

## **100 Meter Rehab**

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Off The Road Column

Athletic participation breaks down into one of three areas – physical fitness, performance based sport and rehabilitation. The vast, vast majority of athletic people fall into the physical fitness category, probably well over 90%. This participation is for the real and perceived health and lifestyle benefits derived from the routine training regimens.

Performance based sport is where competition is used and the outcomes, wins or loses, personal bests or stellar performances are the preeminent goal. Interesting, or oddly my Russian teachers taught that training at this elite levels is not a natural or healthy thing to do for your body.

The third category is rehabilitation. This is the process where an ill or injured person is returned to a previous state of health. Note it is a “process,” meaning a progressive, step-by-step means where health, physical fitness or elite performances are hopefully regained.

We all get hurt from time to time. Although as a coach I always was of the opinion that injuries did not have to happen if training was done correctly. A big “if.” Injuries still did happen from a slip or trip or some other “accident” that was beyond our control.

Whatever the cause the injured state becomes a starting point from which one must progress back to a state of health that allows one to train and compete at one’s pre-injury level.

Classically there are seen to be four stages of rehabilitation: denial, anger, depression, acceptance. The severity of one’s injury and one’s psychological make-up (read that as stubbornness) all contribute to when and even if one will return to performance training anytime in the near future.

One of the great challenges with injury rehabilitation, particularly for a motivated athlete is their reluctance or inability to take the necessary steps, the rest and recovery and possible therapies to regenerate an injured area. It has often been said that one’s greatest strength is one’s greatest weakness. The drive and determination one uses to succeed in a competitive situation, the ability to battle the elements, pain and fatigue actually becomes a mindset that is counter productive when it comes to injury rehabilitation.

There are several analogies that can be used to characterize the mindset of the injured and rehabilitating athlete but at their basic level the athlete is doing work that is pain free. That needs to be emphasized – pain free.

The problem comes that this is seen as “babying oneself” and is totally contrary to what has made one successful (one’s greatest strength...). But there are two realities here. First, one is no longer in the fitness or performance mode, one is in the rehab mode. Secondly, if one chooses to “gut it out” and limp through the pain you can make an injury last forever – and that is not an exaggeration.

Why is limping, or favoring one body part so dangerous? All movement patterns require their own set of biomechanics. There are healthy biomechanics and inefficient, dangerous biomechanics. When one trains with a limp, favoring one side or the other extra stresses and pressures are placed on the healthy side.

Sooner or later this produces a secondary overuse syndrome somewhere else which if improperly rehabbed can lead to subsequent injuries reverberating back and forth between the legs – an “injury” that lasts forever.

So one has reached the acceptance stage and has chosen any number of sensible rehabilitation methods from bike riding, swimming, weight training, yoga, Somatics, water running or some other treatment that is moving one towards a pain-free state. The opportunity to run looms on the near horizon. Finally one’s advisors (coach, chiropractor, therapist) has given the green light to resume performance training. The new dilemma arises – what is the first step?

What I used very successfully with my athletes was what I called “100 meter rehab.” Once they felt they were capable of returning to some type of running I put them on a track and had them run repeat 100 meter runs.

Lest anyone get the wrong idea these were not sprints, they are not even strides or any type of fast runs. It was jogging in a straight line for a pre-determined time at an easy pace. It should be added that we had them run on a lane line so that they would run straight.

All the pre-exercise warm-ups would be done – foot drills, some running technique work, calisthenics, in general a good warming up of the body and then the 100m repeats would begin.

No doubt some are saying – how boring that must be, running on a track? For a distance runner? All true, but that is the point. I never wanted the athlete to start back doing anything too difficult.

Besides doing too much there are several other benefits to their 100-meter repeats. A track is flat so the ground contact from stride to stride is consistent. In that many running injuries, particularly for women, are due to lower extremity instability issues, the use of a consistent surface helps decrease this complicating factor.

Other benefits are that the runner runs straight placing even stresses on the legs. This allows one to concentrate on form, good running biomechanics, that need to be

consciously re-established so that they become habitual and ultimately unconsciously produced actions.

It's boring. True, but this is an opportunity to focus on one's mechanics as opposed to "zoning out." The fact that one must stop, turn around and repeat every 100m becomes a not so subtle reminder of what should be the focus of the workout.

Running the 100m does not allow one to run too far or too fast. If something starts to hurt, you are only 100m from home – stop and get some ice. As for the speed issue, speed actions are the only actions of the five biomotor skills (endurance, strength, flexibility, skill and speed) traditionally not addressed in rehab programs. Remember you are rehabbing, not training. There is a critical distinction there.

The first day may entail the warm-up, 10 minutes of the repeat 100m runs and an easy warm down with stretching, pool therapy or ice. Slowly over the course of a week one can expand the time of the runs to 20 minutes. Once this becomes "easy" one can add what I called "snake runs," a weaving type run where one zigzags the width of three lanes over the course of 100m. This will develop some additional ankle strength and proprioception further addressing any instability issues.

Once one had progressed 7-10 days without incident the same techniques (100m runs, snake runs) on a soccer or football field can be done. The turf field would be slightly more uneven further challenging and developing one's balance and proprioception.

The final step in this progression is to introduce three-minute runs followed by a one-minute rest. Obviously these will not be on a straight line, but rather a circuitous course is recommended. Over the course of days one can build up to 30 minutes in total running. Once this is achieved pain-free one can safely resume training.

While the causes of one's injury can be multiple and varied rehabilitation needs one's focus and attention. There is a different mindset between the injured rehabilitating athlete and the athlete who uses exercise for either physical fitness or performance.

The use of 100m repeat runs is a safe, simple yet effective means to re-introduce one to the stresses and strains of daily training.

Injury, while certainly not one of the goals of athletic participation is none the less an ever looming reality. It provides one with the opportunity to re-evaluate one's goals as to their appropriateness and sensibility. It is a time that can be used wisely and an experience that should make one wiser in terms of preventive care and future training decisions.



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