



Hi, <<First Name>>!

My guest this week was Max King.

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When I interview athletes, there are many personal stories that come out, especially when we discuss the mental aspects of the sport. I don't summarize those parts of the conversation as I believe that would disrespect the athlete's own experiences. You should hear them in their own words. Here is a summary of all the rest:

BACKGROUND

He won the 2011 World Mountain Running Championships and the 2014 IAU 100 km World Championship. He's won numerous national titles at distances ranging from half marathons to ultra marathons and he was named U.S. national mountain runner of the year in 2011. He is a back-to-back winner of the Warrior Dash world championship, winning in 2014 and 2015.

While his success in running is well established, this has been at relatively shorter distances - relative to ultra marathon distances. In 2014 he tackled his first 100 mile race, the legendary and extremely competitive Western States 100 mile Endurance Run where he finished 4th. I was especially interested in learning about how he stepped up to the longer distance as well as his overall approaches to life and training. In early 2015, he quit his day job and became a full-time professional runner. He has been splitting his events between road and trail.

Max is successful at a wide range of distances. He emphasized how much practice it has taken for him to be successful at each. While he certainly has some genetic potential, his experience of success through hard work across distances should give you confidence that you can become good at whatever distance(s) you want to tackle.

TRAINING

Training for a 100 miler: Max focused on double back-to-back long runs (two days in a row) each week where day 1 was 20-30 miles and 7-10,000 ft of climbing, and day 2 was 20 miles on road at fast pace (tempo to near threshold). The rest of the week was mostly easy miles with leg speed such as mile repeats, VO2max intensity, etc. He generally ran 100-120 miles per week.

Training block planning: Max organizes his training in four-week blocks where he builds distance for three weeks and then drops down for a recovery week. A generalized formula is week 1 at 90% maximum mileage, week 2 at 95%, week 3 at 100%, and week 4 at 70-80%. In preparation for a 100 mile race, he might have 3 blocks of those 4 weeks where the maximum mileage for the block progresses from 100 miles to 110 miles to 120 miles. Inside each block, each week has the same overall plan but specifics are varied. A week would comprise back-to-back long runs (e.g., 20/30 miles, 25/25 miles, etc.), a moderate run (e.g., 15-20 miles), and 1-2 workouts that would focus on VO2max, threshold, hills, etc.

I asked him how you can determine when to prioritize or position focus workout types (hills vs threshold vs VO2max, etc.) in the training plan. His response was, “it doesn’t matter just worry about just getting out there...and having some fun with it because the more fun you’re having and the less you’re worried about exactly what you’re doing and whether you’re doing it exactly right, the better your race is going to be”.

NUTRITION

Max’s nutritional approach during his first 100 miler was to continue what has been working for him in shorter races, 50-100k. It worked for him up to 80 miles. At 80 miles his stomach turned and his legs began to falter. He consumes 200-400 Calories per hour, close to 200 for shorter races and close to 400 for longer races. His fluid intake is about 20 oz per hour in cooler temps and was 24-28 oz per hour in the heat of the Western States 100.

Strengths as a runner

His success has been in the flatter 50k-50mile races, which Max attributes to his track background. He does work on improving his weaknesses, climbing for example, but not at the expense of his strengths. Too much attention to weaknesses can cause neglect of strengths, which “never goes well”.

Tapering

At the distances of half-marathon and below, he has a dialed-in plan that works. Above that, for any ultra distance, he continues to wrestle with his tapering plan. He has been lowering the volume (miles) while keeping high intensity parts of the training. If you want an eye-opening scientific view of tapering that has caused many listeners to re-evaluate their taper for ultra distances, have a listen to [Dr. Trappe in episode 6 on tapering](#).

WRAP-UP ADVICE

TOOLS: Max tracks his training (he uses Suunto and heart rate). He is also an advocate of heart rate training.

IMPROVEMENT: Focus less on mileage and pay more attention to the details in the mileage, such as elevation gain or speed. He recommends strength training and working out nutrition that works for you. If you are stepping up in mileage, figure out the most you can about yourself and train as best you can and just get out there and try it.

All the Best,

Shawn

Chief Running Officer, [Science Of Ultra](#)



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