**Track Tips…2018 Edition by George Smith**

The following tips are the results of running track competitively since 1957.

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**The Author:** George Smith was born in Vancouver BC, Canada On September 3, 1943. He began his track career at San Mateo High School [1957-1961] under future U.S. Olympic Track coach Berny Wagner. He set school records in the 600 meters, 180 yard low hurdles in high school. He set and still holds a few university track records at the College of San Mateo, San Francisco State and University of Alberta. He was Canadian 400m Hurdle Champion in 1970 and a member of many Canadian International teams from 1970-1977. He began Master's competition in 1981 setting a WR in the 400mH. He was World Athletic Veteran Champion in 1983, 1985 and 1989. He was Selected Masters Athlete of the Year in 1985 [Age 40-45] by winning all three entered events [400m in 50.10, 800m in 1:56.92 and 400m Hurdles in 56.32] in Rome, Italy. Although a year old kid can now keep up with him in a race, he is still an active Masters Track athlete in 2017.

Introduction: Athletics [Track] is a simple sport. However, good performances in Track and Field are the result of dedicated training, coaching and perseverance. It has been my experience that the race often goes to the athlete that has been in the sport the longest and has learned to properly apply their positive attitude and talent against negative experiences.

Track and Field is a much more '*menta*l' game than it appears those unfamiliar with the sport. Athletes using common sense and intelligent training will often beat athletes with much more natural talent, especially in those events that require an engaged, enthusiastic mind [400m and beyond]. The trouble with track is that it is difficult to train hard and stay enthusiastic in the process over a long period of time. Bribing the mind through games such as multiplication tag, works wonders on longevity in the sport.

An 'Edge' can be gained against one's competitors by using the following tips I have acquired in 60 years of racing. I have kept many of these tips secret to give my athletes and myself as an active competitor an advantage over that of other athletes. After all, I did not have a world class body for track. I made it from what I was given on top of my shoulders, making it a long slow process of trial and error. Failure can be a blessing in this sport in that it will help an athlete appreciate success that is earned from hard work, smarts and fun.

Why give out these tips now after all these years. The answer is simple. I don't want to take it with me when I pass and before that time to pass it on to athletes out there with the right type of brain on top of their shoulders and a passion for track and field. I have begun to give out these tips to an athlete in response to watching their fine work ethic and appreciative attitude.

As a youth, I was always the last chosen on teams. A severe asthmatic until the 9th grade, my doctor urged me take up track to maximize my chances of getting and staying healthy. I only experience asthma now on rare occasions and never when I'm very 'fit'.

These tips are not to be given out to just anybody in the sport. I would hope that these tips find their way into hands that will put them to good use by maximizing their own performances or coaching abilities. They are to be earned by the athlete or the coach. This is the reason I retain the copyright.

