

33RD MARINE CORPS MARATHON



Training Tips from Jim Hage

- 1. Mo' Is Better -** As in mo' miles. I know, all the running magazines tell you how to run a marathon on eight miles per week. Truth is, that's true. But you can run better the more miles you put in. I won't bore you with too many personal anecdotes, but I finished third in the MCM twice, in 1985 and '86 (a long time ago, I know). But I jumped my mileage from 70 per week to 90 per week over the course of a few years and ended up winning in 1988 and '89 (still a long time ago). I went from 90 per week to 130 per week (crazy, yes) and dropped my PR from 2:17 to 2:15. I slept well, too.
- 2. Be Consistent -** Cramming for a test is generally bad news, but cramming for a marathon is worse. Unless you're starting from being reasonably fit, allow 10 weeks to get ready for a marathon. That includes a few weeks of building up to your minimum mileage, five or so weeks working hard and then a couple of weeks to taper for the big race. Thirty miles a week is good, 20 of them on the weekend, not good. The best plan is to run five, six or (gasp) even seven days a week. Rest is good, sure, but see No. 1. And note: the Kenyans, about whom we all profess admiration, don't generally take a day off -- ever. In fact, serious runners train two and sometimes three times every day.
- 3. Do Speedwork Only Under Extreme Circumstances -** Yes, you can run a marathon without hitting the track, or doing tempo runs, striders or fartlek. You'll just go more slowly than if you did speedwork. And fast marathons aren't for everyone -- seriously. The line I see is at 4 hours: those who run faster than that have probably done weekly speedwork. You decide.
- 4. Run With Friends -** Here's one I regularly ignore, not because I want to or even because I don't have friends. It's a chore sometimes to hook up with friends, but I can't think of a time that I regretted the effort it took. Especially for long runs, track work, birthdays and other special occasions. We're all social animals, despite our long-distance proclivities. Training groups are the best.

5. **Make Training a Priority** - Especially if you're training for a marathon, you can't "squeeze in" 40 miles per week. You've got set aside time to run each day. That's where having friends to share the mental burden make a big difference. Treat yourself right, as well, such as getting proper rest and eating right. The night before a long run, get extra rest, hydrate plentifully (avoid alcohol), call the right friend -- you get the picture.
6. **Race** - Test yourself as you go; don't save it all up for the final exam. Races provide milestones to gauge where you are in your training, push yourself a bit (it's not speedwork but it's better than another 10K at your regular training pace), socialize and perhaps most importantly, break up your training. I'll never forget a maniacal training partner I once had who didn't like to race "because it really messes up my training." Needless to say, he wasn't much of a racer.
7. **Use Good Gear** - Running in the proper shoes goes without saying, right? But the other stuff is important, too. Sure, there's a certain cache in running your friends into the ground while wearing a worn-out T-shirt and socks that hang around your ankles. But if you're reading this, you're probably just getting started, and why not give yourself every advantage? Hopefully it's not coming down to a dry-flow long-sleeve technical shirt or a baked potato, but if you can spend a few bucks to make yourself look better, or at least make yourself think you look better, why not? Baseball star Jason Giambi said he used to swagger to the plate, thinking how sexy he looked. There's a lot to be said for a positive self-image, but be sure to draw the line at steroids.
8. **Tapering** - Here's the section where everyone is a champ. Relax a bit the two weeks before the marathon. I know, the magazines say three weeks, and four weeks afterward. That's because they want you to sit on their butt and read their magazines rather than hit the roads. Two weeks are fine and the sooner you get back into a routine once you've finished the marathon, the better.
9. **Enjoy the Race** - More confessions, I wasn't so good at this, but racing was a full-time job for a while and baked potatoes didn't grow on trees. The week before the race, you're a hero to anyone who knows you're running. Revel in it. Put your name on your T-shirt and you'll make thousands of friends on race day. Probably too many, but spectators are looking for a reason to cheer, and if that means screaming your name as you stagger by at 12 minutes-per-mile pace, those cheers just may keep you from toppling into a drainage ditch at Mile 23. Cheer back if you can, but wait until 15 miles; it's less tacky.

10. Do Your Best - If I sound like a curmudgeon, or worse, an elitist, I suppose it's because I feel like too many runners just want to collect their medal without regard or respect for how they get it. Honestly, it's not so difficult to move forward and cover 26.2 miles. To do it well is among the hardest things I know. If you're starting to train and are 20 pounds overweight, lose 10 of them. You'll run a whole lot faster, look and feel better and have something much more valuable than a medal when you're done. I guess the converse of 'do your best' is don't sell yourself short. The marathon provides a chance for each of us to do something great. Carpe diem.

Jim Hage's first place finishes in 1988 and 1989 (2:21:59 and 2:20:23 respectively) earned him the title of the only male back-to-back winner in the MCM's 30-year history. An avid runner in the DC area, Hage is a regular contributor to the Washington Post for his expertise in running events and training.