

FIRST

IN SMART TRAINING

Furman group gains world-wide following for their Run Less, Run Faster plan

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Jim Cheshire of Chesapeake, Va., loves running, but for the past few years he's been frustrated by a string of injuries that prevented him from progressing. Then a friend gave him a book called Run Less, Run Faster, written by three Furman University professors.

"The book's philosophy is a little less frequency and mileage, so it fit right in with what I needed," says Cheshire. "I cut back on my running days, added cross training, and that has really helped me out. I haven't been injured and my times have gotten significantly faster."

Cheshire was so inspired by the program he decided to spend a weekend at a Running and Learning Retreat hosted by FIRST, the Furman Institute for Running and Scientific Training. The retreat brings runners of any age or ability to Furman University's campus for extensive laboratory testing, as well as education about race strategy, pacing, goal setting, nutrition and biomechanics.

Attendees spend time in a classroom and the lab, but also head out to Furman's track for drills and customized speedwork. "What we find," says FIRST co-

founder Dr. Bill Pierce, "is that people follow the program in the book, but their pace is all over the place. They don't know their target pace."

According to the team at FIRST, the right intensity and pacing during training means fewer days on the road and fewer miles are needed to achieve success. The group suggests just three runs a week – fewer than most pro-

grams recommend, particularly for marathon training.

"Consecutive days run is one of the best predictors of running injuries," says Pierce, who chairs Furman's health and exercise department and has run more than 30 marathons. "Injured runners and aging runners need more recovery time." But that time should not be spent idly. The program

recommends two days of cardio cross-training to supplement the three runs. "It's a run less program, not a train less program," Pierce says, and the two days of cross training are key to achieving optimal aerobic fitness while reducing wear-and-tear on the body.

The book has become a top seller for Rodale, the publisher of Runner's World magazine, selling more than 75,000 copies in four years. It's been so successful that the FIRST faculty has been asked to create an updated version, complete with metric tables for the large and growing international readership. Pierce and FIRST co-founder Dr. Scott Murr regularly appear in Runner's World offering expertise, and Pierce has personally responded to 7,500 e-mail questions in the past six years.



Runners of all ages and abilities drive and fly to Greenville to attend FIRST's Running and Learning Retreats. At top and lower left, Dr. Scott Murr takes runners through drills on the Furman track. Lower center, Jill Lucas and Mickey McCauley evaluate each runner's technique and improvement. Lower right, Dr. Bill Pierce (center) answers questions from camp attendees.

Amby Burfoot, editor-at-large of Runner's World and winner of the 1968 Boston Marathon, has learned about hundreds of running programs over the years, but he says the FIRST program stands apart thanks to its scientific basis and effective outcomes.

"What impressed me most is that they are real scientists, real academicians, with a systematic, evidence-based way to train," Burfoot says. Run Less, Run Faster gets positive feedback from readers "because readers can tell it's serious, and it comes from real runners who have tried it themselves."

Murr is an eleven-time finisher of the Ironman-distance triathlon, and FIRST faculty member Mickey McCauley is a certified personal trainer and track coach.

The group brings in additional experts at the retreat, including Furman nutritionists, biomechanists and others who compile data on body composition, VO2 max and lactate threshold. "We take all kinds of measurements, and then we sit with each person and talk about their training," Pierce says. "With the data from the lab, we look at how they can modify their training to get faster."

On this humid day at the Furman track, there is awkward laughter as a dozen runners complete high knees and butt-kicker drills. Murr says the drills get easier and can take less than 10 minutes, but are valuable in getting runners to think about their form.

Then Murr, Pierce, McCauley and Ph.D candidate and former Furman runner Jill Lucas watch each participant race down the track, building to full speed. As they reach the end of the straightaway, they receive feedback. "You need to pull your elbows in a little closer," Murr tells one runner. He points out that those who have a lot of upper body movement might benefit from core work, which will increase stabilization.

Christie Neeley, a pediatrician, watches intently as McCauley demonstrates proper arm movement. She ran cross country and track in college and has kept running over the years, "but I've had a back injury, and I'm not the greatest with scheduling," she says. "I work all the time and don't always eat like I should, but I'm turning 40 this year so I wanted to get more efficient, lose some body fat and keep running for a long time."

Pierce says participants in e-coaching or FIRST retreat have a variety of goals. "What I've found is, people who want to break 4:30 in the marathon well up in tears talking about it, just like people who want to break 2:30," Pierce says. "Some are fast and some aren't as fast, but they are all serious runners, because it's important to them."

FIRST Team Working On Run Less, Run Faster 2.0

By Dr. Scott Murr, Training Performance Director of Furman University's FIRST Program

In 2003, when FIRST was established, we set out on a mission to promote life-long participation in running and physical activity, while helping all types of runners realize their potential through individually tailored training programs.

Even though we had been providing such help to local runners for years, it was through the press that our message became global. Without a doubt, the article that Amby Burfoot wrote in the August, 2005 edition of Runner's World ignited the interest of runners in the FIRST training programs. Runners still write that they began training with our program because of that article. Because that article also appeared in multiple international editions of the magazine, we began hearing immediately from runners from Australia, New Zealand, Southern Africa, the United Kingdom, Germany and other European countries. The Runner's World article spawned a proliferation of articles in daily newspapers across the country including the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, and magazines including Business Week, Men's Health, and National Geographic Adventurer. All of this exposure magnified interest in FIRST, and led to the publishing of our book, Run Less, Run Faster.

Since the book's release, we receive messages daily – more than 7,500 messages from six continents thus far. These messages have given us insight into the challenges runners face whether training in sweltering South Florida or sub-zero Scandinavia, in the desert sandstorms of Iraq or on an oscillating ship in the Persian Gulf.

Others have needed to deal with living in a town with no running track or traveling for business with access to only a hotel treadmill. Equally daunting are the problems that face a mother of five who must train between 4:00 and 5:30am, or a second-shift worker who begins training at midnight. Many runners have special medical problems, and others describe how professional obligations have left them sedentary for years. All of these runners seek an understanding of how to begin or enhance their running. All of them have sought our advice on how to use the FIRST training program effectively.

We have responded to every message. In many instances, this has resulted in exchanges of questions and advice lasting several years. We have filed and kept notes, and all of these interactions have enabled us to learn more about what runners are interested in learning – and how we might be able to help them.

The popularity of Run Less, Run Faster – and what we have learned while working with and interacting with runners since its release – have resulted in the request for an updated and revised edition.

We were excited when Rodale offered us the opportunity to update our first edition of Run Less, Run Faster, and the new edition will provide more detailed information for using the program effectively. We have updated the Boston Training Programs with the new standards for qualifying for the Boston Marathon, have addressed how to use a Garmin with our training programs, and included a brief section for trail runners, ultra runners and triathletes. We will add detailed cross-training workouts for the 12- and 16-week training programs. Look for the revised edition in the Spring of 2012!

