

## **Coach's Corner, Buffalo Stampede**

**By Brendan Davies**

**Coach's Corner** will be a ten part series of coaching tips leading up to the weekend of races at the Buffalo Stampede. Each Tuesday, a different topic will be presented to help you train, prepare and plan your race for either the marathon or ultra.

### **Part 1: Building Mental Toughness; It starts now!**

There is no getting around it, the Buffalo Stampede races are two of the toughest races to be staged on Australian soil. Just ask any of the SkyCampers that experienced the course themselves a couple of weekends ago. Even this experienced trail runner was taken a bit by surprise just how daunting and difficult the course is!

To have a successful race, whichever event, no matter of your goal, it is vital that we train our body systems. Physically; we train our aerobic system with our long run (Part 2), our muscular system with our hilly runs and strength work (Parts 4 & 5) and our energy systems by practising our nutrition and hydration plans (Part 7) in our training too. However, what usually has the biggest influence on the success of a race, particularly one as arduous as the Stampede, is our Mental Toughness.

The reason I've kicked off this series of coaching tips with this topic is simply because developing our Mental Toughness starts now. No one is born with Mental Toughness, nor does it miraculously appear on race day. Just like training our physical body, we must also train our Mental Toughness through experiences. By doing this, we collect a repertoire of skills and experiences to call upon on race day when the going gets tough.

#### **What is Mental Toughness?**

Mental toughness is hard to define, and everyone will have a different opinion on what it incorporates. But for me, I think the most important aspects are discipline and dedication, mindset, focus, resilience, adaptability and keeping a level head right through the training cycle all the way to race day. In short, it's coming to Bright in April 'Ready to Race'. This means that you come to the start line mentally prepared and ready to deal with any thing that may hinder you reaching your goal.

#### **How to Develop Mental Toughness in training**

##### ***1: Being disciplined and dedicated***

I believe that developing Mental Toughness and discipline go hand in hand. Training, recovering and, yes even resting, requires a great deal of discipline. Doing this day in and day out and following your program requires dedication. When we are both disciplined and dedicated, you'll start to build your stockpile of experiences that you can draw upon in the future. Think about it as an investment fund. Every time you knock off a tough session, or make the time for that recovery session, you're investing in your future success. Of course the additional benefit of all this is that your overall confidence will grow which is something all successful runners possess.

Once we have discipline and dedication down, we can begin to break it down even more and develop certain aspects of Mental Toughness. This is all to do with our behaviours and our thought processes when we train.

### ***2: Come to training with a 'tough' mindset***

Prepare for training by looking positively towards it and project confidence. Don't focus on things you can't control like what the weather is like or what session is down in your program. Negative feelings will only bring about anxiety and doubt. Embrace the fact that the hard sessions are going to hurt and there will be discomfort involved. Be motivated by that deep satisfaction you'll get once that session is over knowing that your fitness and tolerance to fatigue has increased.

### ***3: Have a goal and keeping focused***

Have a clear and achievable goal for each training session. Is it to build strength, work on your technique, gain technical skill, grind up a hill, build speed or totally run out of your comfort zone? Having this clear outcome will keep you focused and motivated and training becomes purposeful and a lot more than just clocking up the kilometres.

Try not to over analyse things in training by thinking about how you are feeling too much. We all know the KISS strategy. Keep it simple. Often I'll just concentrate on my cadence or my foot strike and rotate these things around. In other words, keep the focus on the running, in the present moment. I often use counting strategies in training to maintain my goal pace, or I repeat my mantra when I'm encountering a particularly tough part of my training. These are all things you can repeat on race day. Try not to think 'how far you have to go', or 'how many reps you have left'. Focus in the moment.

### ***4: Build your resilience:***

We've all had those days when the session is simply a shocker, we feel flat, down spirited or simply not in the mood to train yet we push through and get it done. Guaranteed when this happens; these sessions are the ones that are often the most beneficial and we draw on these when times get tough during the race. Try not to take short cuts in your training but on the days when it all goes pear shaped; we hit the wall (and these days happen) make sure you see these setbacks as an opportunity to learn. Learning from our mistakes is often the best way to build Mental Toughness.

### ***5: Be adaptable:***

The Stampede is an event that travels over a variety of terrain; from patches of road running to the ridiculous steep ascents and descents in the mountains. Knowing how to adapt your physical output and controlling your mental state for this variability will bring confidence and decrease anxiety come race day. Make sure you choose training sessions and locations with this in mind. Also, be adaptable to the things you can't control, like the weather or the course conditions. Make sure you're mentally tough enough to handle these variables by trying as much as possible to train in these conditions or using positive mental imagery to prepare yourself for these occasions (more on positive mental imagery in Part 9).

### **6: Keep a level head:**

Sometimes we need to be a little selfish as runners when we train. In order to keep focused on ourselves and our own goals we often have to train by ourselves. This is fine of course because this will replicate race day. However, don't become too absorbed in your own interests all the time. Make sure some of your training runs are social, with others for the pure enjoyment of running or if running solo, make sure you have sessions that are more 'playing' than 'training'. This will ensure that in your desire to improve you won't mentally burn out before the race.

While of course I can't cover everything on this topic, I hope I have given you some tips to take into your own training. Practising some of these strategies in your training will, over time, develop your Mental Toughness and come race day, this little race called the Buffalo Stampede hopefully won't seem so daunting after all.

© Brendan Davies, UP Coaching

