

# Excerpt

From *101 Winning Racing Strategies for Runners*

## **Strategy #16: Become very familiar with what different paces feel like.**

One of the keys to successful racing is to become intimately familiar with different paces. If you can develop an internal clock, it will prevent you from starting races too fast and make you more aware of what you're doing in the race rather than just throw caution to the wind and hope for the best. Proper pacing is vital for success in most races, becoming more important the longer the race. In the marathon, for example, deviating from your average race pace by more than two percent is metabolically more costly than remaining within that range.

In learning what different paces feel like, you want to get to the point that if someone were to say to you, "Run at 5K race pace," you are able to run at 5K race pace without looking at your watch. To accomplish this, I sometimes take my athletes' watches away from them when they run workouts on the track and give them feedback only from my stopwatch every lap so they can learn the pace of the workout. Use your workouts to learn a sense of pace. Tracks are invaluable for this. When you do a workout on the track, you can monitor the pace every 100 meters since tracks are marked in 100-meter segments. If you're not good at pacing, calculate the pace of your workout for every 100 meters and look at your watch at each marking. Make adjustments to the pace if you're too fast or too slow. After you have done that for a few workouts, look at your watch every 200 meters, then every 300 meters, and then every 400 meters. For longer races like the marathon, do some of your runs on marked paths and work up to looking at your watch every other mile. Over time, you should be able to acquire a keen sense of pacing as you "feel" the workouts.



## **Strategy #32: Visualize your race before it happens.**

I know an Olympic 400-meter runner who sat in his dark dorm room closet in the Olympic Village the night before his race so he could visualize it. Since he didn't know what lane on the track he would be assigned until shortly before the race, he visualized running the 400-meter race from each lane on the track, seeing himself run each curve, each straightaway, each of the other runners. He visualized the crowd and the cameras. The next day, he won the gold medal and set a new world record.

The mind is a powerful tool. Visualizing your race before you run it allows you to experience it beforehand, making the experience familiar and thus making you less nervous. If the experience is familiar, you will feel more comfortable. Practice visualizing your race each day for a few days before it, seeing the whole experience. Try to use all of your senses in your visualization. See the track or race course, feel the contraction of your muscles as your legs push forcefully against the ground, feel your arms pumping and driving you forward, see yourself blowing past your opponents, hear your feet touch the ground, smell the air, see yourself react to other runners' moves, feel your pace, taste the experience. Then, when it's time for your race, you will have already run it. You can visualize from an internal

perspective, seeing the race through your own eyes as you run it, or from an external perspective, as a spectator observing yourself run the race. Either way, visualize the result you want to see as many times as possible to ingrain that result into your mind.

**Strategy #69: Be strategic from behind.**

One strategy often forgotten in the emotional context of racing is to race as strategically as you can. Watch your competition from behind. As the great marathoner Bill Rodgers told me, the runner behind is often in control of the race, not the leader. Only try for the lead or gain the edge on your competition when you sense the time is right, which may be when the lead pack has been reduced and you have fewer competitors to deal with. Keep stalking your opponents from behind and bide your time. If you feel great and sense your competition is a bit off, surge ahead and carry that momentum to the finish line.

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