

April, 2003

RACE YOUR BEST EASTER BEACH RUN

The famous Easter Beach Run is just around the corner – April 19th, if you haven't already marked your calendar. There are runs that runners and fitness enthusiasts put on their calendars each year as the race to do. This has been one of those races. It was the first distance race I ever ran. If you're doing this race for the first time, or if you really want some tips on setting and EBR PR, read on. I think I can help.

What is the best running frequency for a four-miler? To get a training effect, you need to “train” at least three days per week. Advanced runners and those looking to set a PR should run four to five days per week. There really is no set number, and it is very individual. More is not always better, so it comes down to how much stress your body can handle and perform its best. So for a general rule of thumb, you should train at least three days per week and no more than five.

What is optimal training duration for a four-miler? If your goal is to finish the EBR and you've never done a four-miler, then building up to doing a steady 45-50 minutes will be plenty to carry you through on race day, and the majority of your walks and/or runs can be 30 minutes. For those who want to PR the event and are experienced runners, then “base” runs of 30-40 minutes during the week and a long run of 60 minutes.

How hard should you train? This is the most important part of the equation, and the most overlooked. Most of your training should be purely aerobic. Aerobic training feels easy to comfortable. If you use heart rate as a gauge, use 75% of maximum heart rate as the cut-off point. If you have trouble holding a pace or don't recover well during a race, chances are you are not doing enough aerobic training. Along with aerobic training, to have your best EBR you'll have to do some speed work. Since we're talking specifically about the EBR, we'll go with the concept of “law of specificity”, which states you must replicate in training what you'll do in racing. So the intervals I recommend for the EBR should be fartleks and tempo running (other forms of speed work are track workouts and hill repeats). Fartleks and tempo runs are important because they can be done on the beach, which is where you are going to race. Run fartlek intervals for three minutes above 90% max heart rate with one minute of jogging, bringing the heart rate below 75%. The tempo runs should be ten minutes easy, twenty minutes at 85% max heart rate, then ten minutes easy.

The final consideration for a great EBR is race day. First, like with any race, eat foods the day before that agree with you. Don't eat hard-to-digest foods. On race day, nutrition has always been unique for the EBR. We're used to racing in the morning. With the 4 o'clock start, you have to be especially aware of what you're putting in your stomach all day. My advice is to eat a small carbohydrate breakfast (low in fiber) and a light early lunch. Whatever you do, try not to eat after 2:00 p.m. If you need a little pick-up, having some sports drink or “GU” just before the race would be okay.

Make sure you drink water out on the course. It gets hot, so take water at every aid station, and see that you are hydrating all day long before the event. Try to stay out of the sun before the start, and don't forget sunscreen. Hang out in the shade.

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Be sure to warm up for 10-15 minutes before the gun goes off. It will be hot, so don't overdo it. But try to get in some easy jogging/walking so you have a good sweat going when it's time to start (standing in the brutal sun is not good enough – get some blood flow to the legs). Advanced runners will also want to do 4-5 strides before they start.

When it comes to running the event, remember to pace it. I hear runners refer to 5K's and similar distances as "sprints". They are not sprints. Sprints are 200 meters. The 5K and four-miler are still primarily an aerobic event. So don't blow it in the first mile. The most successful people at these distances keep an even pace. If your goal is a 28 minutes EBR, then try to be at a 7 minute mile pace from mile one to mile four. I know it won't be perfect, but if you keep it close, you'll have a great day.

I hope this answers some of your questions about training and running the EBR. It is a very special race, and most of us want to have a special day when we race it. I hope I hear afterwards that this helped a few people to a PR!