

Goldilocks Training Method

According to Mama Hobbit

I was talking to Melody Muldrow today (Melody Muldrow and Malcolm Glover are the pacer coordinators for the Little Rock Marathon and have paced for many races). One of the things we discussed was the Goldilocks Training Method. Most of you are familiar with Goldilocks and her experience with the three bears – for picky Goldilocks, everything had to be just right (which was pretty darn presumptuous, considering she broke into their house and then complained about everything they had). However, you may not be familiar with the Goldilocks method of training for a race. Since the marathoners are getting into the double digit mileages and the half marathoners are ending their build up phase and starting their “official” training, this is the perfect time to talk about training in less than optimal conditions.



For the Goldilocks of the world to go outside and train, everything has to be “just right”. It can’t be too hot, too cold, rainy, windy, snowy, blowy, cloudy, sunny, buggy, dark, light – the list goes on and on. Everything in the Universe has to align perfectly for them to stick their glass running shoe (oops, wrong fairy tale) out of the door. They want to do all their running or walking on the treadmill. I will be the first to admit that I hate the treadmill, so I am a little biased. I will also admit that there are days when it is just too awful to be outside and the treadmill is the only way to get your training done. However, unless you are going to participate in a race that is totally on a treadmill (and I’m sure there is at least one somewhere), you really need to get outside and figure out how your body reacts to the situations you encounter during a race.

When you train on a treadmill, the surface under your feet is exactly the same the entire time. You don’t have to worry about cracks in the asphalt, a glob of concrete that didn’t get smoothed out, or a stray dog that comes out of nowhere, decides to run with you, gets tangled up in your feet and causes you to fall. There is no camber of the road that causes a knee pain because one foot is hitting the ground higher than the other. There is no turn where you are suddenly confronted with trolley tracks, a mud puddle, or a group of other runners who are spread out across the road and won’t get out of the way. On the treadmill, you are in control of your speed, the incline, the bathroom break, heck, usually even the temperature. Unless someone comes along and trips over the power cord and stops you in full run (that has happened to me, which may be another reason for my hatred of treadmills), there aren’t a lot of surprises when you train on the treadmill.

In addition to building your endurance, one of the benefits of training is to figure out how your body and mind will react to issues you might encounter during your race. Melody and I agreed that one of the biggest problems we see athletes have is refusing to train in the rain. So many of our “Goldilocks” runners and walkers absolutely will NOT get their feet wet. That’s fine, but what are you going to do if it rains during your race? If it’s raining when the race starts, you can always decide to stay in bed and race another day, but what are you going to do if you are in the middle of your race and it starts to rain? How do your feet react to being wet? Do you get blisters and you need to stop and put on some blister band aids to avoid the problem before it starts? Do you need to have dry socks in your pack to change into when the rain stops? Do you have happy little duck feet that love the rain and can keep going no matter what? If you’ve never trained in the rain you have no idea what to do. And, not only do you have the physical problem of wet feet, wet clothes, you also have the mental freak out: “Oh my gosh, it’s raining, my feet are getting wet, I’m going to catch pneumonia, my hair is going to look awful for my finish picture, what do I do now?!?!”. At least some of those questions could have been answered if you’d gone outside during your training.

This doesn't just apply to rain, however. This is our 16th year for the Little Rock Marathon races – in that time, we've had hot weather, cold weather, rain, snow, sleet, humidity, and wind (sometimes all in the same race). If you've never faced any of those conditions, how do you know what to wear or what to eat? If it turns cold and your fuel has been something that is nice and chewy in warm weather, but becomes a brick in cold weather – there goes your nutrition plan. If you've never trained with sun screen and slather it on race morning, will it even stay on as you sweat your way through your race? If it's sunny will you wear sunglasses? Do you train with sunglasses? I'd never trained with sunglasses and wore them in a race (that's a lie – I wore them for about a mile) and the combination of my body heat and my sweat made them fog up and I couldn't see a darn thing. Those sunglasses spent the next 25.2 miles on the top of my head. If I'd trained with them, I'd have known that wouldn't work for me and used a visor or a cap.

The unexpected can make or break your race. Training in different weather conditions will help you figure out what you're going to do no matter what Mother Nature throws out at you. Now, having said all that, your safety is our ultimate concern. Pick your battles – if the weather is hazardous (tornadoes, lightning, blizzard conditions, icy roads, gale force winds, etc.) don't go out and risk your life for a run. Just remember, very few training runs or races are going to be "just right" in terms of weather conditions.