1. Track is a team sport. The more athletes training together in pursuit of a common goal, the better. Track is such a difficult sport on the 'head' that a training group is a necessity to make the workouts seem easier. Games during some of the training phases can be very useful in producing an atmosphere of fun. An atmosphere of fun always produces better results in the long run that an atmosphere of professionalism.
2. Warm-up [jog] and warm-down together as a group at the pace of the slowest runner. The beginning and the end of the workout are keyed on the pace of the slowest runner, whether through nature or injury. Chatting and the right amount goofing around [read 'fun'] are maximized for most of the group at slow warm-up speeds. The internal parts of the workout are keyed the better athletes [don't want to hold them back], so why not give leading roles to the least gifted or fit athletes at the beginning and at the end. Surprisingly, you will find the slower athletes will greatly improve their fitness level and become an important aspect to the team.
3. Always wear sweats until the main part of the workout, even in hot climates [though you may need to be hydrated]. Jog, exercises and drills, strides in sweats. Why? There is a huge mental gain when the sweats come off and you are now lighter when doing the reps, intervals and time trials. Think of it as a shedding a few pounds while increasing the ease of muscle movement. In fact, some athletes get such a positive effect that they run the first interval too fast, but they will soon learn to restrain themselves.
4. Do the stretches to the best of your ability with long term improvement in mind. Everybody has different flexibility ranges. So what if someone can touch their elbows and you barely get to your ankles. That is not to say you shouldn't set improved flexibility as a goal.
5. At the end of a stride or acceleration, coast to a stop like a car in neutral to minimize injury and feel like you are well in control. It has a surprisingly good feeling while you are floating to a stop.
6. If the racing distance is 1500m or less, your goal is to always use spikes not only in races but also in workouts. Wearing spikes only in races and time trials is a bad idea. It will produce slower athletes and often injured athletes. The difference in length of stride in spikes and flats is substantial. Muscles are very exercise-specific. Increasing your stride length even a little involves different muscle interaction.
7. To model bone, muscles, ligaments and tendons, get used to wearing spikes doing slow work on soft surfaces [grass, very soft tracks], then progress slowly to faster work and harder surfaces. An athlete with a solid work ethic, but does most training in flats, is headed to disaster with tender shins or stress fractures if exposed to doing workouts in spikes. For example in my town [Edmonton, Alberta, Canada] it is common to see athletes training hard in flats and racing only in spikes. Should they get a scholarship to somewhere in the states and a coach that trains his athletes in spikes, they often breakdown before showing what they really can do.
8. Shin Splints are often the product of #6 and always the fault of the coach. If the athlete coaches himself or herself, then it is their fault. Shin splints were the curse of the 1950's and 60's. Hard work often rewarded the runner with shin splints. Workouts must progress at the right rate to avoid shin splints and that is the coach's job. Runners wishing to avoid shin splints can by taking 10 seconds every morning and running their fingers down the tibia bone while applying a bit of pressure. No shin splint no scream. Pain from pressing the fingers on the tibia bone will show up about 3 weeks earlier than it will show up in the workout. In other words, people who complain about shin splints and pain have had them for at least three weeks but didn't know it.
9. Intervals or repetitions should have the slowest one first and one of the fastest last.
10. I call them repetitions when they all have the same rest period and intervals when the length or type of rest is varied. The purpose of the varying the rest period to keep the quality high. As a 400m, 800m, and occasional 1500m runner one of my key workouts was ERRR 200's. 1-6 were done with up to 5 minutes rest between, 7-9 with up to 7 minutes rests and 10-12 with 9 minutes rest. The idea was to keep the average of your first six in the next three by taking two extra minutes and the next three after that by taking another two minutes. When I could average just under 26 seconds, I knew I was ready for my racing phase. Please note that the rests were not active as in jogging, but just a stride or two and stretching while sitting. Jogging the recovery changes the workout to that of a 3000m-10km runner. Standing around, etc., keeps the waste products from being recycled and they are certainly not recycled in an 800.
11. Most distance runners hate rests and believe they are ready to go when their breathing rate and pulse is within certain limits. If they wish to increase their speed they must increase their rest period while doing intervals or reps.
12. Time trials are all out performances during practice time. 6x100m is my maximum for short speed with about 10 minutes between each. My key speed workout was 4x200m with 20 minutes between. My speed strength key workouts were 4x300m with between 25-30 minutes rest and 3x400 with 30-35 minutes rest. All were all out. Try getting a distance runner to run 6x100 and take ten minutes rest between. It is next to impossible unless you stake them to a tree.
13. Always complete the distance unless injured and never complete the distance if you are injured in the attempt. Do not finish a workout if injured. What can you gain, a medal for stupidity?
14. Run through the finish line and a meter beyond in training so you don't slack off at that critical part of the race.
15. Always do reps and intervals on the outside 6 inches of your lane around the corners. Do time trials in the middle of your lane and race ~6 inches off the inside line. It is a huge mistake to train on the inside of your lane and very common to see athletes supposed to be going 200m in lane 6 while training actually running in high lane 5. On most tracks the distance is measured 12 inches out in lane 1 and 8 inches out in the other lanes. Why train doing 200m's that are really 198's when you train at 202's and race 200's. Huge mental boost for athletes shooting for a PB to know they can run faster on race day.
16. The inner line of the lane is not part of your lane in 1, 2, or 3 turn staggered starts.
17. If you step on the inner line of your lane while going around a corner you were trying to cheat because centrifugal force is carrying you outward, not inward.
18. Time Trial times are good gauges of fitness but mean nothing compared to race times. I've known lots of athletes who ran on the inside of their lines during training who couldn't run faster in races.
19. With the exceptions of time trial days or where the timed average is important [like ERRR 200's] key workouts, always leave something in the tank for the next workout. If you always try to exact the last drop of effort from yourself, you'll find that you will actually not achieve your goal. You will often chose to do something else or with someone else.
