



HANSONS HALF MARATHON METHOD

RUN YOUR BEST HALF-MARATHON THE HANSONS WAY

LUKE HUMPHREY WITH KEITH & KEVIN HANSON // Foreword by Desiree Linden

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Contents

Foreword vii
Acknowledgments ix
Introduction 1

the approach PART I

- 1 // Hansons training philosophy 7
 - 2 // Marathon physiology 19
-

the program PART II

- 3 // Training program components 49
 - 4 // Hansons training plans 101
 - 5 // Program modifications 129
-

the strategy PART III

- 6 // Selecting race goals 145
 - 7 // Supplemental training 157
 - 8 // Nutrition and hydration 179
 - 9 // Gearing up 213
 - 10 // Race tactics 235
 - 11 // Post-race recovery 249
-

Appendix A: The Elite Program: Hansons-Brooks Distance Project 259
Appendix B: Sweat loss calculator 275
Index 277
About the authors 283

Introduction

In 1999, brothers Kevin and Keith Hanson were successful coaches and running-store owners in the Detroit metropolitan area. But they had a vision—to change the course of American distance running—and with the help of Brooks Sports started the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project, an Olympic training program for postcollegiate athletes. Fifteen years later, the program has a voice and presence at the most elite level of the sport, producing Olympians and World Championship qualifiers at the half- and full marathon distances.

Over the years, the brothers showed that they can train world-class runners, but around Michigan, they have always been best known for helping everyday runners to achieve their best performances. That's where I (Luke) fit in. In 2004, I joined the program as a fairly decent young runner but have since matured into a two-time Olympic Trials qualifier and sub-1:04:00 half-marathoner with Kevin and Keith as my mentors. Aside from being able to run pretty far at a solid pace, I also have a master's degree in exercise science and began teaching the Hansons Method to our running groups in 2006. As the elite program gained success, this renegade training approach began attracting more and more attention. People started asking questions, wanting to know more, and magazine articles, although they were terrific for exposure, couldn't provide the full picture. In 2012, we were given an avenue to

provide the world with the comprehensive knowledge of the Hanson's Method for the marathon.

When our first book, *Hanson's Marathon Method*, was released, the response was wonderful; almost immediately, however, people were asking, "How do I adapt this for a half-marathon?" This perhaps is not a surprising question if you look at the numbers. According to Running USA, each year, the half-marathon has hundreds of thousands more participants than the marathon. In 2012, the number of half-marathon finishers totaled about 1.85 million, compared with about 487,000 in the marathon. And that number is only growing.

The bottom line is that there are a lot more people lacing up for a 13.1-mile race. Most half-marathoners fall into one of these four general categories:

VETERAN RUNNERS // These runners have logged plenty of miles over the years and have probably run several half-marathons in the past. They are looking to take their previous half-marathon performances to the next level. They have probably run at least one marathon in the past, as well. This is a pretty competitive group.

RECREATIONAL RUNNERS // While members of this group are new to the half-marathon distance, they are not running newbies, having completed a number of shorter races. This group is looking to establish a half-marathon baseline, usually with plans to run another half-marathon in the future and probably to move up to the next level after running the *half-marathon*.

NOVICE RUNNERS // The novice group includes newer runners looking to knock "13.1" off their bucket list, as well as those

running for charity groups. Many of these runners will leave half-marathoning behind once they finish the race. The novice group is prevalent in the half-marathon world, due in part to the robust charity scene. I have many clients who run a race for a loved one while representing that person's cause, and it is often more realistic for them to commit to a half-marathon distance than to the full marathon.

BEGINNING RUNNERS // This group includes a large contingent of charity runners, as well as people who decide to do a race as a way to begin a fitness program. While I certainly would not advise complete beginners to take on a full marathon as their first race, the half-marathon distance is much more readily achievable, with less potential for injury. Out of this group, some will continue to run, moving into another group, and some will abandon the sport following their race.

When we discussed training for a full marathon, we talked about newbies being convinced that they can have it all and not sacrifice any of their free time—or their toenails! For many, that time commitment is probably a pretty big turnoff for the marathon, especially when you are training through summer barbecues and days on the beach, but we never wanted to make you feel that you were about to embark on a walk in the park. Well, when we cut the distance in half, the training doesn't have to be such a commitment, and that probably holds a strong appeal for about 1.8 million people in the United States.

With all of this said, make no bones about it: The Hansons Method is still focused on helping you run the best you can. So, while you may not be cursing us during the middle of a tempo run, you may still grumble under your breath.

A training plan with minimal mileage and three running days per week can be a great way to ease into the sport and build a foundation without getting injured; once the decision is made to make the leap to the marathon, however, it simply isn't enough. For the half-marathon, it may be less detrimental, but it still may not provide you with everything you need to be prepared for the race. Although these plans usually assist runners in reaching their main goal, which is to finish, the by-product is often a dislike of the sport. Because the greatest predictor of adherence to any type of exercise is enjoyment, this certainly isn't a recipe for long-term success in running.

By charting a course for a successful and enjoyable half-marathon experience, the Hansons Method seeks to encourage the crossing of multiple finish lines of multiple race distances. Training should always allow you to transition to different race distances without a major change in overall training philosophy. Unlike a number of the other popular training plans out there, our approach will transform you into not only a finisher but a longtime competitor. We take a straight-talk approach when it comes to teaching you about half-marathon training; we won't sugarcoat, offer any supposed shortcuts, or treat you with condescension. Indeed, running itself wouldn't be a big deal if it didn't require a little blood, a lot of sweat, and perhaps a few tears.

