

New York Times
June 14, 2007

Basic Training:
Who, Me Take Running Class?

By: SARAH TUFF

WHEN Steve Huda began running nearly three decades ago, he gave little thought to putting one foot in front of the other. "I did what most people do," said Mr. Huda, 53, a computer specialist from Centennial, Colo. "I just went out and ran."

In the late 1990s, Mr. Huda suffered a series of injuries, including shin splints and a pulled quadriceps. But instead of taking up a new sport, he sought a better way to run by signing up in 1999 for a technique-focused running camp in Malibu, Calif. To his delight, Mr. Huda - who describes himself as a recreational runner and could not quantify his typical pace - found that he was not the slowest camper.

Mr. Huda has returned to the Malibu running camp, started by the exercise physiologist Owen Anderson, four times and plans to attend again this summer. "I'm stronger, I get less injured and I'm able to do more challenging runs," he said. "That's a cool thing."

Up until recently, athletic hobbyists might take tennis lessons or attend a swim clinic, but rarely considered learning how to run, an activity they have been doing since they were toddlers. A running injury would simply mean a switch to a less jarring sport.

That was before middling runners realized that form matters. Many recreational runners now solicit advice before they cinch their shorts and lace up their sneakers. For them, there are Web sites promoting injury-prevention techniques and bloggers raring to discuss the latest clinics. Joggers have helped to spike the sales of form-conscious books and DVDs from programs like

ChiRunning and the Pose Method. And the number of retreats on Running Times magazine's Web site has swelled to more than 100, up from 38 in 2000.

"It's no longer just the geeky runner going to technical stores and learning about form," said Sean Murphy, a biomechanist with New Balance. "Maybe they've been running for 20 years and they can't get rid of their shin splints. Runners become addicted and they're looking for anything to be able to maintain and prolong their running."

There are now nearly 11 million adult runners in the United States, according to the American Running Association; many just want to clear their minds, not win races. "Surveys show that half the people never enter a single race," said Jeff Galloway of Atlanta, the Olympian, author and running coach. "They go out and run for their own sanity."

Impinging on runners' sanity, however, is the high rate of injury. About 60 to 65 percent of all runners are injured each year in five anatomical hot spots: the knee, the calf and shin, the iliotibial band (the connective tissue of the outer thigh), the Achilles tendon and the foot, according to the Sports Injury Bulletin, a newsletter produced by sports scientists in London.

Ten years ago, most runners did not think about these problems until they were benched by a sprain or a pain, said Jennifer Greenberg, a physical therapist in Manhattan. The Internet has allowed for much more anatomical awareness among amateur athletes, thanks to sites like www.runnersworld.com and www.webmd.com. "People are just more aware of what causes injuries and more apt to try to prevent it ahead of time," said Ms. Greenberg, who logs 40 to 50 miles a week.

For those used to ridding their minds of clutter on a five-mile morning loop, suddenly thinking about running can be an adjustment. Aga Goodsell, an aerospace engineer from Mountain View, Calif., ran in college, and resumed the sport 20 years later, but started to have ankle pain and problems with her iliotibial band. So she signed up for a weekly class in ChiRunning, a technique said to prevent injuries by using the stabilizing muscles closest to the spine, a forward-leaning stance and the awareness-building principles of Eastern

philosophy.

"It took a lot of focus and concentration in the beginning to start thinking about my running form," said Ms. Goodsell, 43, by e-mail message. She said that assessing how each part of her body is moving ultimately became second nature. Now injury-free, Ms. Goodsell models ChiRunning form for some of the program's instructional materials.

Sales at ChiRunning have increased by 50 percent each year since its national start in 2004. The program now has more than 100 instructors in six countries, up from 25 in the first year. It is the brainchild of Danny Dreyer, a California running coach who said that his business's rapid growth has tortoises rather than hares to thank. "Most are recreational runners who at some point or another have gotten injured," said Mr. Dreyer, 57. Who oversees ChiRunning with Katherine Dreyer, his wife. "Or they say, 'I've always wanted to run, but it hurt so much, I couldn't do it.' "

ChiRunning, which works with gravity to help pull the runner forward, is similar to the Pose Method, developed by a sports physiologist, Nicholas

Romanov, in the Soviet Union in the late 1970s. Dr. Romanov immigrated to the United States in 1993 and the method took off in 2001 after he founded a Web site, which sells his book and DVD and promotes his theories through online forums and a video blog. He now travels around the country, correcting what he sees as the "national disaster" of uneducated runners.

