

The Beauty of the Base Training Phase

How the off-season sets the stage for the entire year

BY ALAN CULPEPPER

It is safe to say most folks recognize there are no short cuts to seeing significant improvement in the sport of running. It is not the type of activity you can finesse your way to success. To get better, you have to either train differently, more consistently, more specifically or smarter. One of the most effective ways to get faster in any event is also one of the simplest—focusing on the base phase.

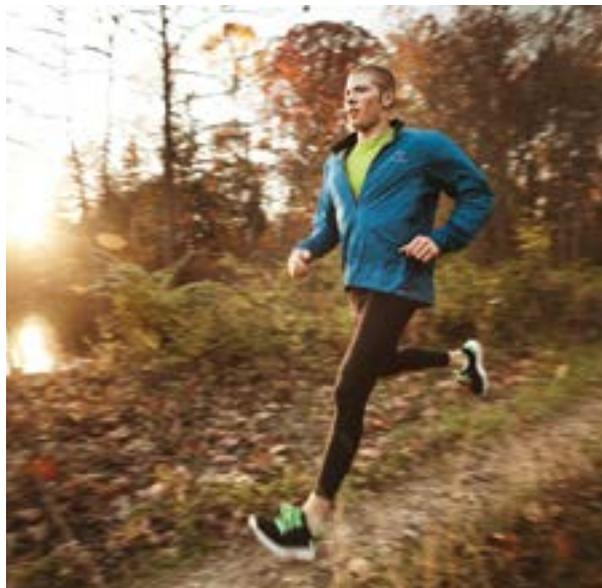
Laying the Foundation

Now that the winter months are settling in many of you may be falling victim to an off-season lag in training and lack of motivation. Although a break is very important, spending the next several months wisely can set you up for a winning season. Many of you may not have a specific goal in mind for 2013, and that's OK. You can simply make your base phase the goal for this winter. This is the time to lay the foundation and elevate your overall conditioning to allow for a higher level of training absorption come spring.

Many people have a common running condition that I like to refer to as "false fitness," a surface fitness level that can easily crumble due to missed training, illness, injury and life issues. Many folks duplicate their standard training program year after year; they get back in shape quite quickly and return to their previous form but fail to actually make forward progress. With a proper base phase an individual can fundamentally make a step to a higher level even before the specific race preparation begins. Think about fine-tuning an engine by changing the air intake, new spark plugs, new exhaust, synthetic oil, and electronic fuel injection. Instead of merely shining up the same engine each year, imagine fueling it up and elevating performance to the max. For training, this starts with the base phase.

What a Base Phase Looks Like

► The base phase starts with a four-week window of nothing but running and building your overall mileage to your lifetime maximum. No workouts should be performed during this period except for one day a week of a few strides (5K race pace repeats for 20-25 seconds) and one or two days a week of more moderate effort runs. A weekly long run should gradually increase during this period and be more of a moderate effort vs. an easy day effort. You should increase your mileage by roughly 20 percent each week during this section of the base phase



because overall volume is the primary emphasis.

► For the next six weeks increase weekly mileage by roughly 10 percent, increasing the long run by 15 percent each week. The focus should still be on overall mileage, with a moderate effort long run and the addition of one workout into the mix. Take a break at week 8 and repeat your week 4 mileage. Include one workout per week, such as: short intervals (45-90 seconds) with longer recovery, hill repeats (30-60 seconds), longer Intervals (4-8 minutes) and tempo runs. Rotate workouts weekly for balanced training.

► For the last four-week period, add an additional workout to the weekly schedule, but do not increase weekly mileage or the long run distance. A rotation of one of the workout types mentioned above is ideal with one or two easy days between workouts. Take another break at week 13, repeating your mileage from week 4.

Planning for 14 weeks of off-season training may feel daunting, but, trust me, once you get through a proper base phase you will be a different athlete. Everyone gets excited to get back quickly and race, but a well executed base phase elevates foundational fitness to a whole new level, allows runners to realize increased benefits from more specific training sessions and sets athletes up for a longer racing season. The beauty of the base phase is that it really works. It doesn't require crazy-hard workouts, rather it's just about putting in the time and being consistent.



Two-time U.S. Olympian Alan Culpepper helps runners of all abilities through www.culpeppercoaching.com