

## **A Break is Better Than a Rest**

James Ratcliffe - September 2008



Every now and again I speak to runners before a race and enquire how their training has been going. More often than not I seem to get the familiar answer “I have been on holiday so haven't been training for 2 or 3 weeks”

This has always puzzled me as the first thing I pack for a break is my running kit, trainers, GPS device and last 2-3 copies of Runners world that I haven't had time to read.

After 20 years of smoking and drinking I was holidaying in Norway and thought this would be a great place to run. Even though I loath running hills, and we were surrounded by mountains, the scenery made these runs a joy. This decision just over 4 years ago has changed my life for my family and me.

Taking running with you on your holiday means to can lace up your trainers, note the location of your hotel on your GPS then break out and explore the local area. Once you have run far enough then the GPS will guide you back to your starting point.

These runs will often reap huge rewards as you can unearth unseen holiday gems, a wonderful quiet restaurant, notice the incredible views and see the areas that you might never have seen.

Running in Tenerife on a recent break meant I could run through date and palm tree paths that skirting a golf course at the same time as learning the lay of island and where the good shops, restaurants, kids play areas and beaches were. It also allowed me to see more of the island than the pool, bar and beaches.



I have learnt that these breaks away from a hectic work and home life can invigorate, refresh and help to give a better perspective on the year gone and the year to come. Without the every day pressures and with more time on your hands allows me to review the past year, plan the next and also makes me realise why I love to run.

Prior to this years break I had had 2 months of running in pain due to a left hamstring or back injury (I had not figured out which). I had tried resting and also seen specialists, but the problem still persisted. However, with the daily work pressures gone and with the time to look back over the last 2 months logs with added clarity, I noticed that the injury started shortly after adding morning and evening stretching sessions to my training. These additions sessions, I surmised, had created pressure on my sciatic nerve which caused the left leg to become very painful when running hard. At times my leg became so sore that even walking was difficult for a couple of days after a hard session

Looking at my running logs and schedule showed that during the last 6 months I had rarely trained over 10k. In fact most of my training was based on speed session and I tended to be running as fast a possible no matter the distance. By analyse my performances in races I could recall that I had been running fast, feeling strong and comfortable for the first 5k of a race, but I had suddenly hit a wall, and struggle for the last 5k.

I also noted that even though I wasn't tired or out of breath, I tended to have small walks during training runs. These breaks appeared to be more habitual, and had come from the walk-run-walk philosophy from being a beginner runner some time ago. As I had got fitter and faster I had continued this habit.

Realising these issues allowed me plan my training to avoid making these mistakes and hopefully I will run faster and pain free over the next year. So instead of resting, as most people seem to do on their holiday breaks, I have managed to:-

- Clear a long term injury by cutting cutting out any stretches that could create issues on my sciatic nerve.
- Downloaded a Garmin specific HRM training program from Runners World website to build my base mileage and force me to stop having walk breaks.
- Learnt that running slowly isn't a bad thing – in fact its quite hard to do.
- Set new goals and targets for the coming year.
- Trained with a number of talented junior Norwegian athletes at a beautiful track surrounded by mountains and a Fjord.
- Run in incredible scenery without the smog and noise we normally have to train in.
- Come back refreshed, invigorated and raring to better my friends and rivals - watch out here I come.....

A Break is truly better than a rest.