Progression of Strides

What are strides? Let me quickly share a portion of the 'Rev the Engine Most Days' section of *Consistency Is Key*.

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A stride is simply a quick, short sprint — anywhere from 70m to 150m — that's faster than your race pace and much faster than your training paces. The principle of revving the engine most days applies to runners specializing in multiple distances: high school cross country runners need to incorporate strides that are faster than 5,000m pace throughout the year. So, too, do 800m runners, who need to run significantly faster than race pace to reach their full potential in their chosen event. And no matter an athlete's preferred distance, he or she needs to go fast whether in season or not.

The following progression is for athletes training in the summer, prior to the cross-country season. This progression also applies to athletes training in November and December as they get ready for track, though they may be able to progress faster at that time of year.

The assumption is that you'll do this assignment at least two days a week, and as many as five days a week.

You may not need to start at the beginning of this progression, so long as you've been doing the volume of strides listed *AND* been doing them 2-3 days a week. You'll want to do at least one week of strides at a given assignment before you move to the next one. You'll see that a lot of the strides are based on effort, so you don't need to time them, nor should you time them. Later in the progression it'll be helpful to time them. Also, you should be using date pace for the track distance assignments – the pace you could race today. That said, it never hurts to get closer to next track season's goal pace once you're in the last two phases of this progression.

Progression of Strides

A. 4 x 20 seconds at 5k effort.

B. 5 x 20 seconds at 5k effort.

C. 5 x 20 seconds starting at 5k effort and squeezing down the pace to 3,200m effort.

D. 5 x 20 seconds starting at 5k effort and squeezing down the pace to 1,600m effort. I recommend 5k, 5k, 3,200, 3,200, 1,600 for the five repetitions, but simply run by feel and don't time these.

E. 6 x 20 seconds at 3,200m effort down to 1,600m effort.

F. 6 x 20 seconds — 2 at 3,200m, 2 at 1,600m, 2 at a slower 800m effort.

G. 3 x 25 seconds — 5k/3,200m/1,600 effort, then 3 x 20 seconds at a slower 800m effort. You can take as much recovery time as needed to be able to run with good posture and good rhythm on the 800m effort strides. Note: This is a great day to start transitioning into spikes – you can run the first three in trainers, change into spikes, then run the last three in spikes.

H. 3 x 25 seconds at 1,600m effort, then 3 x 20 seconds at a solid 800m effort. Again, this is a great opportunity to change shoes between the two sets of strides.

Note: Boys who can run well under 2:00 in the 800m can do 15-17 second strides rather than 20 second strides, as this will be roughly 100-115m. Conversely, a coach might want this athlete to get a bit more volume with this progression so the 1:58 runner getting in roughly 135m for each 20 second stride.

The one problem I see athletes get into with strides is that when they feel less than 100 percent, they still push through the assignment. If after two strides you feel horrible, yet the assignment is for six —and you need to speed up, too! — you're better off just running 1-2 more at the same pace and calling it a day. This won't happen very often, but a handful of times each season it's going to make sense to shut things down early, and, as my college coach would say, "live to fight another day." Another way to think about it is that you're fit and healthy and it would be a mistake to "push through" when you feel horrible. If you've read this far into the document, you're serious about being better, so motivation isn't the issue, but rather the issue is being smart about your training and having the humility to call it a day a couple times a year when you're feeling horrible.

Remember, you need to 'Rev the Engine Most Days' all year long!