Ep #189: How to Train When You Don't Have a Race Coming Up

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you're a woman who has never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you are in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, a certified running and life coach and I teach women how to start running, feel confident, and change their lives, and now I want to help you.

Hey Rebels. So I am recording this on the one-year anniversary of the pandemic shutdown. And oh my god, when all of the races started canceling last year, I for one never imagined that it would still be a thing a year later. In fact, I remember thinking, "Oh well, the Wisconsin Ragnar in September, there's no way that'll be canceled." Surprise surprise.

So it's been a pretty wild year and it's a year later. A few of my clients in Run Your Best Life have been able to run in live races but the majority of us, myself included, don't have any live races until at least the fall. And some of us are like, it's next year, it's 2022.

And I'm hearing a lot of I don't know how to train when I don't have a race on the calendar, or I'm not motivated to train when I don't have a race on the calendar. And we talked several episodes - actually, I guess it was more like shortly after the pandemic got really real, I did an episode on what to do when all your races are canceled, but really, now it's time for a bit of a longer-term plan because I think that it's still going to be many months before we have the same kind of race rosters that we had before.

So this week, I thought I would address the question of how do you train when you don't have a race on the calendar. So like I said, there's two main concerns that people have with being runners when there's no race on the calendar. And by the way, I know that there's a lot of you that listen that really aren't interested in doing races and you're pretty self-motivated to run without that.

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And so this probably isn't the episode for you because you're sitting there thinking, "What's the problem?" So if you can't relate to this at all, I totally understand if you skip this episode and head to another one to listen. But sometimes I drop some fun F bombs along the way, so maybe you'll just stick with me and listen just because we're best buddies and we like to run together.

So again, there are two main concerns that most people have with running when there's no race on the calendar. And the first is kind of questioning or not really knowing if you're running the right amounts to maintain your fitness until it's time to officially start a training plan.

And this is pretty common. But then the other one, which I think is actually more common is feeling bored or maybe unmotivated when there's no prescriptive training plan or no specific goal in the future. And I think a lot of people have tried to plug that gap with virtual races, which is awesome, but there's kind of no substitute for an in-person race.

It's just an amazing feeling, it's an amazing thing to do. And so the virtual races are fun but they can also seem kind of like, alright, well I really wanted to do the in-person race. So let's tackle the question of - because I think it's the easier question to tackle. Let's tackle the question of how much should I be running when I'm not officially training for anything.

And I want you to know, first of all, it's actually pretty normal, and also an excellent idea to have seasons in your training and seasons when sometimes you're putting a lot of miles on your feet because you're training for an upcoming event, and then other times when you sort of scale back to let your body recover, or while you work on other things.

So you could think of this as just a longer than usual off season for you. And you might actually be surprised at how your body responds to rest,

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especially if you're constantly having a race in your future to train for. Because sometimes we get so excited about doing all the races that we just - we train, train, train without a break, and then guess what? That can sometimes lead to injury.

So taking time away from training, whether it's a complete break or simply scaling back your mileage or days per week does give your body a chance to rest and recover and come back stronger. And a lot of times, people will notice that they've got these little aches and pains here and there in their body and they think, "Oh, I'm just getting old," and then they stop training as hard, and lo and behold, the aches and pains go away.

And that to me is definitely an indicator that you've probably been on the verge of overtraining and that rest is necessary. And it's a great time to put some extra focus on your strength and your flexibility and your cross training. And like agility training, right? That will actually help you with speed when you start ramping up your long run training again.

So when you're in this off season, you can add some extra strength and flexibility in, do some extra yoga classes maybe, spend some time on the bike. I know for me, I've just been really enjoying rocking out on the Peloton. I'm like, hey, it's a change of pace and you know what, when the weather warms up, I'm going to be out there doing all the miles. But right now I'm just kind of jamming on the bike and I'm not mad about it.

So here is what I tell my clients to do when they have a race way in the future, like six months or more. I actually help them figure out a plan for themselves. So the first thing you do is you take the training plan that you have for the race. Maybe it's a half marathon, who knows? Maybe it's a 10K, maybe it's an ultra, whatever it is.

