

Go Zone Racing - A strategy for better performance

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In analyzing the splits of hundreds of competitive distance runners, it's clear that personal records and breakthrough performances at distances from 800 meters to 10K come only by getting out of your comfort zone and into your "Go Zone."

Go Zone racing involves serious mental toughness and some risk-taking, as well as a heavy dose of pre-race planning. It is not for the faint of heart. It is for runners who want to perform their best, who want to challenge themselves, who want to go beyond their previous bests.

In short, Go Zone racing puts particular emphasis on the most critical race stage -- the stage where you likely fail to stay on pace and the goal slips away. For most runners, this occurs in the third quarter of races, the time that is usually the No-Go Zone. But with the right mindset, you'll turn this into your Go Zone and your next races into breakthroughs.

Pre-Race:

In your mental prep in the hours (and possibly days) leading into the race, get mentally ready to run fast. The efficacy of this is demonstrated in the "Carlsbad Phenomenon." The Carlsbad 5000 in California is the site of multiple world records and untold PRs by inspired non-elite runners. These records are not because the course is fast; it is not hard, but it does involve two 90-degree turns and two 180-degree turns, plus two slight inclines. It's the mindset. Everyone knows the race is going to be fast so they get mentally ready for it. They expect it to be a fast race, and so it is. Transfer the Carlsbad Phenomenon to your next race. Go into it expecting it to be fast and it likely will be.

The Start:

In the Start Zone, you must be aggressive. You must get out strongly for the first portion of the race (the first one to three minutes of a 5K, for example). Your Start Zone pace for most races will be slightly faster than goal pace but still under control and not too fast. While you won't win the race or PR here, you will set the tone of the race.

Fast Rhythm Zone:

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Fast Rhythm Zone:

The next section of the race is about finding a relaxed but fast rhythm -- that cadence and stride that is quick but relaxed and where you are smooth and fast. You are simply trying to stay on pace but cover ground as easily as possible. If you can do this and do it relatively relaxed, you'll be ready to attack the Go Zone.

The Go Zone:

This is it! After you pass through the halfway point, you enter the Go Zone. In this section, significantly increase your intensity and attack the race. This is vitally important, as the race will be getting harder and harder. You simply must increase your intensity to keep the pace going. Know that if you can just push harder through this section of the race and keep your pace on target, you will achieve your goal.

A good idea is to not only increase your intensity internally, but also to focus on something external. If racing in a pack, move up in the group. If racing in a line of runners, pass someone. If racing alone, pick out a point up ahead on the road or somewhere on the track and focus on running harder to that point. Then, pick another point or pass another person. Do whatever you must to keep the pace going. It's going to hurt -- breakthroughs always do -- but the suffering will be minimal compared to the days and sometimes weeks of knowing you didn't give it your all.

The Get-Time Zone:

Once through the third quarter of a race, you enter the Get-Time Zone. We can all sprint at a pace faster than goal pace. The key is that you must start your push toward the finish line earlier than you normally do. Don't wait until you see the finish line. You can't score too many precious seconds in the last 100 meters. But if you start your push to the line earlier (the last 1 to 2 minutes to go in a 5K or 10K race, for example), you'll score several seconds that can be the difference in your performance. It's not easy, of course, but if you can get your brain to risk it, and your legs to obey, you can Get Time.

It might take several races before you get the hang of Go Zone racing. But try it enough and eventually it will become the norm. If your experience is like that of others who have mastered it, get ready to re-write your personal record book.

Would you like a personal coach to help you with race strategy and optimal training? [Click here for details.](#)

Go Zone : Racing Rules

- 1) You must be race fit. For that reason, Go Zone tactics work well later in the race season.
- 2) You must be realistic in your racing goal relative to your training. No wishful thinking or exaggerating what is possible.
- 3) You must be willing to straddle the fine line between going too fast and going perfectly fast. Even "failure" will help you better understand where that line is.
- 4) You must be engaged in your races and specifically focus on the task of each zone.