

PSYCHOLOGY OF RUNNING HILLS

Success in running hills begins with attitude. If you look at hills as a welcome challenge rather than an ordeal you have to get through you are on your way to success.

At this point one should remember the adage “the will to win is nothing without the will to prepare”. Simple belief without adequate preparation will not take you very far. You must prepare, both physically and mentally, in order to get to that point where you look forward to challenging the hills.

PHYSICAL PREPARATION

The stronger and fitter you are, the easier it attack and conquer hills.

One should do a lot of core work. Ankle and calf strength is huge, particularly when doing steep hills. Strong arms help drive the body.

Make time to train and strengthen the whole body. Knowing you are strong feeds into the positive feeling you need for success.

MENTAL PREPARATION

Once you have the sound physical foundation, it is now all about attitude. You must feel that you can succeed on the hills. You must learn to welcome the challenge. Like speeding up at the end of a hard run or doing serious intervals, you want to push your boundaries knowing that it’s not going to kill you and will make you stronger. Everything must be positive. Block out the negative stuff.

SOUND TECHNICAL RUNNING

When training and running hills, make sure you really focus on sound technique at all times. Breaking down is easiest when you are tired. Poor running form on hills will markedly increase fatigue.

Train on hills of varying distance and grades. Technique will vary depending on the type of hill. Have a plan and focus for each hill.

MANTRAS

Keep them short, positive, and focused. They can really be a boost and keep you on track. Tailor them to meet your own specific needs and situations. Expressions like “tall, drive, butt in, look up, smooth, strong,” are common examples. What’s most important is not what the words are, but do they work for you?

SOME HILL TRAINING AND RACING SPECIFICS

1. If you want success on hills, you have to run them a lot. That means either hill repeats, hilly courses, or even incline work on the treadmill.
2. Long, gradual hills are great for getting that fitness and toughness, while working on a nice, flowing running form. You can easily throw in strides here. Concentrate on that full stride, staying tall, ankle drive, forward knee propulsion, rhythmic arm drive. Feel like a deer bounding along.
3. Hill repeats: These can range from very short and steep to 200-300m . If doing longer reps, don't go too hard at first. Save some energy for the last part. Tuck in the belly button, bringing the hips in, slight forward body lean, good arm drive, high knees, drive off the forefoot. Look up, see the top of the hill. Because your eyes are above ground, it makes the hill look less steep. Repeat your mantras and visualize running through the top of the hill. Be strong throughout.
For short steep hills use short strides, making sure body is over your foot at contact. Drive off the balls of the foot, using vigorous arm drive. Although a quick cadence is usually recommended, find one that feels best for you.
3. Hill surges: When running a hilly course simply surge when you get to each hill, then ease up and recover on the flats and down hills. Again, focus on power and good form.
4. Downhill Running: Don't forget the down hills. Keep the surfaces smooth and even wherever possible. Grass and trails are great. Steep sidewalks are not. Find a good surface and let it flow.

With proper preparation, training, and attitude, hills can become a fun challenge. Remember, if you want that feeling of flying down a nice hill, you usually have to do the climb first.