

## How to Train Like the Kenyans

Since the Kenyans dominate our sport like no country has ever dominated any sport, what can we learn from them? While it's true that a big reason they do so is their ability to train harder (which we'll address), let's first talk about things they do that allow them to reach their potential more than most – things that are practical and applicable for us in Kansas City.

### Workout Recovery

- 1) They prepare the body better for every workout with an extra slow warm up for the first 5-10 minutes: 5 minutes a mile or slower than 5K pace > the slower you begin each run, the more productive each run will become.
- 2) They help the body to recover better from every workout with an extra slow cool down for the last 5-10 minutes: 5 minutes a mile or slower than 5K pace > the less you stretch & do self massage (i.e. foam roll), the more you should cool down properly
- 3) They help the body recover better for the next hard workout by going extra slow on recovery runs: 2:30-4 minutes a mile slower than 5K pace > the easier you go on the easy days, the harder you'll be able to go on the hard days

### In-Between Workouts Recovery They help the body recover better with:

- 1) fresh, seasonal, local real food > try to eat more food from the local farmer's market – the less processed, the better
- 2) lots of sleep and non-active rest (i.e. lying down to get off their feet). 10 hours of sleep each night and 1-2 hours of napping > try to get more sleep and rest.
- 3) simplifying their life with very little distraction – no TV, computers, cell phones, iPads or other technological devices. Outside of basic things like washing their clothes and eating they'll allow for reading or going for a walk, but that's about it > declutter the mind and you'll have more energy to train

### They train in tougher conditions compared to what they encounter on race day

- 1) Soft ground improves their strength and form from the bottom-up and makes them springier & more efficient on the roads > Try to get on grass or dirt a little bit each week. It can be a few minutes of all non-hard workout runs. If you find you enjoy running on the soft stuff, gradually add more each week until you reach your good enough point.
- 2) They overdress to acclimate, most of the time running in tights and a jacket even in weather where shorts and a shirt would work. > There's no doubt the more acclimated you become to warm weather, the better you'll perform in all conditions so consider an extra layer in the form of a jacket/vest, shirt, arm sleeves, or compression socks.
- 3) Some even wear a baggy jacket for greater wind resistance or heavier training shoes compared to their running shoes – both will help you run faster on race day > wear heavier training shoes and race in lighter shoes

### Their Mental Outlook

- 1) They are great believers – all of them think they can win races and break world records. They don't limit themselves but instead choose to discover their limits > dream big and see what happens.
- 2) They never complain either in life or in a workout – their standard response is to state that they're fine even if they're not. > the body follows the mind so lead it well

### Their Training

- 1) If they still feel extra tired or something hurts, they'll call it a day after warming up no matter what the workout calls for. > listen to your body and back off as needed
- 2) However, if they feel good, getting fatigued and exhausted during a hard workout is the goal so they'll increase the intensity and/or duration accordingly. They embrace hard work to find their limits. > do more if you feel good
- 3) They believe in block training rather than year round training. They'll build up for 3-4 months, race for up to another month (those doing 5K-half marathon races), and then completely rest (no crosstraining or running) for 2-6 weeks before starting the next block. > the harder your training, the more complete rest is needed.
- 4) They train in groups and believe this helps them get the most out of each other – iron sharpens iron
- 5) They do lots of lower leg drills and stretching with little to no upper body and some basic core work. > Consider adding the uphill running drill with resistance band 1-2 times a week. Start with a 1-2 minutes total drill time and build from there up to 10 minutes in the form of 30/15's or 40/20's (30-40 seconds on/15-20 seconds rest)
- 6) They take Sunday off for studying the Bible, going to church and complete rest. > take 1 day off for complete rest

### Their Workouts

1) They incorporate lots of hills, even for flat races, as their secret 'speed' ingredient. Hills make rolling and flat terrain feel easier for a given effort and are a great way to incorporate more hard running with less pounding. Hills are encountered on most runs (they'll try to avoid them on easy runs). Hill specific workouts are once a week and vary greatly, from short repeats to one long hill of several miles! A common workout is to find a 200 meter steep uphill that they go up and stride back down (very little recovery time) > For the hill workout, after warming up, find a hill that takes 40-60 seconds to climb at 10K- marathon (comfortably hard to hard) effort with a 60 second recovery to make it back down in a brisk jog before heading right back up and shoot for a range of repeats of 3 to 12 and see how many you can do.

