

# BEACON HILL STRIDERS:

## Performance Running Newsletter

NEWSLETTER No. 1

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Welcome to the very first edition of the Beacon Hill Striders **Performance Running Newsletter**.

The aims of our quarterly newsletters are to offer:

- ◆ An update on the achievements of our leading group members
- ◆ Profiles of current and former top runners
- ◆ Themed articles focusing on key training concepts
- ◆ Ideas to improve your training and racing performances
- ◆ A look at the athletes who might be making the news in the near future

**Alan Maddocks**

(Beacon Hill Striders: founder & group leader)

<http://beaconhillstriders.co.uk/about>

**Update** on the leading performances by our group members over the past six months (November 2014 to April 2015):

- ◆ Youth Olympic Triathlon Gold medallist **Ben Dijkstra** continues to capture National titles. In 2015 he has won: the English Schools' Intermediate Boys XC Championship; the U17M London Mini-Marathon crown; & the BTF Junior Men Elite Duathlon Championship
- ◆ Sixteen year old **Alice Daniel** tops the 2014 UK (RunBritain) U17W 5M rankings with a time of 30 minutes & 25 seconds set at the prestigious Wolverton 5M Road Race (November 2014)
- ◆ **Archie Banks** finishes 4th in the U15B race at the Midland Counties XC Championships (January 2015)
- ◆ Ten group members record 5K personal bests including sub 17 minute performances from **Alfie Thompson** (16-12: March 2015) & **Philip Maddocks** (16-46: December 2014)
- ◆ Group members (**Alfie Thompson, Alice Daniel, Ben Dijkstra, & Rachel Nealon**) represent the East Midlands Region at the 2015 London Mini-Marathon

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## Teenage Distance Runners: Appropriate Weekly Mileage

What constitutes appropriate training volume for teenage runners?

The answer will in part depend on the individual athlete concerned:

- ◆ His/her training history and experience
- ◆ His/her level of physical and mental maturity
- ◆ His/her main event distance & (probably most crucially)
- ◆ His/her motivation to succeed

Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to set parameters for weekly mileage based on the best practice of elite teenage runners (of the past and present). An excellent source for current practice is the US publication **Running Times** (<http://www.runningtimes.com/>) which has a section devoted to High School (Age 15-18) running. Profiles of leading teenage athletes in the US indicates that whilst there is considerable variation of practice, that most leading teenage middle/long distance runners run in excess of 45 miles per week, and more often in the 60-65 miles a week range (some do more!). This may sound like a lot, but is actually quite modest compared to the practices in the 1960s and 1970s where some High School athletes (the legendary Gerry Lindgren comes to mind) exceeded a 100 miles a week.

Recently I came across an online article/interview with two times World XC Champion, John Treacy (of Ireland). Treacy's main argument in this article was that (in contrast to the US experience) the standard of European men's distance running has seriously declined because (on the whole) male runners are no longer prepared to put in the work (volume) that runners were prepared to do in the 1970s & 1980s. He argued that serious minded and ambitious 18 year-olds should be running around 70 miles a week.

It's worth noting that the first non-African born athlete to finish in the Senior Men's race at the recent World XC Championships in China - US athlete Chris Derrick - was, as a 17/18 year-old in High School, averaging 65-70 miles per week. (See: <http://beaconhillstriders.co.uk/training-group/newsletter-archive> for further details)

With the Beacon Hill Striders training group the two athletes (one male, one female) to have made the biggest improvement at age 15/16 have been the two athletes who made the most pronounced jump in their training volumes over a period of 6-12 months. Each athlete progressed from a relatively modest level of performance to record top 5 finishes at the regional (Midlands) XC Championships. So, the advice I offer our group members is that at age 15/16 (Y10 & Y11) they need to start thinking of running as something that they do on most days, & that by age 17/18 (Y12 & Y13) it's not unreasonable that they should be aiming to run for an average of an hour a day on at least 6 days per week (i.e. 50+ miles per week).



### Case Study: Sam Stevens

Sam joined our group at age 15 as a county standard 5K runner (17-30 PB). At the time his training volume was very modest (around 20-25 miles per week).

Over the course of 6-9 months we rebalanced his training, encouraging him to increase the amount of easy/steady running done each week, and reducing the frequency of his harder sessions. Over this period Sam built up his training volume so that he was running on average 5-6 hours per week (45-50 miles per week).

The result was massive personal bests across the board including: a 3-57 1500m; an 8-36 3000m; a 5K road race performance of 15-55; and a 5M road race performance of 26-28 at age 16. (These performances ranked Sam in the UK top 10 for each of these events in the U17M age group in 2014!).



Image Above: Beacon Hill Striders group members - **Pascal Bouttier-Butler, Alfie Thompson, & Ben Dijkstra** - relaxing after representing the East Midlands Region at the 2012 London Mini-Marathon

## Video Corner:

### A blast from the past:

**Dave Wottle  
(USA)**

**Munich 1972  
Olympics:**

**800m Final**

**Dave Wottle** (The man with the hat/cap) comes from nowhere to claim Olympic Gold.

The **race video** can be found on this link:

[https://  
www.youtube.com/  
watch?v=5LHid-nC45k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5LHid-nC45k)

**(Note: you may need to type the url into your web browser)**

More race videos can be found on the Beacon Hill Striders web-site.

