

# **RUNNING 101**

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*Special to the Bulletin*

Beginner runners are often intimidated by the whole process. Finding the motivation and the energy to get out the door and go for a run is a difficult challenge in itself without having to worry about what other runners might be thinking about you. But the truth is, running is probably one of the most non-judgmental athletic endeavors you could choose. Participation in almost every event is open to the public, no one asks what your handicap is, and no matter how many people participate in a race, only one person finishes last. Even that brings no shame, since just being able to run/jog/walk the race distance will likely be viewed as an accomplishment in itself by most of your more sedentary peers. The following ten tips are targeted for beginner runners looking for some common sense advice:

**GET A GOOD PAIR OF RUNNING SHOES:** You don't need to spent \$140 on shoes with every hi-tech gadget imaginable, and expensive shoes won't make you a faster runner (unlike golf, bicycle racing, or fly fishing, for example, you can't buy improvement), but running too many miles in Pro Keds Canvas High Tops and you're asking for trouble. Stores like Nassiff's Sporting Goods in Willimantic or Kelley's Pace in Mystic are excellent places to visit if your new to buying running shoes and require some knowledgeable advice.

**GO RUNNING:** Get out the door and go for a run. Simple enough. Too many people read too many articles in Runner's World telling them that the path to achieving gains in physical fitness is lined with some sort of energy bars, cross-training exercise, or magic workout formula. The truth is, the most effective way to improve as a runner is to go out and run.

**DON'T OVERTRAIN:** I believe that runners with a couple of years of experience under their belts need to test their limits from time to time and see what works for them, especially if racing fitness is the ultimate goal. But beginner runners are best off concentration on establishing a base level of fitness. Too often I see people make the mistake of "binge exercising", asking their bodies to work harder than they are previously accustomed to, only to lose motivation completely a short time later. I advise runners that I coach to avoid doing two difficult workouts back-to-back, which is a surefire way to break down. Research conducted on weightlifting, for example, shows that the greatest benefits are derived when specific muscle groups are worked one day and then rested the next, rather than by working the same muscle groups each day. Even the best runners in the world don't train at 100% effort day after day.

**START SLOW:** Each run should start out at a conservative pace. Run at a pace that you could comfortable hold a conversation and run for a distance that you could tack on an extra mile or so if required. Starting out of the gate at near race pace and collapsing at the front door upon return are not particularly worthy goals.

**JOIN A RUNNING CLUB:** No matter where you live, chances are there is a running club available that will gladly accept new members. Most clubs, despite what many beginner may think, have no minimum qualifying standards in terms of speed. Most club dues or annual fees are very reasonable, and its a great way to meet other runners.

**KEEP A TRAINING LOG:** Keeping a written summary of your running will provide inspiration (there is a "shame factor" associated with writing numerous zeros for your daily mileage totals) and give you useful data to reflect back on in terms of improvement, cause of injury, or a comparative history. How much and what type of information you record is up to you.

**GET A COACH:** Most beginners think that only elite runners have coaches, but the truth is, beginners have more to gain by listening to someone with knowledge of the sport. Be cautious of buying into a training philosophy that doesn't fit your needs; a good coach will take into consideration your personal goals and time commitments. Not everyone aspires to become a world class distance runner. Stay away from coaches that promise rapid improvement in a short time period. Improvement in distance running is a long-term process.

**RUN WITH OTHER PEOPLE:** The advantage of this principle: the camaraderie of running with a partner or a group makes the task of strenuous exercise seem almost enjoyable. The disadvantage? Running too often with people who are not at your same level of ability will result in burnout or injury (running too fast) or a lack of improvement (running too slow).

**ENTER A ROAD RACE:** Having competed in road races for over 20 years, I'm amazed at people who think that running in road races is restricted to only the fleet of foot. Road races are social events. They also provide a good test of your current fitness level, and allow you to compete against others and against yourself. I'm not a proponent of over-racing, but most beginners would be best served by entering a few road races of various distances and seeing what the hype is all about.

**HAVE FUN:** Most people won't continue with an activity if they don't enjoy it. Running is hard work, but the rewards are countless. Learn to view running not as a task but as something you are.

If you're looking for feedback or coaching advice, please feel free to e-mail me at [kdcsikorski@netzero.net](mailto:kdcsikorski@netzero.net). I welcome any running questions from beginners to experienced veterans.

## **This Month in History**

March 17th, 1984 – Weaver High School wins the CIAC Indoor Track Boys State Open at Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven. Weaver's 62-point total is enough to defeat runner-up Xavier of Middletown (54). Bill Johns of Windsor Locks breaks the state and meet record in winning the 1,000 meter run (2:32.20), while Northwest Catholic freshman Mike Remigino, son of 1952 Olympic 100 meter gold medallist Lindy Remigino, sets a state, meet, and National age-group record (14 and under) by winning the 800 meter race in 1:58.95 despite finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Class "M" race a week earlier. In other distance events, Pete Fickinger of Xavier claims the 1,500-meter title in 4:06.36, while East Hartford junior Hector Ortiz outduels Fickinger's teammate Greg Bonaiuto in the 3,000-meter run to win in 8:54.23. NFA claims 2<sup>nd</sup> in the 4x400 and 5<sup>th</sup> (school record) in the 4x880 meter relays.

**Don Sikorski writes a twice-monthly running column for the Norwich Bulletin. His "Coach's Corner" column can be accessed at [www.moheganstriders.org](http://www.moheganstriders.org). He can also be reached by e-mail at [kdcsikorski@netzero.net](mailto:kdcsikorski@netzero.net).**