2) They consider tempo runs their most important speed workout so incorporate lots of them, inevitably covering rolling terrain with some noticeable hills. Typically, they run them for 45-70 minutes in a progressive manner – starting conservatively, running at the prescribed tempo pace by the middle (normally half marathon race pace), with those who feel good opting to race the rest of it. > You can aim for a 30-60 minute run in which you start out like you would for a long run but continue to pick up the pace so that the middle of the run is done at tempo/long fast pace with the option to finish up to 5K effort for the last 3-10 minutes.

3) Fartlek runs are very common since they are effort & time based for excellent intuitive running, especially early on in training. Typically, they'll cover up to 6 miles with 1/1's or 2/1's – pushing the pace at 5K-10K effort for 1 minute followed by a 1 minute recovery jog and repeat as needed. Sometimes, they'll slow the fast minute a little but speed up the slow minute to compensate. > 1/1's are a simple but effective workout to incorporate once a week into most workouts, but typically your semi-long or before a hill or goal pace workout to loosen your legs up for 3-10 reps.

4) Interval workouts are more intuitive and are done on the clay roads more often than a track. They'll start with a plan for the number of repeats and pace. If they're feeling good, they'll run to exhaustion by adding repeats. They'll typically do a high volume such as 20x400 meters. > Increase the range of repeats for your interval workout so that if you're feeling good, you can keep going and even consider shortening the recovery if you are limited on time to train.

5) Long runs are all over the place – from a couple of weekly 12 milers done at marathon pace to 4 hour (30+ miles) slow runs. Some are near marathon pace (15-30 seconds slower) for 20-22 miles once a month, but most are progressive with a slow start (2 minutes a mile or slower than marathon pace) and a fast finish (marathon pace) the last few to several miles. > the progressive long run is your best bet to work both on endurance (time spent running) and stamina (ability to hold goal pace on tired legs)

6) 2-a-day workouts – Most will do 2 runs a day with a 40 minute recovery run to accompany the hard workout or a moderate 1 hour run (roughly 2 minutes a mile slower than 5K pace) which can include some fartlek running or hills and can do up to 7 hard workouts a week. Some even build in a recovery and moderate or long run along with a hard workout for 3 runs every day for a couple of weeks! The premise is to challenge one's limits to become as fit as they can get. > before adding a second workout a day, be sure to build up to 6 days of running. However, you can experiment with an easy recovery morning run before an afternoon or evening speed workout.

### Their Stance on Shoes

Kenyans go barefoot by necessity, not by choice. As soon as they are given ANY pair of shoes (big or small, motion control or racing flats), they'll wear them and not complain. If given a choice, nearly all of them prefer shoes to going barefoot. Their foot, ankle, and lower leg muscles are so far more developed than ours from years of going barefoot on their mostly clay surface that they can pretty much handle anything on their feet. So, it's really comparing apples to oranges in this sense.

However, those who have moved here or spent lots of time here that I have spoken with (the elite runners who are invited to some of our KC races or a few who stay here after going to local universities), prefer a simple, light, flexible shoe like a lightweight trainer or racing flat which make sense given their well developed feet. You won't see many Kenyans wearing a minimalist shoe as they think either of the above helps them run faster - but then again, a Kenyan probably doesn't need a minimalist shoe to help them develop stronger foot & lower leg strength the way minimalist advocates think Americans do. > wear a regular training shoe for most runs, a lightweight trainer and/or racing shoe for some key hard workouts & races, and a minimalist shoe for recovery runs to develop stronger feet

Crosstraining is non-existent for Kenyans. To run faster, you must run and not do other sports. Running drills and stretching are a big part of what they do, but that's about it. > Cross training works if your main goal is overall fitness.