



Bob Kennedy

WHAT I LEARNED FROM BOB KENNEDY

I was fortunate to have raced alongside one of the greatest American distance runners of all time, Bob Kennedy, a two-time Olympian who held American records in the 3K and 5K and was almost untouchable at the U.S. championships for about a decade.

Although I was never able to match his times at the 3K and 5K, I was able to beat him on several instances. I took what I learned from those encounters and applied it to my own running—and so can you. Here are three key things I learned from him.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BASE PHASE

Even as a 3K/5K specialist, Kennedy never neglected to include a base phase in his overall training program. No matter what distance you're preparing for, a period of prolonged higher volume with a focus on workouts at or just above aerobic threshold will enhance your overall oxygen-carrying capacity. Kennedy would put in eight to 12 weeks a year where the primary focus was on becoming aerobically stronger. This not only elevated his performance over the course of a year, but also ensured he could hold his fitness for longer over the racing season.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEED

Kennedy was meticulous about continually developing speed and maintaining a high level of efficiency at running fast throughout the year. Even during the base phase, Kennedy would include faster workouts at 1-mile race pace. These were shorter intervals of 600 meters or less during the higher volume periods including more rest between intervals. Many athletes training for longer races neglect this aspect, as do many runners who started later in life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTENSITY

Another element to Kennedy was his willingness to include intense workouts on a regular basis, usually during the final buildup to his racing season. He was not afraid to push himself very hard in training—often training with the top Kenyan athletes for periods throughout the year—to ensure he was physically and mentally ready for the intensity of racing. It is understandable that pushing hard in training, bordering on race effort for some workouts, is not a natural tendency for some, but if done properly and in the right doses, it can yield huge returns.



Two-time U.S. Olympian Alan Culpepper won national titles from the 5K to the marathon. His first book, “Run Like a Champion,” is available at VeloPress.com.