Hansons training philosophy

THIS CHAPTER TAKES A close look at the philosophies that lay the groundwork for the Hansons Half-Marathon Method. You may think that understanding our philosophy is optional, but I strongly encourage you to take time to read this section. Studies show that we are far more likely to adopt and embrace new habits and behaviors if we understand why we are doing something.

The building blocks of this program rest on the teachings of famed coach Arthur Lydiard. Widely credited with popularizing the sport of running, Lydiard led a long line of runners to realize their Olympic dreams. As a result, his ideas about training had a major influence on the development of our methods. As taught by Lydiard, the idea of cumulative fatigue serves as an underlying foundation of all of our training plans.

Cumulative fatigue comes from a slow buildup (but not to the point of overtraining) of fatigue via the days, weeks, and months of consistent training. In other words, cumulative fatigue results

cumulative fatigue is the accumulation of fatigue over days, weeks, and even months of consistent training.

from repetitive training that doesn't allow for full recovery between training days. It emphasizes a concerted, strategic approach to half-marathon training rather than a number of disparate training days strung together at random. The fundamental principle of cumulative fatigue runs throughout the Hanson's Half-Marathon Method and consists of five components:

- // mileage
- // intensity
- // balance
- // consistency
- // active recovery

If you omit one component of the cumulative fatigue philosophy, you interfere with the others, creating a domino effect that limits the physiological adaptations necessary for successful half-marathoning.

Mileage: Strategic weekly volume

The biggest problem with many half-marathon training plans is that they are tailored to fit what the average runner wants, not what he or she needs. These programs usually place a majority of the weekly mileage on Saturday and Sunday, when runners have the most time available. Roughly the same amount of mileage is then spread over a few days of the workweek. This can mean that all the prescribed weekday runs are higher-intensity workouts, leaving few opportunities for easy runs and the accumulation of important training mileage. Since the weekday runs in those plans are mostly high-intensity, it takes a runner longer to recover, causing the easier runs to fall by the wayside. Even

if these plans did specify running on the interim days, runners would likely be too tired from the previous workouts.

Adequate weekly mileage plays an important role in the cumulative fatigue process. Increasing mileage comes along with increasing training from 3-4 days a week to 6 days a week. This doesn't necessarily mean adding intensity but rather more easy mileage. The Hansons Half-Marathon Method shows you how to add that mileage while controlling your pace to avoid overworking yourself. Consider the fact that runners training for a 5K will put in four to six times their actual race distance in mileage each week (see Table 1.1). Although the average half-marathoner won't put in four to five times the half-marathon distance on a weekly basis (50-65 miles), it is reasonable to run roughly three times the distance per week (35-45 miles).

TABLE
1.1

WEEKLY MILEAGE BASED ON
LEVEL AND EVENT

	BEGINNER	COMPETITIVE	ELITE
5K (3.1 mi.)	15-25	40-50	90+
10K (6.2 mi.)	25-30	45-55	90+
half-marathon (13.1 mi.)	30-40	50-60	100+
marathon (26.2 mi.)	40-50	60-70	110+

Although runners preparing for the half-marathon realize that they will need to run more mileage than they would need to for the 5K, it can be a bit intimidating to look at some of these totals. Runners, especially newer ones, will look a few months ahead and doubt that they will be able to handle the training. What those runners lack is confidence. We

tell runners to start at the ridiculous, or what they think is completely beyond their capabilities, and work backward until they reach a point that is both mentally and physically manageable. While 35–45 miles per week may sound ridiculous on day one, focusing on what you have to do in the present is key. You will be surprised by what you are able to handle a few months down the line.

Again and again we have seen that athletes who give their bodies adequate time to adapt to new training stresses are able to tolerate much more than they ever imagined to be feasible. Our program works to take you up the mileage ladder one rung at a time, starting with lower mileage and gradually increasing both mileage and intensity. As I like to say to our athletes, “If you want to build a house, you must first create a structure to hold it up.” The volume of mileage builds a foundation that allows all the other variables to work.

Intensity: Physiological adaptations

In addition to an appropriate amount of total weekly mileage, our plans stand apart from the rest in terms of pace and intensity. These factors are inextricably linked because if workouts are overly difficult, you’re going to be too tired to reach your weekly mileage quotas. In the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project, the competition can be fierce among our elite athletes. Teaching proper pacing is perhaps our biggest struggle with runners. During workouts, Kevin and Keith always seem to know when an athlete has developed an “I know you’re fast, but I’m just a little bit faster” mentality toward another runner. As a means of emphasizing the importance of pace and punishing runners who run faster than they are instructed to, they dole out push-ups for every second someone is too fast. After a few penalty push-ups, the athlete inevitably pulls back on the reins and falls into step.

While we won't make you do push-ups when you falter in your pacing, pacing does remain an important component of cumulative fatigue. The majority of our suggested mileage is run at anaerobic threshold (lactate threshold) pace or slower. You may wonder, "How am I supposed to get faster if I'm running slower?" In the next chapter, we will explain the many beneficial adaptations that come with endurance training, such as mitochondria development, muscle fiber adaptations, and the ability to burn fat as fuel. Exercise physiologists have discovered that these adaptations are best elicited through a pace that is slower than anaerobic threshold pace. This improves your running by pushing the aerobic threshold, anaerobic threshold, and aerobic capacity up from the bottom instead of trying to pull them up from the top. Whether it is an easy running day or a hard workout, executing the task at the appropriate pace is integral to the entire training system.

