

Train hard with limited time by Julian Hopkins (Former National Event Coach)

I am sure that many race walkers in this country find it difficult to fit in enough training in the limited time which they have available. In this article, I would like to look at this problem and show that it is possible to train hard in a limited time.

Firstly, one or two basic ideas concerning the real purpose of training need to be worked out. When you hear race walkers, or runners discussing their training, they usually quote the number of miles (or kilometres) they cover each week. Certainly, all successful walkers and runners cover large distances in training but this is not the only criterion by which training should be judged. More important is the intensity of that training. In other words, it is no good clocking up a large number of miles per week; if they are done too slowly to produce a training effect. You will only get a training effect if you work hard enough to challenge strongly your present level of fitness. This means that most of your sessions have to be at least "pretty hard" with a pulse rate kept above 150 beats per minute for the whole time. My rule of thumb here would be to aim for 90% of your racing speed for the distance you are covering in training. In other words, take only about 10% longer to cover the distance than you would in a race. For example, if you can cover 20km in 1hr 40min. then your 90% speed over this distance would be about 1hr 50min. I see little point in covering this distance in about 2 hours as many walkers of this ability would do. Doing a lot of walking as slowly as 10 km per hour when 12km per hour or faster is required in races seems almost pointless to me - it is just too easy to produce a worthwhile training effect in a fit athlete. It will probably result in a pulse rate more suitable for a beginning jogger!

If you are short of time then obviously you need to keep the intensity high in training if you want results. To a certain extent you can replace quantity with quality. However, to achieve this you need to train frequently. I would suggest twice per day during weekdays. In this way the quantity of training can be kept fairly high but just as important, an extra fairly easy session each day will speed up recovery. This will enable you to do the second, important session of the day at a high intensity. This additional easy session of 30-35 minutes could be fitted in before work or during the lunchtime. You could do 5-6 km of easy walking or sometimes (especially in the winter) 7-8 km of easy running. If you have only about an hour keep the intensity high. Some nights this will include repetitions or fartlek or a time trial depending on what your objective is for that session.

At the weekend more training time can usually be found so you can fit in longer sessions. So it would seem advisable to train only once on Saturday and once on Sunday. Unless you intend to race 50km., you can again emphasise quality as opposed to quantity in these sessions. I think you could race very successfully up to 20 km with a longest session each week of 2 1/2 or even 2 hours provided it is fast enough. If you want to do anything worthwhile at 50 km then it stands to reason that you must try to find more time for long sessions at the weekend. You must really make your weekend's work pay even if it means easing down a little on Friday and perhaps on Monday as well to allow for recovery. Although it is desirable for 50km walkers to walk for up to 4 hours during their build up, it is frequently preferable to attempt 3 hours at close to 50km, racing speed than walk for longer at a much lower rate.

Essentially, what I am advocating here is a pattern of training very similar to that used by the majority of runners in this country, training for events up to the marathon. I feel that they are successful and let's face it, their standards are high - mainly because of the intensity (that word again!) of their running. Top class runners aiming to race at 5 minutes per mile frequently do the bulk of their training at 5 1/2 - 6 minutes per mile - that's hard running! Only on their long Sunday run might they train a little slower than

this. Of course a runner can clock up a bigger mileage training for the same time as yourself but I feel that this is not a meaningful comparison. Training for the same time and at the same intensity is comparable to my way of thinking. Even so, training in the way that I have outlined above, it would be possible to cover 120 -140 km per week depending on your ability without doing excessively long sessions at the weekend.

I think that there is room for experiment here and if you have not trained in this way before it is certainly worth a try. It could save you time and produce better results. In modern economic jargon you could improve the 'cost effectiveness' of your training.