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Take the training plan that you have for the race and get all of those runs on the calendar. So you're going to take your race day and just work your way backwards, get all those runs on the calendar. And yes, I know that the first run on that plan, it might be months in the future and that is okay.

You're just going to map it out so you know exactly when you need to be starting that plan. Then once you know when your first long run is for that plan, you'll also know how long, how far that long run is. Then you can start figuring out what to do between now and then.

And so I like to say when you are going to enter the training plan. So that's that first, that's week one of your training plan. I call that entering the training plan. So you know once you've got that in your calendar how much time you have between now and when you enter the plan.

So for example, if the plan kicks off, that first week, the longest run is four miles, let's use that as an example. Here's what you need to do. You need to make sure that you are comfortable with that four-mile distance before you enter the training plan.

So between now and then, let's say you've got two months before you need to enter the training plan. You're going to include that four-mile distance on your running schedule maybe two times a month for the next two months before you officially start training.

And during those two months, you should be consistently running three times a week. So for the two months before you're entering your training plan, you're going to do that first long run distance twice a month, you're going to be consistently running three times a week, and then of those three runs, twice a week, two of them are going to be a relaxed pace. Sort of a long run pace.

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That does include the actual long runs. And then once a week I want that workout to be either sprints or hills or a tempo run, which is when you're running faster than your long run race but not quite your race pace. So for that two months before your race training starts, you're kind of in maintenance mode and also sort of ramp up mode.

You are getting your body reused to a three time a week run, in case you've taken some time off. You're getting your body used to that three time a week run. You're getting yourself ramped up to the mileage that you need to be at to enter the training plan. You're doing just enough to ensure you're ready to start that training plan but also not pushing so hard that you're overtrained.

This is a great time to have fun with your cross training, cycling, swimming, dance class, whatever it is you enjoy that gets your heart pumping. Now, if your training starts more than two months from now, like say you're entering your training plan four months from now, for the next couple months, you could even scale it back to running like, twice a week instead of three times a week, and throw in an extra rest day.

Or you could sub out a running day with a walking or a cross training day. But whatever you decide, the bottom line, the way you need to use your time between now and when you enter the training plan is you're going to deliberately scale back a bit on your running to give your body a break so that you'll be in great shape to start your training plan.

And then you're slowly going to ramp up to your starting mileage over that two months before the plan kicks off and you're going to be good to go. So it's not really all that complicated. You're really kind of putting your body in a holding pattern of various degrees of effort. And as you get closer and closer to entering that training plan, you're building up the mileage but you're still not going super hard. And once you enter that training plan, then

you're going to follow it to the letter and you'll be in great shape for your race.

Now, let's talk about the feeling of boredom or that feeling of lack of motivation because that's really the question of what you should be doing between now and your race day is a lot easier to answer than how do I make myself do it. Because you might know exactly what you need to do but you're struggling without a race, if you don't have a race on the calendar of it's like, 10 months away.

You're like, well, I'm just not really motivated right now. So let's talk about it. Because it's one of the most common things I hear that without an in-person race to look forward to, running either feels boring or you're just not motivated to do it.

And I do totally get it because we think that races keep us motivated to train and that's not quite true. The race doesn't actually motivate you. It's really your thoughts about the race that get you going. The race is just a race. It's just a circumstance.

And in response to that, the circumstance, you think, "Oh, I better keep training or I'm going to have a shitty race or I might not finish." And that's the thought you have that makes you feel determined, motivated, maybe a little bit panicked. And those emotions drive the action of running.

So the race doesn't motivate you. It is your thoughts about the race. And when the race isn't there, that thought, "Oh, I better keep training or I'm going to have a shitty race," it feels kind of dumb. Because you're like, well, there is no race so there's no way for me to fail.

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So I mean, signing up for a race is totally a brain hack to help you create thoughts that drive training and that's all fine and good until there's a worldwide pandemic. So I mean, we're kind of hitting the reality right now of okay, I got to figure out how to motivate myself with my thinking rather than relying on an external thing.