Easy runs are often misunderstood as junk mileage or filler training. The truth is, easy runs make up a big percentage of the training week, and when they are run at the optimal intensities, they promote a wide array of favorable physiological adaptations. Despite this fact, both novices and experienced runners struggle with properly pacing these relaxed workouts. Newer runners tend to run their easy days too hard because the gradual training plan feels too easy. Most of the time, the intensity evens out as mileage increases and the runner is too tired to maintain that pace throughout the week. However, as a coach, I would prefer to have you adjust the pace to your half-marathon goal and train properly from day one. This allows you to increase your mileage and intensity safely over weeks and months. More experienced runners tend to get overzealous in their training, believing that faster is better, especially for those moving up from running competitively at shorter distances. Runners in this situation

will quickly be benched as a result of overtraining if they don't temper their excitement and allow easy runs to truly be easy. Regardless of your current level, when we instruct you to run "easy," we really mean easy. Once you add in hard workouts, these easy days will serve as active recovery to allow your body to bounce back and prepare for the next workout.

Proper pacing during hard workouts is equally vital. We cannot stress enough that workouts are designed to spur specific physiological adaptations; they are not to be run as hard as you can to see who is the last person standing. For instance, tempo runs and strength workouts develop the anaerobic threshold, but that doesn't mean you should be running a tempo workout faster than anaerobic threshold pace. Similarly, speed workouts develop aerobic capacity and should be run just under your maximal aerobic capacity, not beyond it. Imagine if you are instructed to run 6 × 800-meter repeats at 5K pace. Let's say this pace is 6:00 minutes per mile, or 3:00 for 800 meters. If you do the first three intervals at 2:45, 2:45, and 2:55, there's a good chance the last three will be around 3:10, 3:15, and perhaps 3:10. While you averaged 3:00, you failed to hit a single interval at the prescribed pace. This means that you didn't accumulate any training at the desired pace, which was specifically set to stimulate aerobic capacity. The first three were too fast, which exceeded $\text{VO}_{2\text{max}}$, producing anaerobic energy and lactic acid. The last three were then progressively slower due to fatigue and lactic acid buildup. In the end, you drove yourself into the ground without gaining any major physiological benefits.

Now you understand why Kevin and Keith assign push-ups. By keeping your paces in check across the training spectrum, you'll tolerate higher training volumes. You'll also be more consistent in training because you won't be so worn-out that you need to take unscheduled days off or modify workouts. Cumulative fatigue is designed to

make you tired, but running paces faster than prescribed will put you beyond the point of being able to recover sufficiently. That really is junk mileage.

Balance: Training equilibrium

Whether you are training for a 5K or a marathon, there should always be one constant: balance. So many programs emphasize one area of training and sacrifice others. For instance, a 5K program may focus on doing repeats on the track two times a week at the expense of a weekly long run. On the other hand, a marathon program may put sole focus on surviving weekly long runs, but no speed work is to be seen. To fully reach your potential as a runner, all the physiological systems must be incorporated into training. Remember, nothing is make-or-break. The long run won't make your half-marathon if it's the only thing you focus on. Being strong and fast and having endurance will make your half-marathon! This is why all of our programs emphasize a balanced approach to training.

The Hansons Half-Marathon Method presents you with two types of runs: easy and something of substance (SOS). SOS runs include speed workouts, strength workouts, tempo runs, and long runs. Think of these runs as workouts that require more effort than do easy days. By varying the training, you reap the necessary physiological benefits in addition to maintaining motivation. If variety is the spice of life, you'd better include a good amount of it in your training. In the same way that your mind gets bored with repetition, so does your body. When you cycle your workouts and stress each individual system, you stimulate a steady rate of physiological adaptation. By giving time and energy not just to the long run but also to easy, strength, speed, tempo, and recovery days, you'll be a stronger, more balanced runner.

There is such a thing as too much of a good thing. When you balance your training, you'll be sure to get just the right amount of each of those things.

Consistency: Sticking to the game plan

As a coach, I find that many runners struggle with training consistency. One week they run three days, the next four days, and the next week maybe only two days. This is unsurprising because each week brings its own challenges and surprises: Your boss imposes a last-minute deadline, your car breaks down, or your child gets sick. The unpredictability of life can make sticking to a training plan difficult. While training adjustments are necessary at times, a regular running schedule remains important.

Physiologically speaking, inconsistency in training makes for a never-ending struggle to maintain even a baseline of fitness. While adaptations can occur rapidly with proper training, they can also be lost with just a couple of weeks of inconsistent running. For instance, if you train 5 days a week for 3 weeks, a noticeable improvement in fitness will take place; if, however, those weeks are followed by 2 weeks of training only 2 or 3 days a week, your fitness gains will begin to retreat. It then requires 2 more weeks of consistent running to get back to the previous level. In the end, 6–8 weeks of running went by just to get you back to where you were at the third week. If life intervenes, modify training, but don't skip it. Something is always better than nothing.

To achieve this consistency, you must establish attainable goals and plan ahead. If you set your sights too high, you're likely to get discouraged when you discover you have too much on your plate. Conversely, if you set them too low, you get bored. Properly placed goals will keep you motivated to get out the door each day, even when running feels

like the last thing you want to do. Planning your weekly running schedule in advance also aids in commitment. Rather than looking at the training program the morning of a workout, you know what to expect for the next 5-7 days. By penciling your runs into your day planner or posting them on your refrigerator, you can plan for hurdles that may be thrown in front of you throughout the week. If you have an early morning meeting on Tuesday, plan on running after work. If your kids have a soccer tournament all weekend, find an opening between games to fit your run in. When you schedule your runs, you are far more likely to stick to the plan and remain consistent in your training.

Active recovery: Partial rest

When it comes to cumulative fatigue, you walk a fine line between training enough and overtraining. The goal of the Hansons Method is to take you close to the line but not over it. The training you do throughout the course of the program is tough, but it will lead to a better, more enjoyable race-day result. Incomplete recovery is an important part of the training because it allows you to perform well, even when you aren't feeling 100 percent.

