

[COACH CULPEPPER]

MANAGING YOUR OFFSEASON

Use time off to your advantage this winter.

BY ALAN CULPEPPER

THERE IS NO SHORTAGE of dialogue on training, workouts, mileage, long runs, footwear, mechanics or cross-training, but taking downtime and resting after a fall marathon or long racing season is a topic that rarely gets discussed. A recovery period is valuable, but what does that look like? What should you do? And how much time off is appropriate?

Recovery is key—our bodies need a break from the rigors of training in order for future improvement to take place. The key to this discussion is finding the right balance between time off and recovery without losing too much fitness.



POST-MARATHON

→The toll the marathon takes on the body is unmatched by any other event. There really is nothing like it; I've found that most folks recover quicker from a full Ironman or ultra-distance event than they do from an intense marathon. There are plenty of reasons for this, but the recovery time needed after racing a hard marathon is definitely longer than any other race. Two to three weeks off—meaning no running whatsoever, or just a few miles every 4-5 days—is a good standard. During this period, I also advocate a minimal amount of cross-training, maybe a light swim or spin once every 3-4 days. Earlier in my competitive career, I took three weeks off without even thinking about it. As I got older, I shortened that period of no running to two weeks and slowed my progression back into training. I was more likely to get injured if I took three full weeks off; most people falter in the first few weeks of returning to training.

A COUPLE OF MISTAKES TEND TO HAPPEN DURING THE NEXT PHASE:

1. Runners jump right back into training too aggressively and risk injury.
2. Runners build up too slowly and miss the opportunity to build off the fitness they developed during marathon preparation.

THE KEY IS BALANCE: You need to build back into your training slowly to avoid injury, but you also want to continue capitalizing on your fitness. Your initial focus should be on building mileage back up, not as much on doing faster workouts. Your first week should be about 40 percent of your biggest training week during your marathon preparation. If you ran upward of 50 miles a week during training, you should start back up around 20 miles per week. From there, you can increase your volume by about 15 percent each week. After four weeks of mileage, start reintroducing speed workouts; one faster workout a week until you reach your maximum weekly volume is enough. The focus is on gaining your strength back, ensuring you stay injury-free and preparing to focus on another specific training block. Ideally you want to get to full volume first, then add the workouts. This will prevent your fitness level from plateauing over and over again.

POST-RACING SEASON

→After finishing up a racing season that doesn't include a marathon, you can take your rest as an active recovery period. Unlike the marathon, there is no need for multiple weeks off, and cross-training during this period is a great idea. You need to de-emphasize the harder running-specific workouts, but keep active and continue to include some running in your routine. Mixing cross-training and some running (about 50 percent of your highest weekly mileage during the competitive season) is a good combo. Taking a two-month period to just enjoy running without the physical (and mental) burden of intense workouts is a great way to recover during the off-season. Cross-training lessens the stress on the body but allows for continued aerobic and muscular benefit. Gym work with weights, lower intensity spinning or elliptical workouts or moderate swimming along with easy running is a good combination for this two-month period during the winter. From there, you can build your mileage back up by 15 percent each week and start to include harder workouts again.



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