So I want you to know that you can for sure sit around and complain that there are no races. I mean, it won't be inaccurate when you say there are no races. But when you're complaining about it and kind of whining about it, those thoughts, "There's no races, I'm not motivated," they make you feel resentful and hopeless and unmotivated.

And guess what? When you have those emotions, because what you're thinking about the pandemic and the race cancelations, when you have those emotions, are you going to get out there and run? No. You're going to sit at home with your pity party hat on eating Cheetos on the couch. Ask me how I know.

So the point here is that it is not the race that motivated you to run last year or in 2019 I guess, back when we had races. It wasn't the race that was motivating you. It was your thoughts. And when the races went away, your thoughts changed from, "Oh, I'm so excited about this race, I better get out there and train," to, "What's the point?"

You know I'm right. Your race was canceled and you immediately thought, "What's the point in training now?" You felt hopeless, frustrated, disappointed, and when you felt those emotions, the action that you were taking was not running. Or maybe it was sporadic running.

So the lack of race is not the problem. It is your thought. What's the point? That thought, not super helpful. So let's just own that. So stop blaming the

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pandemic, or the race directors, or whatever. I mean, yes, it sucks that everything was canceled but we're all in the same boat.

Nobody is like, has this magic place where there's tons of races and they're keeping it all to themselves. We're all in the same boat. Telling yourself that you're unmotivated without a race is not helping you. It is keeping you stuck and it is bullshit. You got to own your own motivation.

And I could tell you, I could say you need to figure out all the reasons why you love to run and you need to figure out your why. And I mean, yeah, that's true. But really, you just got to decide that a lack of a race doesn't mean you stop running. You don't need a fucking race to be motivated. You really, really don't.

You brush your teeth every damn day without a race medal because you like how it feels when you're done brushing your teeth. Running is the same thing. A race is just a moment in time. The real reason you run is because of how it makes you feel, right? You cannot get that feeling from skipping your run.

So be honest with yourself. Your motivation for running has nothing to do with races. Nothing to do with race bling. And everything to do with the way you want to feel when you are a runner. And that is your motivation, my friend. That feeling of accomplishment and pride, the feeling of relief from the swirling thoughts in your brain.

You know it's like you're so stressed out from work, you come home, you go running, 10 minutes in, it's like you hit that moment when your mind finally goes blank and you're just right there in the moment and it just feels so good. And then that amazing exhaustion that feels so awesome when you're done.

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So those feelings, both emotions and the physical feelings in your body, that's your motivation. A race, just a moment in time. Really, it is just one day. Your motivation for running is the continual satisfaction you get from training and you don't need a race for that. You really don't.

And guess what? If you decide like, you know what, there's no races right now, I think I want to do something else exercise wise to get that feeling, I just want to mix it up a little bit, you go do you. That's totally fine.

So don't tell yourself the races are gone so I had to find something else to do. It's like, oh, the races are gone, I'm going to take this as a tactical break from running and do something different and explore that. Own it in a positive way. Don't pretend like running was taken away from you because everything got canceled because it wasn't. You've been taking it away from yourself.

Okay, now before I close this episode, I do want to let you know that on April 11th, I'm doing a half-day workshop on how to stay consistent with exercise, whether it's running or strength training or something else. Registration for that class opens up next week on March 28th, which I think is a Sunday.

And what I'm going to do in that class is teach you all the reasons you're struggling with consistency and then how to get past them. So I will be sharing the signup link for that class next week so make sure you come back next week and listen to the podcast.

And my rebellious friends, that is it for today. It's a short and sweet episode. So I love you, stay safe, and get your ass out there and run. I'll talk to you next week.

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

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a Race Coming Up

Oh, and one last thing. If you enjoyed listening to this episode, you have to check out the Rebel Runner Roadmap. It's a 30-day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you've always wanted to be. Head on over to rebelrunnerroadmap.com to join. I'd love to be a part of your journey.