

RUNNING BY FEEL & LOGGING

By: Jay Johnson

Most newsletters I send out are intended for high school coaches, yet I've never been a high school coach. I've worked with high school athletes at the Boulder Camps for the past 16 years, and while we'll have over 350 campers join us this summer, the first few years of camp we served no more than 100 campers each year.

The flip side is, I've been involved in the sport for close to three decades and there are more similarities between a high school athlete and a collegiate athlete or a professional athlete, both of whom I've coached, than there are differences.

With all of this in mind, I'd like to talk about how kids can use the data, specifically mileage and pace data, that shows up after each run on their Garmin, to aid them in the goal of becoming a better runner.

Do Garmins Make Your Job Harder?

My guess is that Garmins often make your job as a coach harder. If you are a coach who values running by feel and you want to teach your kids to do that, it's much harder to teach that skill when they can look down at their watch and see what pace they're running.

If you are a coach and want to assign runs based on time, it's hard not to have athletes compare the 45-minute easy run in two weeks with what they ran today. If it's extremely warm and humid in two weeks, they should run slower than they did on a run where the temperatures were slightly cooler than normal. I've struggled in my career to get collegiate athletes, professional athletes and weekend warriors to understand that the second run will be slower and that comparing it to the run two weeks prior is both incorrect and silly. My guess is you have the same struggle.

If you take one thing from today's newsletter, it is that I have great empathy for how the data a Garmin computes for every run can make your job difficult. It's a great tool — I love mine for tracking heart rate and staying in the right zones for a given workout — yet it's a tool that comes with drawbacks.

Running By Feel And Running By Minutes

I believe in running by feel and I think it's a skill you should make central to your training. The chance of injury decreases when runners learn to run by feel. Cross country performances are better when athletes have honed this skill. And over the course of weeks and months, the athlete who knows how to run by feel has a better chance of "staying on top of their training, rather than being buried under their training," a phrase Sam Bell used when coaching Bob Kennedy, the first non-African to run under 13 minutes for 5k (that's 62.4 second 400s, 4:09.6 per 1,600m).

Minutes for easy runs are the way to go and perhaps kids need two watches, using a \$16 Timex watch for their easy run.

RUNNING BY FEEL & LOGGING

Logs Can Build Them Up Or Break Them Down

The final thing we should talk about before your athletes get into more challenging summer training is the fact that training logs can provide a great sense of accomplishment in the summer. A solid training log of miles and minutes and non-running work is something an athlete can look back on in August and say, "I'm ready for racing and more challenging training because I put in a solid summer of work."

But the flip side is if the next four weeks are such that the weather is great and they are feeling refreshed each day they train, yet in mid to late July, you get some intense heat and humidity, causing you to back off training for a few days, the athlete may incorrectly think their training isn't going well. And if the family takes a vacation during that time, there will almost certainly be a dip in mileage, leading to the volume number at the end of the week being lower.

Your job is to put all of this information in context for the athlete, remind them that the key is consistency.

Related: the motivated runner can be challenging to coach in summer because they desperately want to improve and they want to be meticulous about getting in all of the running they understand to be necessary to make a jump in fitness. If you can get them to buy into the idea that week after week of injury free training is the goal and that the consistency that comes from that type of summer of training will lead to fast racing in the fall, then you've done a great job with this athlete.