**//TITLE// Get Fast On The Track**

**//SUBTITLE// The track workouts that will transform your winter base miles into spring speed**

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Coach to 2:37 marathon runner (and wife) Holly Rush.

//Mugshot emailed to Adam and Liz along with copy//

**//INTRO//**

There really is no substitute for the track if you are serious about improving your running speed. You may argue that it's not relevant for Ironman distance triathlons (involving a marathon run), although even that's open for debate. With certainty, if you want to improve your running for anything shorter, it’s a must.

So what do you get from running in circles that you can’t get from running on road or trail? Firstly, there’s no hiding place. You know exactly how fast you’re running. That line you’ve just crossed, it’s marked out clearly and it is exactly 200m from the start line. If it’s taken you one second longer than you had planned, you'd better dig deep and catch up on that target. Lose a second in 200m and you lose three and half minutes in a marathon.

It will also help you correlate perceived effort with pace and if you add a heart rate monitor, correlate actual physiological effort and pace. This means accurate training zones are yours for the calculating. Get in a good group and you will also learn to run in a pack, benefit from being dragged along to faster times than you thought possible and take your suffering – in the name of gain - to a whole new level.

On a very practical level, track work enables you to run fast, uninterrupted sessions and it provides a reassuringly smooth surface so you can concentrate on effort and feeling, rather than where your foot is landing. It also provides a comfortable environment to carry out your technical drills and an opportunity to borrow a few from the local sprinters. And the final reason for running on the track is pressure - psychological pressure. Exerted by knowing exactly how fast you are running but also by an expectation that track training is about serous performance.

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**Track Training: The Practicalities**

You should be looking at one or two track sessions per week from Spring onwards, but this comes with a couple of warnings. The first is that like any new form of training you need to break in gently. Wear decent training or racing shoes, don’t do too much volume on your first few outings on the track and take notice of any unusual muscle pain that comes on as a result.

If you have never run on a track before it is a great idea to simply go down and run a few miles at a steady pace to get used to the feel of the surface and work out the line markings.

And finally before you step on the track it is really useful to have a good estimate of your paces. The key ones are 3k, 5k and 10k paces so if you have run a recent races you should do some simple maths and estimate what your 400m (1 lap time) should be for each of these distances. If you haven’t raced one of these recently, or only one, then the online calculators (search for running calculators) will give you the answers you need.

**Structure Your Own Track Session**

Track training sessions should follow a basic template like this:

1. **A** **warm up** of easy running. Normally this is around 10-minutes, but I think it would benefit from being longer - 20 to 30 minutes.

2. **Dynamic exercises** to take joints through a good range of movement and mobilise muscles. So try 5 to 10 minutes of leg swings, skipping, zig zag running, postural exercises to set the body up and step ups for glut recruitment.

3. **Running drills** to develop co-ordination, teach or reinforce good mechanics. Running drills are an article in themselves but aim for a few drills done really well with a reason for doing them.

4. **Running strides** to rehearse the speed of movement of the actual main session. These are short progressive sprints e.g. 4 to 6 x 60m build-up runs to 80% maximum intensity.

5. **A main session** with clear intention and goals.

6. **Warm down**. Depending on the intensity this should involve easy jogging until you feel in ‘balance’ and relaxed enough to contemplate leaving the track in relative comfort. This could be 20 to 30 minutes of light jogging with easy strides and some refuelling. You could also do some easy stretching and mobility exercises.

**Choose Your Session**

There are different types of track sessions, giving various benefits. Here's the lowdown on three of the most important for triathletes.

**1. Aerobic Speed**

If it is speed you are looking for, keep the volume of your main session to around 5km and your pace at around your best for 3km. This is classic ‘big, fast, aerobic engine’ producing training, teaching the heart to pump and the muscles to use oxygen to burn fuel. These are the sessions that get Alistair Brownlee to 9.5km of the London Olympics with only one competitor in tow but with enough in reserve to kick away and win. Start with short repetitions and build the length of time you are running at this pace. Here are some examples of how to progress your main sets:

Session 1: 2x10x200m with 20secs between reps and 4mins between sets

Session 2: 3x5x300m with 45secs between reps and 4mins between sets

Session 3: 2x6x400m with 60secs between reps and 3mins between sets

Session 4: 12x400m with 1minute rests

**2. Aerobic Endurance**

If it’s fast aerobic endurance you're after, the volume stretches to 8km and your pace towards 5km pace. There is definite advantage in running for over 3 minutes in each repetition as you will have your heart rate at its maximum (or near max) for longer periods of time. Examples of fast aerobic endurance sessions include:

Session 1: 8x800m with 2mins rests

Session 2: 6x(800m/400m) alternating 2mins rest and 1 minute rest

Session 3: 8x1km with 2mins jog rests

Session 4: 6x1200m with 2mins rests

**3. Anaerobic workouts**

Running shorter and faster than these paces on the track takes us strongly into the anaerobic zones. Train at these paces and you will be developing your ability to apply quick force to the track, increasing your stride length and there is good evidence showing an increase in efficiency as well. Volumes for these types of session are cut down to a maximum of 3km and often a lot less. If you have a developed a good endurance base and do a ‘big fast aerobic’ session once a week you will find that it doesn’t take many of these speed endurance sessions to produce a rapid performance improvement. Just 6 to 10 sessions will move you on significantly, the key so to be fresh and fuelled when you do them.

Session 1: 10x200m with 90secs rest between reps

Session 2: 7x300m with 2mins rest between reps

Session 3: 6x400m with 2mins 30secs between reps

So in summary, think of the track as your test bed for pushing your run

performances further. Keep it interesting and challenging by changing the sessions and combining elements at different paces. Record your times and build up knowledge about key sessions that let you know when you are really ready to race.