

The Little Things

We have all heard the phrase “look after the little things” and most of the time we nod our heads in agreement or understanding of what that phrase encompasses. Over the last two years since I have been a part of the Alberta World Cup Academy I have heard this on an on going basis and have indirectly been reminded of it everyday. Sometimes it causes me anxiety because when I do an account in my head it starts spinning so fast with everything I have been told to look after...and essentially all these little things are actually one big thing that can make or break you as an athlete. The other observation that I have made about these so called “little things” is that they don’t affect you until you are at a race that matters the most. So I have compiled a list of the little thing I feel are important and also what I have been taught being on the Academy and also from observing athletes who can hold it together when it matters. Please feel free to add to this list as I think this is an important exercise for any high performance athlete.

In no particular order, here are some “little things”:

-SLEEP: rule of thumb, you need 8-9 hrs plus whatever you trained to recover properly. This is very important for women because this is the only time that you release growth hormones= recovery of muscles.

-FUEL: plan to eat 6-8 times a day. Breakfast should be well rounded, try different things to find what works for you- spend the time to figure this out, it is key, everyone is different! You also may need to vary this for intensity or races vs. an over-distance workout or strength. After training re-fuel with a liquid recovery mix for the quickest absorption (try different products to find what works for you, ask your teammates, coaches). Lunch should be one of your biggest meals, followed by a snack before your second training and then liquid recovery after your second training. Remember to bring a snack and sport drink for distance workouts and plan to bring recovery nutrition with you if you have to travel to and from training. Timing is key. Try to keep meals whole and well rounded- you need fruits and vegetables! if you don’t like them, take greens plus or an alternative!

-REST AND RECOVERY: Find out what works for you, sometimes this is a nap, sometimes this is reading, homework or crocheting :). This is essential between workouts and between races. You need to find a way to decompress and let your body and mind chill out. This is the toughest one for me as I work and try to run errands.

-Plan your day and week: As an athlete or student athlete or athlete with children, time management is the key to performance and fitting in the little things. Plan your meals; plan your workouts, when you will shop, when you need to run into the city to get new roller ski wheels, when you need to get blood testing done, when you need to nap.

-Be Selfish: this year more then any other year has to be about “you”. Always ask yourself if a decision or action is helping you achieve your goal or not. Those closest to you will understand. You can’t be stretching yourself thin or trying to please everyone or saying yes to everyone- it costs a lot of energy and stress is very hard on the body!

-Find a good Doctor: At this point in the game you need to know what’s happening in your body. This means knowing you are not low on anything. Find a doctor who can help with regular blood testing. Make sure you keep them up to date on how you are feeling and always ask questions.

-Stretch: This is so essential for recovery. The easiest ways I have found for stretching are the following: get a yoga pass- if you pay for it you have to go!, stretch for the duration of a half hour sitcom or other tv show,

get a stretching group organized within your team- we tried this briefly last year and it definitely has potential.

-Massage: You need to budget 2 massages a month at the very least. Do some research and talk to other athletes about who they have seen and who they like. You don't want to waste your money on blindly going to see a massage therapist that can't go deep enough.

-Physiotherapy: Skiers are prone to overuse injuries. We are constantly on edge of pushing our bodies too far. Try to see someone once a month to ensure you have good mobility and biomechanics, get them to give you strengthening and balancing exercises. We are all good had hammering, but sometimes taking time to re-align is a chore.

-Get a good Chiropractor: this one is up for debate I'm sure: if you like them, find one that works for you- we put our backs through the ringer for 11 months of the year and lets be honest a Nordic skier usually doesn't have supermodel posture.

-Supplements: A good coach will know physiologically what you need. Talk to them or talk to a doctor or sports doctor. Endurance athletes are usually depleting everything everyday, you need to be sure you are starting each day topped up and ready to go. You don't want to feel tired for two months and find out it was because of low iron or low vitamin D. This is another avenue to help you keep track of where you are at in training and feeling especially when there are a few months on your ilog that have feeling level of 3.

-Psychology: At this level everyone is as fit as the next. The one who will win is the one who can push past the pain for the longest. I would definitely suggest budgeting in a sport psychologist. They can help you get stronger and help you with race plans, strategy, imagery and overall well being.

-Support Network: Ensure that the people you have around you are "in the know". Your family and true friends will understand where you are at and why you are going to bed at 9 or yawning at the bbq at 7. You want to feel comfortable in your circle, not that you have to stretch yourself out to maintain good relationships.

-Financial Stability: Nordic skiing in North America is a tough career to get wealthy off of. It is getting better, but a lot of athletes struggle. Work on making your sponsorship package stellar, plan a few days to go and seek out sponsors, cold call companies, talk to other athletes who have had success with getting financial backing. If you want this to happen, you really have to make it happen. It takes work, people will not just hand you money, especially with the economy's current volatile state. You can also set up a meeting with your bank to talk to someone about budgeting and financial planning. Financial stress is just as much an energy drain as any other type of stress.

-Coach Relationship: An athlete needs to have 100% confidence in the coaches prescribed program and the coach needs to have 100% confidence in the athlete's ability to recover and look after the little things to execute the program. Find out what works for you: email, phone, face time. Always ask questions, keep track of how you are feeling and how that fits into the period of training, be honest with your coach and speak up if you are not sure. You have to be proactive about the program.

-Equipment: Be prepared the night before a workout. Don't show up with classic poles for a skating intensity because you left your skate poles in the team van. Make sure your pole tips are sharp. Show up with enough water and fuel for the workout. Show up early to wax skis and be ready so you can get a quality warm-up in.

-Pay attention and Observe: who are the fastest on the team, what do they do differently to get to that level (within reason). Pick their brain, ask questions and in harder workouts use them to bring you to the next level. If you are the fastest female use the boys for benchmarks. Don't be afraid to go with the fastest athlete.

-Know the purpose of the workout: Each workout has a purpose. Pick two technique cues and then follow the plan. If it is a low z3 workout, go low z3. It is important to write this down in a book or in your training log, you need to have a quality workout!

-Balance: Staying happy and excited for training and racing is probably the most important. Obviously it is tough to stay even-keel all the time when you are pushing your body so hard and you are constantly on hormonal peaks and valleys. Take the time to make sure you have a good balance. Be aware of your happiness and ensure you have a balanced lifestyle.

Hopefully that can help some of you. Obviously some people may not agree with all the points, but I encourage you to make your own check list!

Happy training!

Brooke