

Owner's Manual

a runner's guide to performance + maintenance

training

Pedestal Power

by Brian Metzler

Whether you're an improving 1500-meter runner or an aspiring Boston Marathon qualifier, core strength can help give your training and racing a boost. But, not only is it hard to get fired up about doing 300 crunches every morning when you wake up or the moment you finish a run, crunches aren't the only — or best — answer.

With the idea of hardening some of his young middle-distance runners, Kansas State University distance coach Mike Smith incorporates a series of general strength workouts known as the Pedestal Routine into his program's daily workout regimen. It's a series of 10 quick core-building exercises that strengthen many muscle systems from mid-thigh to the bottom of the ribcage.

If done regularly, the routine will build the abs, psoas muscles, hip flexors, upper hamstrings, glutes and numerous other structural systems that contribute to core stability. And that will ultimately allow a runner to exert maximal power throughout a workout or race and maintain an efficient, upright form,

even when fatigued, Smith says. The bottom line is that, combined with a strong aerobic system, a sturdy structural system can help you drop race times, run better workouts and recover quicker.

"The concept of a pedestal is something that supports something from a strong, stable base," Smith says. "And in this case, your core is supporting your upper body and

your legs. So the stronger that core is, the better we are able to sustain our power, flexibility and efficiency."

For an 800-meter runner, it means creating more efficient power on a short-term basis. For a 10,000-meter runner or marathoner, it's about tolerating the impact and fatigue over a long period of time. And it can also help you avoid nagging overuse injuries and soreness that can keep you from a workout or force you to reschedule a race.

Smith implemented the series of exercises because he was noticing a trend of young college runners being aerobically strong but structurally weak. The same might be said for marathoners who took up running in their late 20s to early 40s, which is why these exercises have such a broad reach.

The beauty of the routine is that it can be done in about 10 minutes, depending on your fitness level. But be prepared to feel the burn.

"We're really not talking about a lot of time for the benefit you're getting," he says. "It's not easy, but we have to get away from the notion that extra work is detrimental. With this routine, you're making yourself stronger to run faster and more efficiently, and you're making yourself less prone to injuries."

continued on page 16

training

Stabilize your knees, ankles

by Seánan Forbes

When I worked as a personal trainer in a major New York City health club, I acquired driven, hard-training marathon runners, dedicated to working out in the gym and maintaining high levels of strength and endurance. After a long race, my runners often came to me complaining of pains in their knees and hips.

The issue wasn't about weight-bearing strength, but about stability. The body functions in a chain reaction; if there's weakness in the ankles, then the knees have to compensate; if there's weakness in the knees, then the hips will suffer; everything is connected. Knowing that, we focused on the muscles and tendons that stabilize knees and ankles.

I gave them exercises that could be done on any stairwell. After implementing the exercises into her training routine, one of my clients returned from a race in Sweden. "I don't hurt," she said, grinning. "There's no pain."

Keys to these exercises are moving slowly, paying attention to details, and working within easy limits. Your goal is not to increase your range, but to maximize stability within the range you use.

Unless you are absolutely certain of your balance, keep one hand on a banister or touching a wall. This is even more important when you are working on fabric or another unstable surface.

For each of these stabilizing drills, keep your knees in line, your weight

continued on page 17

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Pedestal Exercise 4: Supine Elbow Stand, Single-Leg Raise

Jay Johnson



4. Supine Elbow Stand, Single-Leg Raise

From a supine position balancing on the forearms and elbows and a stationary foot, lift the opposite leg upward to near full extension, keeping toes pointed downward and knees straight. Repeat 5-10 times on each leg while maintaining postural integrity and keeping the hips from drooping below the plane created by the shoulders and toes.

5. Lateral Elbow Stand, Single-Leg Raise

Turned to one side and balancing on the downward elbow/forearm and downward stationary foot, raise the opposite foot to near full side extension. For optimal balance, position the hand not in use on the upward-facing hip, pointing the elbow upward in the same plane as the rest of the body. Repeat 5-10 times and then switch sides to work the opposite side of the body.

6. Lateral Hand Stand, Single-Leg Raise

Same drill as above, only balancing from one fully extended arm and stationary foot. Repeat 5-10 times and then switch sides to work the opposite side of the body.

