

2018 Off-Season Training: What's Next?

By Tyrone T. Irby, The Choice Performance Center

So, you have just finished the best (or worst) running season. Your medals are hung, and you are ready for some time off. A runner's off season should be a time for rest, recovery, and reflection along with strategic planning for the next season.

Break down all your races, the ones that went well, and those that didn't. What is something that you could control that you can improve on? Was it your conditioning? Was it your strength? Was it your nutrition? Create a list of pros and cons from this past season and begin to find ways to address them.

The most important aspect of off season training for runners is rest and recovery. The miles of training take a mental and physical toll on the body. Most runners will tend to over-train during the off season with miles and miles of "non-intense" training. Give your body a break. When you run non-stop (even a mile a day), the chances of injury increase exponentially along with the toll it takes on the body.

Every professional athlete has an off season. For runners, depending on your distance, the "on" season can extend to 9 or 10 months of the year. Your body is training through 2 or 3 temperature cycles. The two months off are as important as the previous 10 months.

100% of runners, including elite runners, should focus on getting stronger in the off season. The pros and cons of the past season may likely include an injury. Injuries for runners are typically a result of overtraining, muscular imbalances, or a combination of both. For a productive off season, both need be addressed.

Poor static posture and dynamic posture are the key indicators of imbalances. Sedentary jobs lead to glute atrophy, tight hip flexors, and rounded shoulders, all three of which can negatively impact your running. Imbalances, tight muscles, and underactive muscles will decrease flexibility and limit range of motion, which will lead to injury and decreased performance.

One of the most effective assessment tools is the Overhead Squat Test, which is designed to assess dynamic flexibility, core strength, balance, and overall movement efficiency. The test focuses on five kinetic check points, which indicate movement compensations. The five checkpoints are feet and ankles, knees, lumbo-pelvic-hip (LPHC) complex, shoulders, and head/cervical spine. The functional movement of the overhead squat is related to linear running, since it can *indicate among other issues* hip flexibility, calf tightness, and core weakness.

The Overhead Squat test can be performed at home with nothing more than a 1lb 36" PVC pipe.

How to Perform The Overhead Squat Assessment

Start by standing with your feet shoulder-width apart, and the toes pointed straight ahead. It's best to do this barefoot. Raise your arms overhead holding the PVC pipe, with elbows extended and palms facing forward, keep your arms next to your ears.

From this starting position, squat down to about chair height (18'). Hold the bottom position, while a friend takes a picture of you from the front, back, and both sides. Repeat a couple of times so that you have a good representation of what your form looks like at the bottom of the squat.

The following are several common results from the Overhead Squat Assessment and what they might indicate:

Anterior View (2)

Knees turn in/out during squat- this indicates lack of glute engagement/strength;
A foot turns out-indicates tight calve muscles

Lateral View (2)

Arms fall forward during squat- tight pectoral muscles, weak trapezius/rhomboids
Excessive forward lean- weak gluteus maximus

Posterior View (2)

Weight shift during squat- indicates weak glute medius and adductors
If your heels raise from the floor- indicates tight calve muscles

For professional strength coaches, the overhead squat is one of the first assessments performed by a new athlete. Overall, the assessment can give a clear indication of previous, current, and/or future injuries for the athlete. Single Leg Squats are another common assessment tool.

The strategy of the offseason for the athlete is to then address those imbalances with both stability and strength work. Training in all three planes of motion (sagittal, frontal, and transverse), all human movements (push, pull, squat, hinge, and carry), and all movement actions (eccentric, concentric, and isometric) will yield the best results.

Strength training for athletes, including runners, should follow a periodic strength plan. Each phase of the plan should address the needs of the athlete, depending on the season. The off-season training cycle is designed for rebuilding foundational stability and strength.

Whatever your goals may be, approach your off season with the same focus as your racing season. It is as important, if not more so to achieve success. Great races await you in 2018. Get Strong!

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