



Why the 50 Is Not Just the 50

By Darryl Johnson & the coaching team at Up Coaching

“I’m just doing the 50.” “I’m not mad enough to try and run 100km.” “I’m not ready for 100km.” Just a few of the responses us 50km runners give when asked which event we are doing. We are our biggest critic. Nobody told you it was “just 50km” and I’d bet there are plenty who thought you were “mad” when you told them you had signed up for a 50km race through the upper reaches of the Blue Mountains. The 50 is never just the 50, the question you need to ask yourself is, “Am I ready for the 50!”

The UTA50 is a course I would describe as relentless – there is no free ride on this monster. Something triggered you to sign up, pay your entry fee and commit to the taking on stairs – up and down, hills – up and down, technical single track, exposed rugged open ground, stairs, fire trail, a bit of road here and there and more stairs! The 50 throws just about every trail challenge at you and all in “just 50km!” That moment you signed up was pivotal in your mental preparation for the iconic UTA50. You had the gall to enter, now to prime your engine to get it done. The 50 is never just the 50.

Specificity is key. Train to the race conditions – terrain, elevation, surface, climate, and nutrition. If you want to get the best out of yourself on race day then you need to put in the specific training that will allow you to do so. There is not enough good that can be said about course knowledge. Get yourself on the course as much as you can throughout your key training block. If you are training on the same part of the course as you have previously, try something different or keep doing what works and try and do it better. Hook up with some on course running groups, pick their brains, and draw on their knowledge – what runner doesn’t love to talk about their own running?

The UTA50 does indeed present you with a lot of stairs and hills. Stairs and hills are not something most might incorporate in their weekly training regimen. We all seek to rack up big km’s in our training (hey it looks better on Strava) so we can neglect the dreaded stairs and hills for open trails. Make them your friends and embrace the challenge they present. My training around stairs and hills is to always try and take them on under fatigue, hit them mid-training run and up the effort once you reach those climbs. Stay consistent – “maintain form” “pump those arms” “I’m tethered to the top and the ropes pulling me up” “Move your BUTT!” Mental cues, use them and abuse them - whatever gets you to the top in good shape and allows you to push on to that crest, up and over and go go go. Get some repeats in and if you can’t hit them mid-training run then do a set of reps and try and keep them consistent right the way through.

The UTA50 is unforgiving – wear yourself down on one section with a view to recovering on another? It might sound like a good strategy but which section do you recover on? Up the stairs? Have you ever heard of anyone getting to the top of a staircase and saying “OK, I’m ready to go again?” Down the stairs? But there’s your chance to blast away, make up some time. That really long

flat section? There is one of those sections in the 50 and it comes after you've climbed your way out of Wentworth Falls and you hit the road. The sun might be up, the rain might be coming down, it might be perfect weather but you've just put in 25km of technical single track, stairs, hills, some ducking and weaving and you're choosing the section that you excel at to recover, that stretch of road that gets you to the milestone that is QVH and 28km in? My point is you need to plan and run a measured race. Certainly run to your strengths and pick your sections to go and to slow (draw on your on course training). Don't drain the tank too early and set yourself up for a laboured finish. Everyone wants to finish strong, drain the tank at the end. Remember, the 50 is never just the 50.

QVH and beyond – the point of no return. You've probably seen some family and friends, fuelled up, hydration strategy in play and you commence the descent into the depths of the Jamison Valley. It's all downhill for a while now so why the long face? Whether you love or hate downhill this is a time for you to recover somewhat and get your motor humming again. Check yourself over, legs are moving – check, pack is stocked up – check, breathing under control – check, moving in the right direction – check! You are on your way to the finish but stay measured, 22km out there is not your regular half marathon. Keep playing to your strengths, if the downhill is your specialty then this is the time to go, if you can't go, take a bit more time to get your mojo back and try again, still nothing – tell yourself to go! Start calling on your training bank and making those withdrawals. "I've done the training." "I know this course." "This is not JUST the 50!" Go!

Before you know it you've reached the bottom of the valley and there's only one way out. UP! You've got 9km to go so grit your teeth and dig deep, find those reserves, keep withdrawing from the Bank of Hard Training and power up the hills. Run, walk with purpose, run/walk – whatever it takes. The aroma of accomplishment is wafting through the valley, you can almost taste the finish. "I know elevation, I've seen it before." "Hills are my friends." "Embrace the incline." You're at the top of the hills and ready for a short smooth ride into the Sewerage Treatment Works before you hit the pristine Leura Forest for the final push home. Take a breath, take several deep breaths, revisit your form, nutrition, hydration, legs moving, mind willing, let's go!

Leura Forest arrives and we start climbing some more, enjoy the beauty on offer as you grind your way through some single track, fallen trees, ferns tickling your limbs,.....keep moving! Pick your marks and get there strong, pick another mark and go again. Giant Stairs to your right, "I smashed them 40km ago", don't turn right, head straight and onto the final climb up Furber. You've made it this far and you've got 1km to go of stairs (remember we trained for this!). It's all or nothing from here, leave it all on the trails and make that final withdrawal from the training bank. You start to hear the crowds, the hikers shake their heads in wonder at your achievement and encourage you up a few more stairs. That aroma of accomplishment is now a taste of sweet success. The final stairs up to the boardwalk, and there is nothing left in your tank, get to the finish, turn into that finish chute and live it up. Accomplishment, success, triumph! The 50 is never JUST the 50!

Are you ready for the 50?!

If you would like to speak to myself or any of the UP Coaching coaches about UTA and/or your training please email darryl@upcoaching.com.au or brendan@upcoaching.com.au or check out the website www.upcoaching.com.au