7. Prone Flexed-Knee Elbow Stand, Hip Lift

Balancing on the elbows, forearms and one knee in a prone position, lift the opposite leg upward with flexion in the knee. Repeat 5-10 times on each leg.

8. Supine Flexed-Knee Elbow Stand, Hip Lift

Balancing on the elbows, forearms and one foot from a supine position, lift the opposite leg upward with flexion in the knee. Be sure to keep the hips elevated while maintaining a horizontal plane from the shoulders through the stationary knee. Repeat 5-10 times on each leg.

9. Crunch with Low Reach

Lying on your back with knees flexed and feet flat on the ground, slowly raise your head and upper torso while reaching with your arms low alongside your body. As your head raises, try to extend the reach toward your feet.

10. Crunch with Low Reach and Twist

Same exercise as above, only adding a slight twist to either side to isolate other abdominal muscles. (Alternate twist direction on every rep and continue for 5-10 reps.)

The Pedestal Routine is one of six general strength workouts and 100 total exercises presented in the first volume of the DVD series "Building a Better Runner: Building From the Ground Up" available at www.RunningDVDs.com. Visit the site for more information and free downloads.

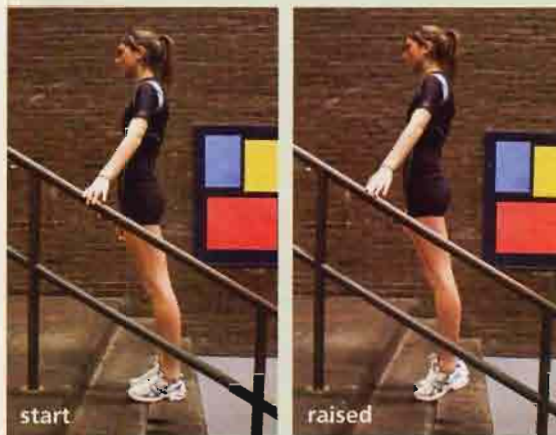


training continued from page 14

distributed across all toes, and your hips even. Repeat each exercise 25 times.

Ankle Stabilizers

Stand on a step, facing upstairs, with the balls of both feet on the step. Place one hand on the railing. Keeping your feet parallel and your legs straight but not hyperextended, slowly lower to your maximum comfortable level, heeding your body, and then slowly raise onto the balls of your feet.



Juan G

For the second set, turn your feet so that you are slightly pigeon-toed. All of the above rules apply: maintain weight distribution, keep your knees pointing forward, and move slowly.

When you're ready, progress to a single-legged version, toes pointing straight forward, dropping one foot off the stair and doing single-leg calf raises with the standing leg. Allow the non-working leg to be loose and relaxed, and keep your hips even. Switch legs and repeat.

Increase the difficulty of any of these by placing a folded towel on the stair. When you do this, hold the railing. Working on fabric

continued on page 18



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training continued from page 17

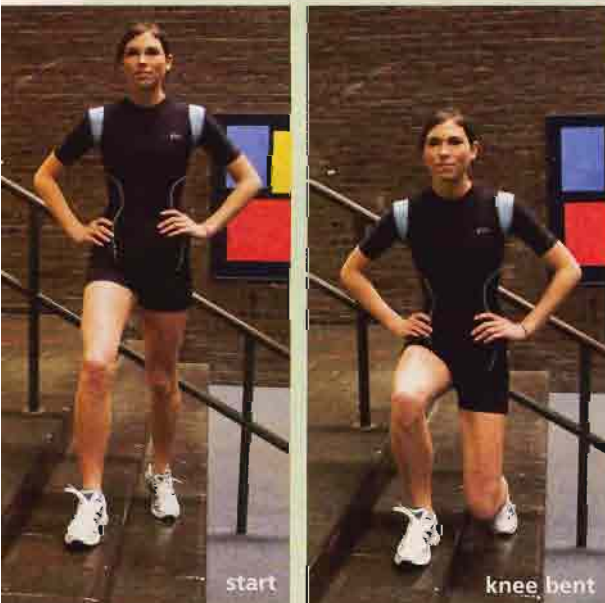
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mimics the action of running on an unstable surface, preparing you for off-road running.

