

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

**By Brendan Davies**

### **Part 3: Strength Training**

In Part 2, I mentioned in my article about the importance of the long run, and that every other facet of our training cycle is the 'icing on the cake'. Strength training is a little like more than the icing though, in this analogy it's probably best described as the egg in the cake that holds it together and stops the cake from crumbling! It's an important component of any distance runner's program; not just for the strength benefits for our muscles and joints but more crucially for the injury prevention benefits. I couldn't think of a race where strength training would play a more important role than the Buffalo Stampede races. The amount of ascent and descent could break more than just your spirit on the day and having a strong and durable body will go a long way towards you having a successful race and recovery.

But what type of strength training and how often should we specifically do strength sessions is a question that often pops up. Well the good news is that most of us training for the Stampede are probably incorporating a lot of specific hill and mountain training in our programs which gives us already a lot of leg strength benefits. However, there is very much a place for stand alone strength sessions and I'm not necessarily talking about going to a gym or putting on any more muscle mass. I do all my strength work at home and a lot of it can be done without weights although having a few different weighted dumbbells are a great investment. Strengthening our core is also very important and can improve our posture and running economy too, especially crucial towards the back end of races. All of this of course will lead to a better performance!

How often should I be doing Strength Sessions?

Strength sessions should supplement your running training, not replace them. To get benefit from strength sessions, I believe they must be undertaken at least three times per week for about half an hour each. These sessions can typically be done before an easy run or on their own as a second session. They should be done right throughout the training cycle with a sharpening of sessions towards race day, just as you would with your running training.

What strength exercises should I perform?

The range of exercises are far too comprehensive for this article but I'll give you some examples of a typical leg strength and core strength workout. A few rules of thumb apply though for either:

- If you're new to strength training, start with a small number of repetitions and increase them gradually.
- Use your own body weight initially before adding resistance in the form of weights or resistance bands
- A routine of three sets per exercise (with a short rest in between) and ten - 20 repetitions is what you should be aiming for.
- Determining the amount of weight to use is a bit of a trial and error process. The last repetition should feel as if you couldn't do another.
- Balance your strength training with a dedicated stretching program too

## **Examples of Leg Strengthening Exercises.**

### **Deep Squats**

Squats are a very effective exercise that strengthens the entire lower body. Squats target the quadriceps, hamstrings, hips, hip flexors, and glutes. There are many variations of squats that can be performed such as squat jumps and sumo squats and explosive moves like squat jumps and squat rotations. To increase the resistance, add a 3-5kg dumbbell while performing the deep squats.

### **Mountain Climbers**

A great quadriceps workout, these can be done in lots of 20.

### **Lunges**

A great exercise for quads and hip flexors and can be done with dumbbells to increase the resistance. Lunge jumps are a more explosive alternative.

### **Lateral Lunges**

Similar to the forward lunge but to the side, targeting our glutes, quads and calves.

### **Box Step Ups**

A great exercise to improve uphill running! Can be performed on a box, bench or a seat, with or without weights. Stand tall and drive your knee up in front, don't jump up.

### **Standing Calf Raises**

For working the calf muscles. Can be with one or both feet. They are done on a raised surface with the heel lower than the toes to allow a greater stretch. The exercise is performed by raising the heel as far as possible. Weights can be used to add resistance.

## **Examples of Core Strengthening Exercises.**

### **Plank Exercises**

Rest on your forearms and lift up on your toes. Hold for 20 – 60 seconds. Watch for the sag in the middle; engage your abdominals to avoid sticking your rear end in the air. Side planks are another alternative, make sure to switch sides.

### **Back Bridge**

A great exercise for building glute strength and side stabiliser muscles. Squeeze your core and try and pull your belly button back to your spine. Hold for 30 seconds.

### **Criss Cross Sit Ups**

Place your hands behind your head, bend your knees and bring your shins up so they are parallel with the floor. Repeat with the opposite arm and leg. Do 10 times on both sides.

### **Push Ups**

Great for building shoulder and pectoral strength. Inhale as you lower, exhale on the push up. Do 10 – 20 push ups each set.

### **Sit Ups**

Place your hand below your head. Lift your head and shoulders together, keeping your abs tight and exhale on the way up. Do 20 each set.

### **Supermans**

Lie face down with arms stretched above head. Raise your right arm and left leg together. Then repeat with opposite arm and leg. Hold each lift for about 2 seconds. Do 10 times each side per set. A great exercise for building glute and back strength.

With a consistent strength program incorporated into your weekly routine, you will not only be reducing the risk of injury but it will potentially improve your performance by making you a stronger and more efficient runner. It will also help your body withstand the impact of the amount of steep downhill running in the Stampede. Remember too that variety is the spice of life so alternate exercises, and incorporate different forms of resistance each session.

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