Whether you are doing a speed, strength, tempo, or long run, there is a general preoccupation with the idea of being "fresh" for workouts. That freshness, however, requires days off before and after workouts, which takes away from the crucial aerobic adaptations that easy runs offer. While we don't put hard workouts back-to-back, we do employ the idea of active recovery. This means that workouts are often followed by easy running days. This allows you to recover for the next hard workout without taking the day off from running. Think about it this way: After a hard workout, your muscles are depleted of glycogen and feel supremely fatigued. At this time it is important to replace

that glycogen, hydrate, and allow the muscles to heal. This, however, doesn't mean you should lie inert on the couch for the next 24 hours. For one thing, you can't gain any aerobic fitness if you take the next day off. Also, you never teach your body how to deal with long-term discomfort if you always allow it to completely recover. Easy running is done at low enough intensities that you are primarily burning fat, allowing your body time to rebuild the lost carbohydrate (glycogen) stores. In addition, your muscles learn to more efficiently burn fat because they are running at a pace that promotes fat burning rather than carbohydrate depletion. The muscles also adapt to the training loads placed on them and will eventually become stronger. This means you can handle increased workloads, recover, and gain aerobic fitness faster if you just run easy on days you don't have a hard workout.

active recovery is a light workout where the heart rate is elevated but for a short period of time, such as 15–30 minutes.

While recovery is important, cumulative fatigue calls for only partial recuperation. Even after an easy-run day, your muscles may still be somewhat fatigued and glycogen stores only moderately refueled, causing you to feel slightly sluggish. This is normal. You are training your body to withstand many miles of running. Just as you may feel sluggish toward the end of the half-marathon and will need to push through, it is important to learn to keep moving forward during your training. This makes cumulative fatigue an integral part of your long runs. Although you'll have the last few days of training still in your legs, you'll be recovered enough to run the long run as desired. Our method

teaches your legs to withstand the latter portion of the half-marathon by loading them with a little fatigue prior to the long runs.

Put simply, we're looking to simulate running tired. By feeling fatigued going into a workout, you know how the late stages of a race will feel. Knowing you can nail a workout while tired from regular training will boost your confidence late in the race when things get hard physically and mentally. That being said, the stress is not so great that you will need the following week to recover. Instead, the next day will be easy, and then a workout will follow a couple of days after that. Through a number of physiological adaptations, cumulative fatigue trains your body to be fully prepared for the physiological stress imparted by the half-marathon distance. As you look at our training programs, you'll notice that every 4 weeks, the mileage increases slightly via easy days, tempo runs, and long runs. As your body adapts, you vary the stress and continue the progression upward. Leading up to the big day, you will finally allow your body to fully recover, giving you that fresh feeling as you toe the line. In other words, you are ready for peak performance. Our programs are designed this way to help you feel your best during the race, not during training. After all, you never want to execute your best performance in practice.

Training for a half-marathon isn't easy, and it shouldn't be taken lightly; a few curse words may be uttered, favorite television shows missed, and social outings forgone, but you will regret nothing when you successfully cross that finish line. This entire program has been developed by great coaches who have learned from other great coaches. It is a philosophy that can transform you from a person who wants to run a half-marathon into a bona fide half-marathoner. We're here to get you there.

Understanding certain physiological principles will help you make sense of the structure of the training program. That foundation will

provide the “why” while the program will provide the “what to do” and “when to do it.” The structure of the Hansons Half-Marathon Method is dependent on the physiological basis of endurance running performance. By understanding these key principles, runners are less likely to make critical mistakes in their training.

The end result of all these components is the idea of cumulative fatigue. After reading the previous pages, you have, I hope, picked up on one thing—these components are all related. If you remove one or change one drastically, the whole flow of the philosophy is disrupted. The marathon training version of our program asks for a very substantial commitment. However, the beauty of the half-marathon is that the training doesn't need to consume as much of your time, and our half-marathon plan may seem like less of a risk than the marathon plan if it is very different from other types of training you have tried. It's also great for me as a coach because I can introduce you to a slimmer version of the training and then trick you into training for the full marathon later on! On a serious note, though, don't be fooled. Training for a half-marathon takes focus and a strong commitment; the results, however, will be well worth that commitment.

Index

Page references followed by f denote figures. Page references followed by t denote tables.

- Achilles tendinitis, 169, 217
- Adaptations, 14–16, 28, 30, 52, 65, 132, 141, 264, 266
 - described, 11–12
 - easy running and, 52–56, 58
 - heart strengthening, 28–31, 81
 - long runs and, 62, 63–65
 - speed workouts and, 67–70
 - strength workouts and, 80–83
 - to stress, 16, 24–25, 28, 45, 51, 65
- Advanced Program, 102, 113t, 147, 149
 - described, 112–113, 118
 - mileage for, 52, 130–131, 255
 - training schedule, 114t–117t
- Aerobic capacity, 11, 12, 32, 56, 67, 105, 146, 193
- Aerobic metabolism, 15, 16, 20, 22, 35–36, 37, 54, 57, 67, 80, 90, 112, 190, 264
- Aerobic threshold, 11, 37–42, 94
- Anaerobic metabolism, 23, 32, 35, 36–37, 56, 69, 80, 186
- Anaerobic threshold, 11, 12, 20–21, 80, 82, 90, 94
 - described, 35–37
 - increasing, 11, 12, 13, 20, 37, 56, 68, 81, 105
 - pace, 11, 12, 36–37, 82
- Apparel, 232–234, 240–241
- Arches, 216–218, 220, 221
- Arm swings, 163
- Back, stretch for lower, 170
- Back extension, 176
- Back injuries, 169
- Balance, 13–14
- Beginner Program, 102, 147, 149, 230
 - described, 103–107
 - mileage for, 130, 255
 - speed progression, 72
 - training schedule, 108t–111t, 134t–135t
- Blood, 28–31, 55, 81, 139, 158, 191, 196, 197, 234
- Blood glucose, 201, 250
- Bounders, 167
- Bridge, 177
- Burnout, 44, 63, 106, 260. *See also* Over-training
- Butt kicks, 166
- Calories
 - burning, 207–208, 208t, 210
 - calculating needs, 181–184
 - consuming, 180–184, 202, 205, 211, 239–240, 245–246, 250, 251
 - serving recommendations for, 182t–183t, 184
 - stored, 209–211, 210t, 211t
- Calves stretch, 171
- Capillaries, 22, 23, 24t, 30–31, 45, 55, 62, 68
- Carbohydrates, 185–188, 195, 196, 200–203, 209. *See also* Glycogen
 - consuming, 185–186, 188, 205–206, 239, 240, 251
 - importance of, 186–188
 - source of, 185–186, 202, 204
 - stores of, 16, 38, 39, 40, 187, 202, 205, 209–211, 210t, 211t