20. It is important to have flats designed for longer distance runs and lighter ones for distance racing. Likewise, it is important to have a pair of spikes for training that are heavier and more substantial for reps and intervals and a light pair to race and use for time trials.
21. Why wear socks in racing distances less than 3000m? Training yes, racing no. It is a huge psychological boost to have light spikes to race in. Why add useless weight to ruin the effect and the performance?
22. Racing spikes should fit tight so slippage is avoided. Training spikes are supposed to have a comfortable fit to maximize training performance.
23. Attendance at your track group social events outside of scheduled track time should be a very high priority in your life. If you want to maximize your performances in track and field you need to meet and have fun with your teammates outside of track workouts and competitions. Otherwise there is a strong tendency to correlate track with hard work only, which takes its toll when medals or ribbons are not enough to motivate you to do your best.
24. Lengthy warm ups are preferred over lengthy warm downs especially as the athlete ages or if the athlete is gimpy from injuries or hard workouts.
25. Track and Field athletes with a strong work ethic do really well, but often hide their injuries until these injuries cannot be hidden any more. This is a very bad thing. Unfortunately, Track and Field also produces a high number of hypochondriacs and it is a tough thing to know who is hiding and who is whining.
26. Do not stretch muscle injuries that have not had time to heal. Think of such muscles as a frayed rubber band. Stretching the rubber band is only going to do more damage.
27. It is very important, when possible, to show up to watch and cheer on your teammates while they compete. Track and Field is such a hard sport mentally that it is very important for you to be at competitions at a time when you are not under the pressure of competing. This enables you to gain greater appreciation, not only the efforts of teammates, but those of yourself.
28. Get to the workouts and competitions as early as practical so you may socialize and begin your warm up in time.
29. Never wear sweats during short rest intervals unless weather dictates that it is common sense to do so. Muscles are very exercise-specific, so limiting their range through wearing clothing that will not be work in competition is not wise.
30. In races with multiple laps on a track use common sense to run the shortest possible distance without compromising your chances of a maximum performance. Remember, it is 6 meters further per lane per lap, so if you run a full lap hung out in lane 2 you've just run 6 meters further than those in lane 1. I've won lots of 800m races because I ran between 800-801m and some of my major competitors running between 806-812m. Likewise, in races where you must cut down from an outside lane to lane 1, run the hypotenuse of the triangle unless you need to get the lead to slow down the pace. The hypotenuse is the shortest distance. From lane 6 the hypotenuse is only about 8 inches further than running straight from lane 1, but cutting right over can have you running 10 feet further.
31. You should have an easy training day the day before a competition to work the kinks out of your system and maximize your chances to perform well. I think of this as in taking your car out for a spin to see if it is running well. If you take a day off, take it two days before your race.
32. It is difficult to heal injuries without the help of your coach or someone to make sure you don't do some drill or workout that will only aggravate your injury.
33. Never avoid a competition because you are not ready to run a fast time. Competitions give you the best idea of where you are in your training and what you need to do to improve.
34. Talented athletes often retire from competition sooner than less talented athletes. Less talented athletes with a high work ethic will eventually often outperform more gifted athletes with bad attitudes.
35. Young males will get faster and stronger as they go through puberty as testosterone is produced, but the testosterone will maximize and future gains will depend on other factors.
36. Young females have an initial advantage over young boys their same age, but unlike boys very little testosterone will be produced. It is then that performances will naturally plateau and PB’s [personal bests] become more difficult to attain. It is then that attitude, hard work, wholesome fun, and good decisions will lead to success and a long future in the sport.
37. Track and Field athletes have their own minds. It is very easy to tell them to do something outside of practice time, but the chances are good that they won't even though it is in their best interest. Do not equate how faithful they are following your advice during track practice with the likelihood they will follow it elsewhere and/or in a timely manner.
38. An athlete should be aware that long times out in direct sunlight can lead to skin cancer and rather to simply apply sunscreen which blocks out Vitamin D production, wearing a cap, long sleeve light tops, breathable tights or full sweats may save them from skin cancer in the far future. I did not and my long history as a runner, life guard, tennis instructor, etc., has led to many basal cell cancers being removed. Although seldom fatal it does not make one look pretty or handsome.
39. I have found that some of the best track and field athletes have been an “appreciator”. They appreciate help and show it and in turn they help their fellow athletes. That ‘pay forward’ attitude brings them pleasure whatever their performances.
40. ‘Very dedicated’ runners that follow every word of their coach to the exclusion of fun activities often ‘burn out’ and quit the sport even though they are still winning their races. Young athletes should not be given long travel trips because they have success by developing fasterr that their peers.
41. Today’s Canadian sports are unreasonably concentrating on young athletes simply because they mature early. Such early bloomers are often solidly beaten by late developers as seniors in high school or university. Young kids can be talked into almost anything with promises of making the Olympic team, etc. However, once an adult attitude gains a foothold with that kid, they cannot be duped by promises and prizes.
42. Many parents try to live through the successes of their kids. There is nothing wrong with supporting your children, but please do not use track and field as a baby sitter while they are young. Many of my best times as a kid came when one or both of my parents showed up to watch me race. They did not try to live through me. They tried to live with me and that was a tall assignment as I was not a perfect kid and they did not expect me to be anything but a kid.
43. Parents who help their child in their sports are to be cherished. That effort will come back in spades as the son or daughter will inevitably ‘pay forward’ to others in the future.

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