

Fit Ref? - A Running Perspective

BASICS

Rugby referees are on their feet for 1hr 20mins in a men's match - an ordinary fun runner would have finished most of a half-marathon in that time, so stamina / endurance / aerobic fitness are essential to putting in a good refereeing performance.

But it's not steady running that is needed - it's harder than that! What we have to do cope with a huge mixture of running in that time and speed is an essential element. Simple then, all we need is **STAMINA** and **SPEED**!

STAMINA

Stamina is the ability to keep going. To some extent this requires muscular endurance (ie having leg muscles that are happy to keep going), but regular referees have probably already built up sufficient muscular endurance, so for us stamina is all about **heart and lungs**.

This is **aerobic fitness** - the lungs taking in lots of air/oxygen and the heart pumping blood to get that energy to the muscles. It's worth noting that a good level of aerobic fitness not only helps us maintain our performance throughout a match, but also helps recovery rates during a match after short bursts of faster running - very handy for blowing a whistle or talking to players!!!

The good news is that improving aerobic fitness doesn't mean having to do the "Long Slow Runs" that road runners do - the ideas below offer a few options.

SPEED

The need for (and benefits of) running speed during a match is pretty obvious, but analysis of top refs shows that they only actually sprint for **122 metres** per match.

So, our goal is not really flat out sprint speed. More realistically, it's "**running with speed**" - something top refs do for about 12-15% of the time they are moving during a match.

There are only two things that affect running speed! ... **STRIDE LENGTH** and **CADENCE** (ie faster strides).

Each of the ideas below will help one or both of these. We each have a natural running style and hopefully you will already know whether you are more of a "**Shuffler**" (short striding, maybe with a decent cadence) or more of a "**Bounder**" (long slow strides)! This will help you focus on those exercises that address your weak point, or perhaps you need a good balance of the two. If you're not sure, ask someone to watch you.

THE GROUND RULES

- Always warm up and stretch **before** a session and always warm down, stretch and smile **after**.
- Introduce training changes **gradually** - this applies to volume and intensity.
- **Commit to your commitments** - if you are going to try something new, commit to it for at least six weeks to give it a chance - if you have a session planned, do it in full and do it regardless of the weather!
- Running on **grass** is easier on the body than pavements.
- If you pick up a niggle **be sensible!**
- It doesn't have to be running! [I am a great fan of **exercise bikes** and **rowing machines**, but if you are going to use them I recommend doing specific sessions on them that replicate the sorts of sessions below]. **Treadmills** are OK for some things, but not for some of the sprint work / drills.

THE SESSIONS

There is a range of different sessions below. Those who crave variety can **mix and match** them, plus choose different routes - on and off road. Those who want to focus on specifics can **repeat sessions** to get the most out of them.

For those who like to **measure their progress** I recommend the Mile Reps as a test of stamina / overall running fitness. As a benchmark, 8mins for a mile is considered by road runners as the borderline between jogging and running! I am currently in the 7:00-7:15 range for 4 reps.

Above all **find a combination you enjoy** (either enjoy the sessions or enjoy the benefits they bring!).

General run - stamina with some speed

1. [Run 3min / Walk 30sec] repeat 6-8 times - run with good style and rhythm
2. Rest / Walk / Stretch for 3-5mins.
3. [Run fast 40-60m / Walk Back] repeat 8-12 times - jog into each rep

Mile Reps - stamina with endurance

1. Run 1 mile (measured by car) - timed
2. Walk / Stretch for 3-5mins
3. Run the mile in reverse direction
4. Optional: Repeat (total 4 miles) - try to run all reps in the same time (though wind will affect times)

Power Run

1. Run fast for 90sec
2. Walk for 90sec
3. Repeat to taste! If more than 8 reps, try breaking into 2 halves with 4-6min walk/jog between

Power the Hills

1. Find a nice hill - 100m plus, but any hill is better than no hill!
2. Run fast uphill (ideally 40sec - 2mins depending on your hill)
3. Walk/Jog back
4. Repeat to taste! If more than 8 reps, try breaking into 2 halves with 4-6min walk/jog between

Sprint the Hills - basic

1. Find a hill - the steeper the better
2. Sprint uphill between 2 markers 30-50m apart (lampposts are useful)
3. Walk back
4. Repeat to taste! If more than 8 reps, try breaking into 2 halves with 4-6min walk/jog between

Sprint Pyramid - Hills optional!

1. [Run fast 30-50m / walk back] repeat
2. [Run fast 80-150m / walk back] repeat
3. [Run fast 150-300m / walk back] repeat
4. [Run fast 80-150m / walk back] repeat
5. [Run fast 30-50m / walk back] repeat

Sprint Drills

- High Knees
- High Heels
- Bum Flicks
- Fast Knees
- Arm Running
- Acceleration Run

Just Run!

I like plan my runs and know what I' m going to do when I walk out of the front door, but sometimes it' s just good to go out and do whatever takes your fancy. Fast/slow. start/stop. Change the route. Try to catch someone running ahead. Drive to somewhere (usually the Downs in my case) and enjoy some countryside, beach runs, etc. Also, the day after a hard game / sevens(!) a 2mile jog/walk can feel good and help recovery.

Mini Indoor Circuit - for some variety :o)

- Crunchies
- Squat Thrusts
- Body Bends
- Press Ups
- Wall Run
- Skipping

Daily to build up a bit of leg strength!!!

- Heel Raises
- Lunges
- Squats