- Carbohydrates (*continued*)
 use as fuel, 22, 31–32, 38–40, 39f, 54,
 186–188, 190, 207–211, 208t, 266
- Cariocas, 167
- Checklist, race day, 247
- Chest stretch, 171
- Clothing, 232–234, 240–241
- Conflicts, adjusting for, 134–136
- Consistency, 14–15, 45, 178
- Cooldown, 57, 83, 91, 104, 105, 126, 131, 150
- Costill, David, 63
- Course, studying, 238
- Crosstraining, 59–60, 157, 158–161
- Crunch, 175
- Cumulative fatigue, 7–17, 51, 61, 91, 97, 106,
 124
- Cushioning, shoe, 220, 222, 223, 227, 232
- Cutdown (tempo run), 266
- Daniels, Jack, 62–63
- Deep venous thrombosis, 234
- Dehydration, 192–196, 199
- Delayed onset muscle soreness, 234
- Diet, 181, 184, 185, 189, 190, 205. *See also*
 Nutrition
- Easy runs/days, 8–9, 13, 50, 59–60, 125, 133,
 136, 137–141, 196, 263
 Advanced Program, 114t–117t, 130–132
 Beginner Program, 108t–111t
 benefits of, 15–16, 52–56, 53f
 described, 52–60
 guidelines, 56–59, 58t–59t
 Just Finish Program, 120t–123t
 pace, 11–12, 54, 56–57, 58, 97, 98t
 in weekly schedule, 58–59, 58t–59t, 61
- Eating. *See also* Nutrition
 post-race, 250–251
 pre-race, 204–206, 239, 240
 what and when to eat, 198–204, 199t
- 800 repeats, 75t
- Electrolytes, 35, 191, 193, 197, 201, 251
- Elite Program, 259–273
 components of, 261–267
 sample training log for, 267, 268t–273t
 training cycle, 9-day, 261–262
- Endurance, 13, 22, 23, 27, 35, 56, 90, 119, 139,
 185, 192
- Endurance training, 32, 50, 90
 benefits of, 28–32, 29t, 254
 fat-burning and, 38, 189–190
 long runs and, 63–64
- Energy, 20, 21, 23, 35, 37–42, 45, 54, 61–63,
 186, 190–192, 210
- Enzymes, 31, 41, 45, 54–55, 97
- Even split strategy, 89, 243
- Exercises, 163–168, 170–174, 175–177
- Fast-twitch (Type II) fibers, 21–27, 24t, 25t,
 53–54, 62, 163, 168, 174
- Fatigue, 15–17, 35, 63, 80, 91, 95, 96, 107, 126,
 174, 224
 cumulative, 7–17, 51, 61, 91, 97, 106, 124
 muscle fiber types and, 23, 24t, 27, 53–54,
 62, 67
- Fats, 38, 187, 188–190, 210t, 211t
 burning, 11, 16, 22, 26, 31, 37–42, 39f,
 54–55, 62, 90, 112, 187, 190, 200,
 207–208, 208t, 211, 266
 importance of, 189–190
 sources of, 189–190
 stores of, 38, 54, 189
- Fitness, 16, 68, 96, 105, 133, 140, 159–160,
 253, 266
- 5K, 20
 post-half marathon race, 256
 race equivalency chart, 152t, 154t
 speed workout pace charts, 73t–79t
 training intensity pace chart, 99t, 100
 weekly mileage, 9, 9t
- Flexibility, 161–174
- Fluids
 absorption of, 195–196, 201
 consuming, 186, 194–201, 203, 205, 240,
 244–246, 251
 loss, 193–194, 197, 199–200, 207
- Foot strike, 214–218
- Foot types, 216–219
- Forefoot strike, 215, 225
- 4 and Go! (tempo run), 267
- 400 repeats, 73t
- Fractional utilization of maximal capacity, 81
- Freshness, 15, 17, 58, 96, 161
- Gait analysis, 228–229
- Gear, 213–234
- Gels, 201–203, 208, 240, 246
- Genetics, muscle fibers types and, 22, 26,
 52–53
- Gluteal stretch, 172
- Glycemic index, 203–204
- Glycogen
 depletion, 15, 38, 54, 63, 68, 139, 186, 188,
 193, 250, 251, 252
 rebuilding, 16, 63, 205, 249, 251
 saving, 26, 37, 40, 42, 81
 stores of, 16, 26, 62, 68, 188, 193, 207, 209,
 239–240