"It's a healthy thing and a beautiful thing to run," said Dr. Romanov, 56. "But if you don't know how to do it, you're in trouble."

Some running advocates, however, warn that more distress can come from messing with the way your body naturally moves. David Willey, the editor in chief of Runner's World, said that Paula Radcliffe's funky form and that Alberto Salazar's broken-glass-in-the-shorts style are proof that the unorthodox can win races.

"Go stand at any finish line of any marathon in American and you see people with

the most god-awful running form, hunched over and bowlegged," Mr. Willey said. "But they're booking across sub three, running a lot faster than I ever can."

Mr. Galloway said that there is no perfect way to run. "The human body is designed to run, and it makes all types of adaptations," he said.

That hasn't stopped shoe companies from introducing footwear for the form-obsessed. In 2004, Nike sent forth the slipperlike Free to strengthen muscles and improve flexibility, inspiring a crop of athletic shoes that angle the runner for purported better form. Last summer, the Swiss SpringBoost footwear line hit stores in the United States; it is designed to position the heel lower than the forefoot to activate muscles and improve stability. Velocity, a brand from Portland, Ore., that made its debut last fall, is, like the Nike shoe, said to push the runner forward to relieve stress on the ankle and the knees.

Ray Fredericksen, a biomechanist in East Lansing, Mich., said that such concepts are plausible. "What we find is that if you can enhance some instability, then you can improve balance and posture," he said.

Enrollment is rising at running camps like that of the Craftsbury Outdoor Center in northeastern Vermont. Established in 1978, the center targeted its first running camps at "serious" runners who spent their sessions doing little more than racking up miles on dirt roads, according to Russell Spring Jr., the general manager. Now, Craftsbury campers undergo a video analysis of their technique and then work on form alterations to improve efficiency and prevent injuries.

The camp reports a 30 percent increase for summer 2007 from previous years, in part because of recreational runners chasing correct form, said Greg Wenneborg, the head coach and director.

While many running camps - often held in idyllic locations - are mere getaways for some campers, others use them as a chance to learn a sport from the ground up. Campers are excited to receive suggestions on form, said Jessica Cover, another Craftsbury coach. "It's like Christmas," she said.

Ms. Cover, 37, said that running lessons, along with smarter training and nutrition, are ways her sport has advanced. "In the old days, the crazy guys would just run themselves to the ground," she said.

But some believe the emphasis on form is taking running in the wrong direction. Dr. Jason Friedman, a physician and a coach who last summer founded the Shawangunk Running Camp in New Paltz, N.Y., went so far as to call it "gimmicky."

"You can lose sight of what's great about the sport - which is that it's simple," he said. "There's no substitute for hard work and just getting out and doing the miles."

Basic Training looks at the latest thinking about conditioning and technique for recreational athletes. It appears periodically.

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Rules of the Road

By SARAH TUFF

FOR distance running (versus sprinting) most experts agree on the following principles of proper form:

Arms should not swing side to side. (To test this, run with the palms facing up; they should not cross over each other.)

Look ahead, not at the feet or up at the sky.

Stride rate, or turnover, should be around 180 steps a minute for optimal efficiency. You can measure your turnover by running for one minute while counting how many times your right foot hits the ground; then multiply that number by two.

Debatable areas include:

FOOT STRIKE The position in which the foot hits the ground, heel, midfoot or forefoot. Runners have long been taught to land first on their heels, but to avoid a "braking effect" the Pose method advocates a forefoot strike, and ChiRunning teaches a midfoot strike. The Olympian Jeff Galloway coaches runners to let their feet land the way that feels natural.

STRIDE LENGTH Whether your foot strikes under your body and paws back, or you extend your lower leg out in front of you.

BODY CARRIAGE While Mr. Galloway says that a forward lean can cause back and neck pain, Nicholas Romanov coaches "controlled falling" as part of the Pose method. In ChiRunning clinics, Danny Dreyer teaches a similar concept of falling forward.

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