

## Racing Your Way Into Shape

By Dave McGovern

In coaching circles, the specificity principle dictates that to be ready to race a particular race distance you need to train yourself specifically for the challenges of that particular distance. For marathons that means long days and long tempo workouts at or near race pace; for 1,500 meter racing that might mean lots of short intervals at 1,500 meter race pace. For 5K walkers, specificity might mean getting ready to race 5K by racing 5K. (Afterall, what is more similar to a 5K race than a 5K race?)



After finding a way to not make the Olympic team in 1996, I took some time off to regroup. I lost some—OK, a lot!—of conditioning over the summer, but decided I wanted to try to win the National 5K in early September. With only four weeks to get ready for the event I jumped into a local 5K running race to test my conditioning. The result? I walked a 20:50. Not too shabby, but probably not nearly what I would need to win the National Championship. After a solid week of training I decided to enter another 5K as a nice tempo workout. This time 20:32—progress! I pressed my luck and raced again a week later and hit 20:24. Still not quite where I wanted to be, but I felt like I was rounding back into shape. I tapered through the next week and wound up hitting 20:06 at the Championship (and getting edged out for the win by none other than WALK! contributor Tim Seaman!).

The point is (and there must be one, right?) walking an occasional low-key local race can be great physical and psychological training for an upcoming event. 5Ks are great for training because they are short enough to allow you to recover from even a hard effort in just a few days. When training for longer races, longer trial races can be used, but be careful to not overdo it, as longer races require more

### Canadian Connection

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<sup>1</sup>Ottawa's magnificent tulips are one of history's great thank-you gifts. Members of the Dutch Royal Family lived here during the Second World War. Princess Margriet was born here, in a hospital room officially designated part of the Netherlands to ensure her citizenship. When her mother, Princess (later Queen) Juliana, got home to her country liberated largely by Canadian troops, she was kind enough to feel that a card or fruit basket was just not enough. One hundred and twenty thousand bulbs of the Netherlands' finest tulips arrived in 1946, 20,000 from the Princess herself, and the remainder from her country. Twenty thousand replacements have been sent annually since.

Roger Burrows has been a coach or manager of Canadian track and field teams since the 1970s, including race walk teams at several Pan-Am and World Cups and the Olympic Games. After a two-decade career as a sports administrator at provincial, national and international levels, he currently works as a Parliamentary translator in Ottawa.

recovery time. A good (general) rule of thumb is to allow one recovery day per mile raced before resuming speed work or other intense training, so allow a week after a 10K, two weeks after a 20K or half marathon, and a full month after a marathon. Add at least 50% or even double those figures when calculating the rest interval between races—allow a week between 5Ks, two weeks between 10Ks, three or four weeks between 20K/half marathon and six to eight weeks between marathons.

If you're anything like me, you'll find it easier to push harder in a race (when you have an audience!) than you can during a workout. Physiologically, racing prepares the body to race in the most specific way possible. But trial runs are also great psychological preparation. Entering a few local races is a great way to practice pre-race relaxation, and the best way to find out what pre-race meals, warm-up and racing strategies work best for you. If in the trial race you got sidetracked by friends and other distractions before the race and wound up having to cut short your warm-up, make sure you work to keep better pre-race focus in the big event. If you got a bit too excited at the start and walked the first mile too fast then slowed down considerably, you may need to practice your pacing. It actually takes more confidence to start out in a race a little slower rather than too fast, and trial races will give you that confidence.

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After the race go over in your mind what went right and what you could improve upon, and write these impressions in your training log. Then before your big event write out a perfect pre-race script. Example: 8:00 a.m.—arrive at race course and check in; 8:10—begin warm-up; 8:40—get in line at the port-a-potty and stretch while waiting your turn; 8:50—arrive at the starting line and do last-minute stretches and sprints; 9:00—Go! (But not too fast!)

For many first-time marathon walkers, the big event—the marathon—is their first-ever walking event. That's crazy! If you're a beginning walker and are undertaking a half marathon or marathon, the last thing you want to do is get overwhelmed at the starting line by a thousand unfamiliar sights, sounds, and smells. Getting a few low-key local races under your belt will teach you a lot about what to expect on race day and will help you to be relaxed and confident on the big day.

Dave McGovern has competed all over the world as a member of the U.S. National Racewalk Team, but he still enjoys using local road races to hone his skills. One of the coaches for the U.S. team at the 2008 World Cup in Cheboksary, Russia, Dave has coached both elite and novice walkers to excel in competitions near and far. Visit his web site at [www.racewalking.org](http://www.racewalking.org).