- Goals, 20, 49, 59, 80, 90, 95, 101–106, 118, 124–125, 130, 133–134, 138–140, 206, 207, 253, 256
 - adjusting, 151, 156
 - pace charts and, 73t–79t, 85t–88t, 98t–99t
 - race, 138–140, 145–156
 - setting, 14, 148–150, 255
 - SMART, 146–147, 156
- Grapevine, 167
- Groin stretch, 172
- Half-squat, 164
- Hamstrings stretch, 173
- Hansons-Brooks Distance Project, 1, 10, 50, 132, 259–261, 263–264, 267
- Hansons Marathon Method* (book), 2, 129, 256
- Hansons Method, 1–4, 7–17, 27, 37, 45, 50, 56, 59, 61, 63, 66, 69, 71, 89, 91, 96, 101, 129, 158
- Heart, strengthening, 28–31, 81
- Heart rate, 16, 29, 192, 199
- Heat stroke/exhaustion, 193
- Heel counter, 221, 222
- Heel strike, 215, 225
- Hemoglobin, 55, 68
- High knees, 166
- Hills, 50, 149
- Hip circles, 164
- Hip flexors/quads stretch, 173
- Hips stretch, 173
- Hydration, 192–198
 - dehydration, 192–196, 199
 - pre-race, 205, 206, 239
 - during race, 244–246
 - restoring, 249, 250, 251
 - what and when to drink, 198–204, 199t
- Hyponatremia, 197–198
- Illness, adjusting for, 136–141
- Injuries, 66, 126, 158, 169, 225–226, 231
 - adjusting for, 136–141
 - crosstraining during, 158–159, 160
 - overpronation and, 217
 - overstriding and, 215
 - preventing, 58, 169, 174, 178
 - rate trend in, 225–226
 - risk of, 63, 69, 83, 103, 105, 106, 107, 118, 135, 162, 168
 - shoes and, 223–225, 231–232
 - supination and, 217–218
- Intensity, 26, 51, 103–105, 118, 133, 141, 204
 - calorie expenditure and, 207–210
 - as cumulative fatigue component, 10–13
 - of easy runs, 16, 54, 56
 - energy sources and, 16, 38, 39f, 54
 - increasing, 9, 10, 266
 - pace and, 10–13, 94f, 97–100, 98t–99t
 - of speed workouts, 65, 70
 - of strength workouts, 80, 82
 - tapering, 95–97
 - training intensity chart, 97–100, 98t–99t
- Intermediate fibers, 23, 26, 67, 81, 163, 168
- Just Finish Program, 102, 103, 118–119, 120t–123t, 130, 133, 140, 146–147, 149, 255
- Lactate (lactic acid)
 - buildup, 12, 35–36, 80, 81, 82, 83, 199
 - production and clearance of, 36, 39f, 42, 80, 81–82, 233–234
 - threshold, 11, 20, 36–37, 264, 267
- Ladder pace chart, 78t
- Leg kicks, 165
- Leg swings, 165
- Long runs, 13, 50, 52, 57, 80, 125, 134, 136, 137, 161, 252
 - Advanced Program, 112–113, 113t, 117t
 - Beginner Program, 106–107, 109t, 111t
 - benefits of, 61–62
 - described, 60–61
 - distance based on weekly mileage, 64t
 - duration based on pace per mile, 65t
 - Elite Program, 264, 265–266
 - guidelines, 62–65, 64t, 65t
 - Just Finish Program, 121t, 123t
 - pace, 63–65, 65t, 99t
 - in weekly schedule, 58, 59t
- Low back stretch, 170
- Lydiard, Arthur, 7
- Marathon, 3, 13, 18, 20, 98t–99t, 256–257
- Martin, Dave, 63
- Mental preparation, 241–242
- Midfoot strike, 215, 216, 225
- Midsole, 219–220, 222, 227
- Mileage. *See also* Training volume
 - base miles, 102, 133
 - as cumulative fatigue component, 8–10
 - for Elite Program, 261–265
 - increasing, 9, 10, 17, 57–61, 118, 125, 130–133, 254–256, 260
 - junk, 11, 13, 42
 - post-race, 253–255
 - tapering, 95–97, 107
 - weekly, 8–10, 9t, 50, 51f, 61, 63, 103–107, 112, 125, 130–132, 161, 255, 262–263

