



Coaching the Slower Walker

By Tom Dooley, National Advisory Coach

One of the first things that a coach has to consider is the conditioning of his participants. Very early in the season, Coaches are aware of some athletes, who for a wide range of reasons are not walking fast enough to pass the time limits set for their race, and they end up being “swept” or “sagged forward.” Both of these are situations that participants (and coaches) would like to prevent.

It has been my experience along with that of many other coaches that the majority of those walkers are: A) only training on TNT Saturdays
B) training only 1-2 days/week, at the most and often under an hour.

It is not always possible to have participants choose the event most appropriate for their ability. Once the season begins and plans are made, it is difficult to make changes even if everyone agrees to do so.

Our challenge then, is to keep these participants in our program and provide them with training programs that can maximize their available time. We want those participants to be able to walk their best on training days with the knowledge that they will get faster and stronger even with minimal training.

Given this scenario, I have created a circuit that can be done almost daily, that can fit into almost anyone’s lives. This circuit incorporates many of the joint flexibility exercises that teams do before and after training and during crosstraining days. If a participant was unable to train, they could do the circuit anywhere, when they had time. Then when they walked they would be able to be much more efficient.

Plyometrics

Plyometric drills are done to develop your ankle range of motion, building toward a stronger push off, resulting in a faster cadence.

Heel and Toe Walks

Heel walks develop the shins and help to prevent shin splints. Toe walks develop calf strength and also help to prevent shin splints. After a short

walking warm-up and mobility exercise, walk on your heels for 20-25 paces and then retrace your steps on your toes. Walk at your normal stride for a minute and repeat. If your feet, calves or shins cramp, stop and stretch before continuing.

Skipping Rope

Try interval sets of skipping rope (2-3 sets of 30 seconds) focusing on pushing up rather than forward. Jumping rope: (2-3 sets of 30 seconds) focusing on staying on your toes as much as possible. (ankle flips)

Wobble Boards/Bosu Balls

Both of these tools are excellent for balance and spatial awareness. Squats (1-2 legs) performed on them develop ankle strength, which is necessary for racing on hilly and uneven terrain. (eg San Diego RNR, SF Nike Women's) For a greater challenge, close your eyes as you squat.

Power Skips

Vertical and horizontal skipping focuses on pushing upward through the ball of the foot and toes. Vertical is for height and horizontal is for distance. Keep the supporting leg as straight as possible throughout the exercise and try 2-3 sets of 25 -50 meters vertical one way and horizontal on the return.

Ankle Mobility Circuit

Seated Ankle Circles

Sit on the floor or an exercise mat with your legs together straight out in front of you with your knees straightened. Rest your back against a wall. Circle both feet together clockwise and then counterclockwise. Do 2 sets of 10 repetitions in each direction. Cross one leg over the other and do 2 sets of ankle alphabets, tracing the letters of the alphabet with your top foot.

Windshield Wipers

Sit in a chair with both feet flat on the floor. Rotate your feet inward and outward as far as possible while keeping the heels together in place. (as in a sweeping windshield wiper motion) Do 2-3 sets of 10 repetitions.

Seated Foot Roll

Sit in a chair with your bare feet. Place a rolling pin/dowel/closet rod under your arch(es). Roll it back and forth for 30 seconds. To place more pressure on the arch, stand and use a tennis ball/lacrosse ball. Roll on the ball, moving it slowly around the whole area for 30 seconds. If you come to a spot that is tender, try to hold the ball at the spot for up to thirty seconds before moving the ball.

Seated Heel and Toe Raises

Sit in a chair with both feet flat on the floor. Raise the heel while keeping the ball of the foot on the floor. As soon as the heel touches the floor, raise the toes as high as is comfortable. Do 2 sets of 10 repetitions. (This can be done with dumbbells placed on knees.)

Towel Grabber

Sit on a straight-backed chair with your bare feet. Spread a large beach towel out in front of your chair. Place your feet on the towel with your heels on the edge closest to you. Keep your heels down. Scoot the towel back underneath your feet by pulling it with your toes as you arch your feet. When you have done as much as you can, reverse the toe motion and push the towel out again.

Knee Circles

Stand with your feet together and bend your knees as deeply as you can. Place your hands just above your knees on your thighs, keeping your heels on the floor. Circle your knees to the right, straightening them as you do. After 10 reps, circle your knees to the left. Repeat.

Sitting Ankle Stretch

Begin by kneeling on your hands and knees, on a soft surface. (Carpeted floor or exercise mat.) Keep your knees and ankles together with your toes pointed behind you. Leaning backward, take your weight back onto your ankles and shins until you feel a mild to moderate stretch. Hold for 10-15 seconds and come up to an upright position. Repeat 2-3 more times. (Coaches note: If participants have any prior knee pain or injury, avoid this exercise.)

Sitting Ankle Mobility

Sit on the floor or exercise mat with both legs straight out in front of you. Keep your knees straightened throughout and make sure to keep your heels together with your big toes touching while performing each of the drills.

- Push the feet forward, trying to place your soles on the floor. Hold for 2 seconds and then return to normal. Repeat twice more (Plantar Flexion)
- Pull your feet back towards you and hold for 2 seconds. Repeat twice more (Dorsiflexion)
- Turn your soles inward trying to touch your little toes together. (Inversion)
- Turn the feet outward while pulling both little toes upwards as far as possible. (Pronation)

These four exercises are designed to be done as a circuit. Do them for the time given and repeat the circuit twice more.

Marble Pick-ups

Perform this exercise one foot at a time. Sit in a chair with your bare feet. Place a dozen marbles on the floor between your feet. Pick up a marble with your toes and extend your foot as far away as possible while keeping your heel on the floor. Alternate feet until you have moved all the marbles. Then reverse placing the marbles back to where you started. Another variation is to pick up the marbles and place them in a bowl.

Stair Toe Raises/Heel Raises

Stand with the balls of your feet on a stair, with your heels over the edge. Keep your feet pointed straight ahead. Slowly rise up on your toes and then lower the heels below the step, pausing briefly at the bottom. Then return to horizontal. Repeat 10-15 times. Perform the same exercise but with your toes pointed inward (pigeon-toed) and then pointing out (duck-feet.)

Further Reading

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