Final Week Tips for HKU Marathon Team

So now it is coming down to the wire and you have less than 10 days to go until the start of the 2015 Standard Chartered Marathon. If you are a seasoned runner you will have a good idea of your final race preparations, but for those newbies, you may have some jitters and start second-guessing your preparation. Dr. Michael Tse, Assistant Director of the Institute of Human Performance, will provide some advice about the dos and don’ts of your final week of preparation and tips on race day.

The Dos

1. REDUCE VOLUME (TAPER): During the final week you should begin your taper. That means you should be backing off on your training to allow your body some rest before the race, however, it is important to keep running. Cut your usual training volume down to 40-50% of what it has been, but remember to keep some intensity. In addition to running at your regular pace, you should do some short efforts at race speed and slightly above. The idea is to feel fresh this week, but not make yourself fatigued.

2. HYDRATION: Stay hydrated so that you don’t start your race in a dehydrated state. If your urine is a deep yellow color, this is a good sign that you may be dehydrated. Drink regularly and in small quantities. Remember, being hydrated is good, but it is not good to be overhydrated. Use common sense.

3. CARBO LOADING: If you have been training regularly and with consistency, you will probably already have been consuming a diet that has a good amount of carbohydrate. In the final week it is ok to have a little more carbohydrate, particularly from sources such as pasta, steamed rice, potatoes, yams, vegetables, legumes (beans), etc. Since you are lowering your training volume, remember that you shouldn’t take in a lot more calories overall, so you need to be aware of the quality of foods you are consuming. Carbo loading can work, but for most new runners it may not be recommended.

4. HAVE A ROUTINE: On race morning you should have a routine in terms of what you eat as a pre-race meal, what time you plan to get to the race venue, how you will warm up, and at what position and time you want to be at the start before the gun goes off.
Pre-race meal: this should be something you are used to and have been using during training such as some bread with jam, a banana, maybe one boiled egg, and it should be at least 90-120 minutes prior to race start; Warm-up: go out and jog for 5-10 minutes and include some short strides (increase pace a bit for 10 seconds or so), then come back and do some dynamic warm up. For those who don’t plan to race at a pace that pushes them hard, you might consider using your first 1-2 km as an easy warm up; Go to start: be warmed up before you go to the start and find a position that is right for your pace. Remember YOUR race begins when you cross the starting mat, so no need to push right to the front and stress yourself out.

5. HAVE A RACE PLAN: Pacing: it is good to have an idea beforehand how fast you would like to go and what you will do at each aid station. It is recommended that if you are racing hard for the 1/2 and full marathon, it is good to get a small drink at aid stations as you feel. Stopping at aid stations: depending on the weather, if you are sweating more then you will probably need more hydration. At the same time, if you are not racing as hard and if you are not sweating so much, then it may not be necessary to drink too often. Go by feel also. If you feel your stomach sloshing with water then there is a good chance that you have taken too much water. Try to alternate water at one aid station with electrolyte drink at the next.

The Don’ts

1. DON’T CRAM: If you haven’t done the training or if you think your training hasn’t been sufficient, don’t cram more training into the last week to try to catch up. Actually, your fitness won’t improve much at this point no matter what you do in the final week. Follow guideline in point 1 above.

2. DON’T OVER-REST: Contrary to “don’t cram”, some runners think that they should do nothing in their final week to allow their body to completely rest. This is not a good idea. You will lose fitness and you will also become very sore after the race. Again, reduce your training volume and keep some intensity, then try to get additional rest and sleep if you can. This is the best preparation.

3. DON’T OVEREAT: In an attempt to try to increase glycogen stores (the sugars in the body that are stored in the muscle and liver), some runners feel they have to stuff in a lot of carbohydrates, as they may have heard of the prerace method called carbo-loading. Don’t make this mistake and gain extra pounds in the final week and maybe even get to the race with gastro-intestinal (stomach) problems. Take in a bit extra, but don’t overdo it. Tried and tested methods that you have done for yourself are what is best for you.
4. **DON’T TRY ANYTHING NEW:** This is a common mistake of newbies. In the final week when they get nervous about the race, they may think their equipment isn’t good and run down to the shoe shop and buy a new pair of race day running shoes. Don’t use shoes that you have tried in training. You will likely get blisters, and that’s no fun. Don’t try new foods on race day either and also as importantly, don’t start a new method of training that you might have heard your friend tell you about. Keep calm and trust that what you have been doing is sufficient to get you through the race.

5. **DON’T SPRINT:** many runners, maybe those who want to get their picture in the newspaper or have their face shown in the evening news may sprint at the start of the race. However, for good performance a sprint start to a marathon is pretty useless and may even hurt your overall performance. It is ok to go out a little harder if you like (if you have already warmed up), but you shouldn’t be going that much faster than the pace you expect to hold during the main part of the race. These running events are aerobic events, especially the longer distances. So the longer the distance, the more your pace should be one that you are able to *talk or say a short sentence*. If you feel you can hardly get out a few words then you are going too fast and your body will be the one that will decide that you have to slow down. Better that you are in control of the pace rather than your body making you slow down. Also, it is not recommended that you do a big sprint at the finish. If you are competitive and going for a specific finish time or racing head to head with someone, then a sprint may sometimes be unavoidable. However, the biggest risk to long distance runners tends to be at the end of the race when they are fatigued and they suddenly spike their adrenaline and heart rate. Use your common sense.

**IHP and DAAO wish you a good race, and most of all HAVE FUN!**