- Mile splits, 242–243
- Mitochondria, 11, 22, 23, 24t, 31–32, 38, 41, 45, 54–55, 68, 90, 112, 190
- Motor unit, 22, 26
- Muscle(s), 21–27
 - adaptations of, 65
 - breakdown of, 64, 69, 190, 249, 252
 - contraction, 22, 23, 23t, 35, 37, 53
 - engagement, 168
 - fatigue, 15–16, 35
 - glycogen stores, 15–16
 - strength, 16, 62
- Muscle fibers, 21–27, 112
 - conversion of, 24–25
 - fast-twitch (Type II) fibers, 21–27, 24t, 25t, 53–54, 62, 163, 168, 174
 - intermediate fibers, 23, 26, 67, 81, 163, 168
 - slow-twitch (Type I), 21–27, 24t, 25t, 52–54, 62, 67, 168, 211
- Myoglobin, 67–68
- Negative split strategy, 89, 242–243
- Noakes, Tim, 63
- Nutrition, 179–192. *See also* Carbohydrates; Fats; Protein
 - calorie consumption, 180–184, 182t–183t
 - fueling plan prior to race day, 204–206
 - race fueling strategy, 206–211, 208t, 210t, 211t
 - what and when to eat, 198–204, 199t
- 1K repeats, 76t
- 1-mile repeats, 85t
- 1.5-mile repeats, 86t
- Overload principle, 50–51
- Overpronation, 217, 222
- Overstriding, 215–216
- Overtraining, 7, 9, 12, 15, 44, 51, 63, 65, 103, 106, 135, 156, 160–161, 260
- Oxygen, 45, 199. *See also* VO_2max
 - delivery of, 22, 28, 30–31, 55, 67, 81
 - running economy and, 42–43
 - utilization, 67, 80
- Pace, 12, 26, 38, 50, 51, 104–106, 148, 193, 200, 207, 263, 266
 - anaerobic threshold, 11, 12, 36–37, 82
 - of easy runs, 11–12, 54, 56–57, 58, 97, 98t
 - foot stride and, 216
 - how to pace workouts, 94–95, 94f
 - intensity and, 10–13, 94f, 97–100, 98t–99t
 - internalizing, 89, 91
 - of long runs, 63–65, 65t, 99t
 - midrace adjustments, 246–247
 - physiological adaptations and, 11, 56
 - race, 242–244, 246–247
 - running economy, 42–45
 - of speed workouts, 68–69, 71–72, 73t–79t, 94–95, 94f, 99t
 - of strength workouts, 81–84, 83t, 85t–88t, 94–95, 94f, 99t
 - of tempo runs, 89–91, 93t, 94f, 95, 99t
- Pace charts
 - for speed workouts, 73t–79t
 - for strength workouts, 85t–88t
 - for tempo runs, 93t
- Performance, 27, 32, 36, 139, 150
 - diet and, 186, 187, 189–190, 199
 - foot strike and, 214
 - hydration and, 196, 199
 - pace and, 89
 - running economy and, 44–45
 - strength training and, 174, 178
 - sweat loss and, 192–193
- Physiology. *See also* Adaptations
 - aerobic threshold, 11, 37–42
 - anaerobic threshold, 11, 12, 20–21, 35–37
 - of easy running, 52–56
 - of long runs, 61–62
 - marathon, 19–45
 - running economy, 42–45
 - running-specific muscles, 21–27
 - of speed workouts, 67–68
 - of strength workouts, 80–82
 - of tempo workouts, 90–91
 - VO_2max , 12, 27–35, 29f
- Plantar fasciitis, 217
- Post-race recovery, 249–257
- Posture, 216
- Preparation
 - mental, 241–242
 - pre-race, 236–238
 - race day checklist, 247
 - race weekend, 238–242
- Pre-race preparation, 236–238
- Pronation, 217
- Protein, 190–192
- Race day checklist, 247
- Race equivalency chart, 150–151, 152t–155t
- Race expo, 238
- Race protocol, 242–247
 - midrace pace adjustments, 246–247
 - race fuel, 244–246
 - race time, 242–244
- Races, adjusting for, 132–134, 134t–135t

- Race tactics, 235–247
 - pre-race preparation, 236–238
 - race day checklist, 247
 - race protocol, 242–247
 - race weekend, 238–242
- Race weekend, 238–242
 - before bed, 239–240
 - mental preparation, 241–242
 - pre-race dinner, 239
 - race expo, 238
 - race morning, 240–241
- Range of motion, 161–162, 169, 174
- Recovery, 8, 140, 159
 - active, 12, 15–17
 - crosstraining during, 159
 - diet and, 191–192
 - on easy running days, 10, 61
 - in Elite Program, 262–263
 - incomplete/partial, 15, 61, 97
 - post-race, 249–257, 252t–255t
 - in speed workouts, 65, 69–70, 82, 104, 105
 - in strength workouts, 82–83
 - training intensity pace chart, 98t–99t
- Runners, categories of, 2–3
- Running economy, 42–45, 56, 67, 80, 90, 231
- Scheduling runs, 15
- Shin splints, 169
- Shoes
 - choosing, 213–214, 227–230
 - construction, 219–221
 - cushioning, 220, 222, 223, 227, 232
 - foot types and, 216–219
 - pricing, 226–227
 - race day, 231–232
 - replacing, 230
 - stride biomechanics and, 214–216
 - types, 221–226
 - wear pattern in, 228
- Shoe types, 221–226
 - lightweight, 222–223
 - minimalist, 223–226
 - motion control, 222
 - neutral, 222
 - racing flats, 223, 224, 231–232
 - stability, 222
- Shoulder stretch, 170
- Side bends, 164
- Side plank, 177
- Simulator, 265
- 600 repeats, 74t
- 1600 repeats, 71, 79t
- Slow skipping, 165
- Slow-twitch (Type I) fibers, 21–27, 24t, 25t, 52–54, 62, 67, 168, 211
- Something of substance (SOS) workouts, 13, 50, 52, 57, 58, 96, 106, 112–113, 124–127, 130, 132, 133, 136, 137, 149–151, 160, 184, 196, 223, 232, 254, 262, 263, 265. *See also* Long runs; Speed workouts; Strength workouts; Tempo runs
- Specificity, 59, 158
- Spectators, 237
- Speed progression chart, 72
- Speed workouts, 13, 50, 124–125, 127, 133, 136, 162, 224
 - Advanced Program, 113, 114t, 118
 - Beginner Program, 104–106, 108t
 - benefits of, 67–68
 - described, 65–67
 - duration of, 69–70, 71
 - Elite Program, 264
 - guidelines, 68–72, 72t–79t
 - importance of, 66
 - Just Finish Program, 120t
 - pacing, 68–69, 71–72, 73t–79t, 94–95, 94f
 - physiology of, 67–68
 - post-half marathon race, 256
 - recovery in, 65, 69–70, 82, 104, 105
 - running economy and, 44
 - in weekly schedule, 58, 58t
- Sports drinks, 195, 197, 199, 201–202, 205, 245–246
- Sprints, 168
- Strength progression chart, 84
- Strength training, 174–178
- Strength workouts, 12, 13, 50, 125–127, 135, 138–140, 162, 254
 - Advanced Program, 113, 116t
 - Beginner Program, 106, 110t
 - benefits of, 80–82
 - described, 80
 - Elite Program, 264–265, 267
 - guidelines, 82–84, 83t
 - pace and, 81–84, 83t, 85t–88t, 94–95, 94f, 99t
 - physiology of, 80–82
 - recovery in, 82–83
 - speed workouts compared to, 68–69
- Stress, 55, 71, 82, 224, 236
 - adapting to, 10, 17, 24–25, 28, 45, 51, 65
- Stretching, 161–174
 - dynamic, 162–168
 - static, 168–174

