathon is going to bring, so they do need to log more volume. Marathoners also need to get ready psychologically for the distance, so running more will build their confidence.

If you've always been thinking about how many miles you're logging, how about trying a different approach for a while? Start logging quality workouts. Instead of thinking about how many miles you think you should run, think about pushing yourself harder on your speed days. Did you ever have an opinion that you own and never question? Well, professionally, this is one of those for me. There is no doubt in my mind that the key to performance boosting is quality over quantity. This keeps getting reinforced by all the athletes I coach. Last weekend, Debbie Tillman (whom I coach) ran a 2:00:17 30K and brought home the GOLD medal. This is a remarkable 6:30 pace for 18.6 miles. Never once did Debbie and I count her miles. In fact, I really don't have a clue. She maybe peaked at a 30 mile week leading up to this race. She had a long day leading up to this race and 2 quality speed days during the week. What we counted was how she was racing and what times she was hitting in her workouts. That's how I gauge if a runner's ready—not by miles, but by interval times and other races. And physiologically that is what makes sense. And yes, Debbie and people like her who win races have a special, God-given talent. But the point to this story is that it's NOT the miles that lead to the faster times.

So I never told you how many miles to run, because in truth, it doesn't matter. If you want to go faster, find a way to push yourself and get more out of your training. Take the direct route to speed and simply go faster. Not every run, of course, but 1-2 days per week should be set aside for speed, and on these speed days, find a way to run your best. Dig deep, because it's not easy to push yourself to the limit you need to go if you want to go faster. Our Tuesday night track session can be outright brutal, but the pay off is when we go to races. And if you love to log the miles because you simply love to run, that's okay too, just train with the right purpose for what you're trying to achieve.