Knee Stabilizers

Stand facing the side of the stairwell or case. Place one hand on the railing. Have one foot off the step and one foot on. Again, allow the free leg to relax. Slowly bend your knee, maintaining alignment. Do not allow your knee to move forward of your toes. Straighten. Turn to face the other wall and switch legs. A towel can be used to increase the challenge.



Stand one stride away from the staircase. Extend one leg back and rest a toe on the first or second step, as dictated by comfort. Move into a slow lunge, dropping the back knee while keeping the front one in line above your forward ankle. Holding your hands on your hips will help to maintain hip alignment. Placing fabric beneath the rear (not standing) foot will decrease stability and increase the challenge. ■

by Roy Benson

accumulated wisdom + applied science

Keep Your Intensity in Check

George Beinhorn is one of our running community's deeper thinkers. I just finished an excerpt from his book *Fitness Intuition: The Wisdom of the Heart in Exercise and Sport Training*, a nicely balanced, well-researched discussion about how runners can get faster by running slower. Let me unequivocally state that I agree with Beinhorn: long, slow distance, or LSD, can help every runner . . . depending on how and when you do it. Here's one application that demonstrates its effectiveness.

Exhibit "A" is Gary White, the classic adult-onset runner. He's a middle-aged, very successful owner of his own business who began running in 2003. By the fall of 2005, his 5K and 10K times were down to 20:40 and 43:30, respectively, but he had stopped improving. In fact, his times were rebounding backwards harder than a NASCAR Chevy that hit the wall at Talladega. That fall he joined my Misery Loves Company program, using highly customized workouts I designed around his primary activity of weight training. At 5-foot-10 and a stocky 166 pounds, Gary isn't built like your typical ectomorphic distance runner, and while serious about running faster, he still wanted to continue his very intensive lifting routines.

The result was a skimpy running pattern of just three workouts per week: Tuesday intervals at 90 to 95 percent effort; Thursday threshold workouts at 80 to 85 percent effort on his treadmill; and either a Saturday race or a Sunday LSD run of 8 to 10 miles at 60 to 75 percent effort. The paces of each workout were based on his current racing fitness and in heart rate zones those paces were expected to generate. In addition, the perceived level of exertion was succinctly described for each different type of effort. There were no easy, slow days for recovery, but the Sunday long run fit almost everyone's standard definition of LSD. Recovery from his hard running workouts were days completely off while he was lifting. Not the ideal way for a serious distance runner to train, but this was the customized pattern Gary wanted.

Over the last two years, Gary's times improved, particularly in the 5K, but not remarkably. His history at Atlanta's Strong Legs race every fall revealed a curious trend: 2003 = 45:16; '04 = 43:32; '05 (after one month in the program) = 43:22; '06 = 43:41. After using my workouts in 2005 to take 10 seconds off his personal course record, his time got slower in 2006. Following that disappointment and other unsatisfactory races, his frustration grew. I thought weight lifting was leaving him fatigued, so I advised cut back or taper off before races. But that wasn't his problem.

When I finally grilled him about heart rates on the Thursday and Sunday workouts, I found out he decided — since he was running so few miles each week — that increasing the intensity of the running workouts was the path to improvement. I told him he had two choices: crash or slow down. It was probably the fear of a disabling injury, more than my brilliant explanations of the physiology, that forced the changes. He brought the effort of the threshold workout back down to 85 percent. And, once he got used to the true "pokey" pace of the LSD run, he felt fresher and friskier.

By last November he was on such a roll that he ran 41:50 at Strong Legs, an amazing 92-second improvement. Soon he was asking if increasing his weekly mileage with more LSD on his off days would further his gains. Since it's true that the more you run, the faster you get, I told him to try it. Sure enough, his 5K PR dropped to 19:10.

Sometimes, the only way to get faster is to practice slower. The pedestrian paces of LSD can make it happen. Of course, you need to keep this study of one in the context of Gary's givens. But next month, I'll show how the magic of LSD applies in other ways and offer specific guidelines so everyone can apply them to their own running. ■

Roy Benson, MPE in Exercise Physiology, has been a distance running coach for 44 years.