- Stride
 - biomechanics, 214–216
 - lengthening, 215
 - minimalist footwear and, 224
 - overstriding, 215–216
- Superman, 176
- Supination, 217–218
- Sweat loss, 191, 192–193, 199, 275t–276t
- Sweat rates, 192–193, 199
- Tapering, 95–97, 107
- Tempo runs, 12, 13, 44, 57, 80, 82, 97, 125–127, 131, 133–134, 136, 137, 162
 - Advanced Program, 113, 114t, 116t, 118
 - Beginner Program, 105–107, 108t, 110t
 - Elite Program, 265, 266–267
 - Just Finish Program, 120t
 - pace, 89–91, 93t, 94t, 95, 99t
 - physiology of, 90–91
 - progression charts, 92
 - in weekly schedule, 58, 58t, 61
 - workout guidelines, 91
 - workouts described, 89
- Tendinitis, 169, 217
- 10K
 - post-half marathon race, 256
 - race equivalency chart, 152t, 154t
 - speed workout pace charts, 73t–79t
 - training intensity pace chart, 99t, 100
- 10-mile run, 113, 113t
- 3-mile repeats, 88t
- Training
 - consistency, 14–15, 45, 178
 - crosstraining, 59–60, 157, 158–161
 - flexibility, 161–174
 - marathon, 3, 13, 18, 20, 60, 256
 - optimal, 45
 - philosophy, 7–18
 - reducing, 95–97, 204–205, 226
 - strength, 174–178
 - supplemental, 157–178
 - varying, 13, 49–50
 - window, 149
- Training intensity chart, 97–100, 98t–99t
- Training programs, 101–127
 - balance in, 13–14
 - components, 49–100
 - easy runs/days, 52–60, 53f
 - Elite Program, 259–273
 - FAQs, 124–127
 - modifications, 129–141
 - racing during, 125–126
 - Training schedule, 58–59, 58t–59t
 - Training volume, 12, 64, 106–107, 112, 134, 146, 161. *See also* Mileage
 - easy runs, 52, 55–56
 - in Elite Program, 262–263
 - reducing, 95–97, 141, 204–205
 - running economy and, 43–44
 - strength workouts, 80, 82, 83t
 - tapering, 95–97, 107
 - of tempo runs, 91
 - Travel, 236
 - Tread, shoe, 219, 220
 - Treadmills, 32, 40f, 41f, 42, 159
 - 1200 repeats, 77t
 - 2-mile repeats, 87t
 - Underpronation, 217
 - Volume. *See* Mileage; Training volume
 - VO₂max, 12, 29f, 36, 56, 139, 193
 - calculating, 32–35
 - central components of, 28–29, 29f
 - described, 27–35
 - energy sources and, 38, 39f, 40, 207–208, 208t, 210
 - improving, 28, 56, 62, 68, 105
 - of long runs, 63
 - myoglobin development and, 68
 - pace versus intensity and, 94–95, 94f
 - peripheral components of, 29f, 31–32
 - running economy and, 42, 43f, 45
 - speed workouts and, 68–69, 71
 - strength workouts and, 82
 - treadmill tests, 32, 40f, 41f, 42
 - Warm-up, 57, 91, 104, 105, 126, 131, 150, 162, 163
 - Water. *See* Fluids
 - Weight, gaining, 174, 205
 - Weight loss, 181, 199–200, 203
 - Wet test, 218
 - Workouts. *See also* Training; Training programs; specific programs
 - eating and, 198–204, 199t
 - modifying, 124–127, 135
 - pacing, 73t–79t, 85t–88t, 94–95, 94f
 - training intensity chart, 97–100, 98t–99t
 - Zatopek, Emil, 213

About the authors

Luke Humphrey began running track in middle school and hasn't slowed down since. After several all-state performances in high school, Luke ran for Central Michigan University from 1999 to 2004. There he was part of several NCAA Division I top-25 cross-country teams, including a 9th-place team finish in 2002. In 2004, Luke competed in his first marathon at the LaSalle Bank Chicago Marathon in the fall of 2004 for the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project. He



He ran a debut time of 2:18:46 and was 18th overall. Since then Luke has gone on to finish 11th in the 2006 Boston Marathon, 11th in the 2008 ING New York City Marathon, and 12th in the 2010 Bank of America Chicago Marathon as well as to qualify for two U.S. Olympic Trials for the marathon (2008 and 2012). Luke holds a personal best of 2:14:38 in the marathon. He has a B.A.A. in exercise science from Central Michigan University and an M.S. in exercise science from Oakland University. Luke began Hansons Coaching Services in May 2006 to help runners of all abilities reach their running goals. He is the author

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Keith and Kevin Hanson are cofounders of the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project, together coaching the Olympic development team to victories on national and international stages. They also co-own the Hansons Running Shops and avidly support, build, and encourage the running community, coaching hundreds of local runners to their first or 100th marathon.

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LUKE HUMPHREY is head coach of Hanson's Coaching Services and a runner with the Hansons-Brooks Distance Project.

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