

Tapering

By Dr. Robert Vaughan

- I. Description of Tapering
 - a. What is it?
 - i. A reduction of volume and intensity before the event.
 - ii. Intention is to produce peak performance on day of event.
 - b. Where did concept originate?
 - i. Forbes Carlile and Frank Cotton, from Australia, coined term in 1047.
 - ii. Arthur Lydiard refined concept for runners: “Running hard in the days before the race can only make performance worse.”
 - c. What happens when I taper?
 - i. As fitness increases so does fatigue.
 - ii. When training is reduced, fatigue declines rapidly
 - iii. Fitness can be maintained on 50% of previous volume
- II. Examples of Tapering
 - a. Bruce Fordyce Comrade’s Marathon, (88 kilometers) 5 time winner, longest training run 48-64 km
 - i. 5 weeks out 100%, 4 weeks out 88%, 3 weeks out 71%, 2 weeks out 62%, week of event 26%
 - ii. Last ten days included three days off, five 5-6 km runs, one 20 km, one 10 km, and one 8.5 km run
 - b. Peter Snell Olympic 800-1500 Champion 1964
 - c. Lasse Viren 1972-6 5000-10000 Olympic Champion
 - d. Francie Larrieu Smith 1991 American Record 10,000, 2nd World Cup Marathon
- III. Examples of Results After Forced Taper
 - a. Joan Samuelson: 1984 Olympic Trials Champion following knee surgery
 - b. Dave Bedford: 1973 World Record 10,000 following four months reduced training due to injury
 - c. Abebe Bikila: 1964 Olympic Champion and World Record 2:12.11, six week layoff due to appendicitis
 - d. Roger Bannister: 1954 first sub four minute mile following five full days of rest. Franz Stampfi, Bannister’s mentor first to emphasize tapering.
 - e. Emil Zatopek: 1950 hospitalized for two weeks prior to European Championships. Released two days before 10,000, one by one lap, later won 5,000 by 23 seconds.
- IV. When Do I Start/What Do I Do?
 - a. Carlisle and Cotton found that after two to three months hard training, their swimmers performed best after eased training for three weeks.
 - b. A peak will last between 3-6 weeks on reduced training.
 - c. Three weeks out 75% of volume, Two weeks out 50% of volume, week of event 25% of volume.
- V. Principles to Remember
 - a. Don’t think that fatigue is a barrier to overcome. Your body is asking for some recovery time.
 - b. Derek Clayton on whether he worked too hard: “Indeed, I did. I realized that efforts like that take more out of a runner than they know. Unfortunately, I discovered it too late.”
 - c. During the last three weeks, you can’t do too little, only too much.
 - d. Gain one or two pounds the last week. Whatever you do, don’t lose weight the last two or three days before the race.