## Training Concepts Examined: Static Stretching

Back in the 1980s & 1990s my pre-race (and pre-training) warm-up included 5-10 minutes of static stretching. Now, I know better. But, it still amazes me how many athletes still engage in pre-race or pre-training stretching, often with their coaches looking on approvingly.

There is now an almost conclusive body of evidence that increased 'flexibility' has a negative (not positive) effect on performance. What you need are 'stiff' muscles and tendons that store and release energy like springs. In a recent excellent running magazine article looking at what it would take to run a sub 2 hour Marathon (Runners World: May 2015) the author (renowned sports scientist, Alex Hutchinson) commented:

*"Muscles and tendons act as springs that store energy; stiff springs may store and return more energy with each stride. So elites like (Paula) Radcliffe tend to be **less flexible** in places such as hamstrings and lower back; indeed, in one study of elite runners, those who were 20cm **less flexible** on a sit-and-reach test ran 27 per cent more efficiently."*

For an interesting in-depth discussion of the benefits of muscle tension the following article by US coach and exercise scientist, Steve Magness is worth reading: <http://www.runnersworld.com/race-training/managing-muscle-tension?page=single>

So, what to do in your warm-up instead of stretching?

If preparing for a race of 10K (or longer), all that's required - beyond easy running - to prepare your muscles and tendons for the road ahead are a few strides a little faster than anticipated race pace. If warming-up for a 5K race (or shorter) some dynamic running drills in addition to strides might be called for. The secret is to work within (and up to) the range of motion required for your event, not to go beyond this.

So, is there any role for static stretching?

The answer is "yes / possibly / maybe". Stretching may well be required to aid the re-habilitation process if you've suffered a muscle tear or injury. In a similar vein, static stretching might alleviate unusual tightness after a race or training session, when reducing muscle tension might be necessary to aid recovery, though a prolonged easy paced cool-down jog might well be the better option.



## The Crystal Ball: Potential 2015 Headline Makers

Which athletes will be making the news headlines this Summer?

With the announcement that Jo Pavey has decided to forego the opportunity of competing at the World Athletics Championships in Beijing this Summer, the focus domestically turns on who may replace her as the top British female 5000m/10000m runner. The two athletes with the strongest credentials to step-up are **Emelia Gorecka** and **Kate Avery**. Emelia has a 5000m personal best of 15 minutes & 07.45 seconds, and a sub 15 minute clocking may well be in reach this year. Kate, who had a stellar cross country season, has this month (May) produced a signature performance with a new 10000m personal best of 31 minutes & 41.44 seconds, and may well challenge the world's best female runners within the next 18 months. For the record, Jo Pavey's 2014 bests were: 15-04.87 (5000m), and 32-11.04 (10000m).

On the international front I shall be looking forward to seeing if US Steeplechasers **Emma Coburn** and **Evan Jager** can build upon the progress they showed in 2014. Coburn surprised everyone (her competitors especially) with her free flowing, front running exploits in the big Diamond League competitions, whilst Jager edged ever closer to the magical 8 minute mark with a US national record of 8 minutes & 04.71 seconds. Both will look to improve their times and challenge for medals at the 2015 World Athletics Championships in Beijing.

The middle-distance (800m/1500m) picture is as always full of possibilities for new talent to emerge. Domestically, one of the most promising young talents is the 19 year-old Birchfield Harrier **Theo Blundell** who recently ran a 1-47.84 800m personal best on his seasonal debut. Others to have already reached international level competition who I expect to make further progress include **Jessica Judd** (20), especially as she is now back on an endurance-based training programme under the guidance of the highly experienced coach George Gandy, and **Laura Muir** (22), who has a very impressive range of times from 800m to 3000m. In addition, a number of UK athletes, including 22 year-olds **Sam Stabler** and **Calli Thackery**, are making their mark on the US collegiate scene. On a global level new talent from Ethiopia and Kenya are sure to arise. Two non-African runners, however, to keep an eye on are **Ajee Wilson** (USA) & **Sahily Diago** (Cuba), both in the Women's 800m. Will either of them emerge as global stars at Beijing this Summer?

Finally, will **Mo Farah** hold on to his 5000m & 10000m world titles? My guess is that the opposition will be less compliant than in 2012 & 2013. Expect to see Kenyan World XC Champion **Geoffrey Komworwar** to challenge at 10000m, and his compatriot **Caleb Ndiku** \* (2014 Commonwealth Games 5000 Champion) to challenge at 5000m. Will Mo retain both titles? My guess is that he won't.

\* For a full analysis of Caleb Ndiku's training, please go to our "Resource Centre"

See: <http://beaconhillstriders.co.uk/resource-centre/bhs-resources>

For news, views, and information on road running in your area go to **runABC**: <http://runabc.co.uk/>

## Contact Us:

**ALAN MADDOCKS: Beacon Hill Striders (Performance Running)**

Web: <http://beaconhillstriders.co.uk/>

E-Mail: [striders1@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:striders1@hotmail.co.uk) / Tel: 01509 414866