

## **A time to Rest, Reflect, and Recharge: The Importance of Down Time in between Seasons**

by Mark McManus

At the end of every racing season we owe it to ourselves to celebrate, to reflect, and most importantly, to reward our minds and bodies with ample rest and recovery before tackling the next racing season. Just like overworked agricultural fields and exhausted med school students after exams, our minds and bodies can become equally overworked and depleted from the racing season, and like them, we need time to replenish, to breathe, and allow time to reflect on what we have produced and challenges overcome.

Who doesn't look forward to a little break from the daily grind at work and our regimented training schedules? That break can help us appreciate what we have, what we've accomplished, and what we hope to accomplish. The old saying, "absence makes the heart grow fonder" always resonates with me.

Looking back on my long experience with running and from my observations of my training partners, those of us who took the necessary down-time to rest and relax, more often than not were able to restart their training and racing cycles with a renewed sense of purpose coupled with a fresh mind and body. We need that down-time to heal and to address any overuse injuries, to hopefully end any psychological barriers or slumps, and to think about what we learned from this past season. Without a break, the mind and body can potentially become stale and overworked to the point of it negatively affecting our performance, motivation, self-confidence as an athlete, and it can take away from the satisfaction that we get and need from our respective sport.

Many of us know an athlete who insisted on training at a high level during the off season without a break. Sure, they were able to perform at a high level at the beginning of the next season, but when it really counted in the peak of the season, i.e. regional, national, and world championship events, that athlete more often than not ended up peaking too soon, sustaining an overuse injury, or worse, that great motivation and drive that was so apparent during the off season and the early part of the season had simply dried up. From my experience, it's very difficult and too risky to try to sustain a high level of physical intensity and mental focus for a long period of time without a break.

I had the privilege of training with a group of world-class Kenyan runners back in the late 90's, and the two most important things I took away from that experience were that you need to have rhyme and reason to your training and you need to give yourself enough time to recover and relax in between seasons. The training aspect was simple, you can't train hard every day.

For every hard day you need to follow that with a few easy days. When it came to the difficult track workout days, those same Kenyan runners would run circles around us. Then when it came to the easy days, the Kenyans were running at a much easier and relaxed pace than my American training partners. As one Kenyan runner put it, "no one wins a gold medal or sets a world record during the off season or on an easy training day. Save your energy and your focus for the difficult track sessions and those few important races. Rest is just as important as the effort and focus that you put into your training".

As for time off, this world class group of Kenyans insisted on taking a month off from training in between seasons. It was a time for them to attend to their families, recover from injuries, and to mentally and physically recharge for the upcoming year. One member of this group, Noah Ngeny, went on to become the 2000 Olympic 1,500 Champion and World record holder for the 1000 meters. That rhyme and reason in his training and his emphasis on taking long breaks obviously worked for him and I have found it to work for the numerous athletes that I coach.

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### **About the author**

For over 22 years Mark McManus has competed nationally and internationally in Cross Country, Road Racing, and Indoor and Outdoor Track and Field. Beginning in High School, Mark was All-State in Cross Country and Track and Field at Saint Ignatius College Prep. Mark continued his running at the University of California, Davis where he was a five time All-American in Cross Country and Indoor and Outdoor Track and Field in the mile and 1,500. [Read full bio>](#)