

OBSTACLE RACE TRAINING 101

BY SOLO

DO YOU HAVE AN OBSTACLE RACE coming up this year?

Have you been eyeing the muddy posters in your local running store? Do not be intimidated by the chiseled muscles on the flyers - there are enough different types and distances of obstacle races out there for everyone (check out the "Obstacle Run" category in Get Out There's event calendar online or in the back of this issue as a start!).

First, you'll need to decide on the distance you want to cover in your first obstacle race, as well as whether you'd like to participate in a timed event or a friendly challenge. The race distances will vary from a very manageable 5k to a brutal full marathon distance. Some events carry a bit more of a competitive spirit with chip timing, total rankings, and even penalties for skipped obstacles. Others encourage team spirit, costumes and mud. Whatever you choose, your first obstacle race can be a challenging but fun day in sun, or it can be a really painful experience with high risk of injury. Proper training will ensure the former and avoid the latter.

Obstacle racing in general is a bit of a hybrid. Its CrossFit-meets-endurance sports-meets-adventure racing. As far as preparation goes, you need to have both the physical and the psychological aspects of training covered.

In physical training for an obstacle race, there are two main components: cardiovascular endurance and muscular strength. Of the two, cardio is king. Especially for longer distances, runners lacking strength would usually do better than weightlifters lacking cardio.

Ideally, by race day you should be able to run at least the distance of the race comfortably. One way to do that is to pick a training plan designed for a specific race distance and stick to it. For example, if you have a 5k mud run coming up, you can follow a running program like Couch to 5K.

Ironically, the faster you are, the easier the logistics of the race are. If you are walking the whole thing, you may be out on the course for hours. It's that much harder to be in the sun for so long, let alone without proper food and hydration.

Speed pays on the obstacle course again and again.

TIPS:

- * Aim to run two to three times a week, incorporating some intervals or hills as well as one long run into your schedule.
- * Get outside! Trail running is great training.
- * Don't just run! Include a body weight circuit at the

beginning and at the end of your run. Or stop and do burpees after every mile you run.

While strength is really important in order to successfully complete obstacles, being able to bench press a million pounds is not going to do you any good. Your focus should be functional body strength in relation to your size and weight.

TIPS:

- * Learn to maneuver your body weight up, over and around various barriers (jump over rocks, crawl on the ground, climb trees).
- * Focus your training on compound movements, including multiple muscle groups. For example, lifting and transporting asymmetrical objects.
- * Know your weaknesses and incorporate skill training into your routine. For example, if you know you have trouble with monkey bars, find the nearest playground, and practice, practice, practice!

Finally, the psychological training. No, you do not need to sign up for hypnosis sessions. However, many races will play on our common fears. Are you afraid of the cold? The dark? Tight spaces? Heights? Chances are there is an obstacle there calling your name, and causing your knees to shake. It will be to your advantage to consider what your fears are, and devise a strategy or even practice.

For example, many are intimidated by the ice bath obstacle, because it's so intense. If you have trouble with the cold, or you want to know what to expect in general - fill a bathtub with really cold water, then dump few bags of ice in there. Get in, and submerge yourself completely. See how it feels. (Hint: It's miserable! You can get out now.)

IN THE WEEK BEFORE THE RACE:

- * Avoid hard workouts 1-2 days before the race.
- * Try going for a 15-20 min tempo run or do some intervals the day before the race to keep those legs moving.
- * Get lots of sleep not just the day before, but for at least a full week before the race.

Solo is a Toronto-based obstacle racer, yoga teacher, college professor and self-professed adrenaline junkie. Follow her training and crazy adventures at www.solovieva.com.