

## REFERENCES

- James, S. L., Bates, B. T. and Osternig, L. R., 1978 "Injuries to runners". *Am.J.Sports Med.* 6: 50-60.
- Nicholl, J. P. and Williams, B. T., 1982 "Popular marathons: forecasting casualties". *Br.Med.J.* 285: 1464-1465.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Title:** FOCUS ON THE MARATHON  
**Authors:** J. Humphreys and R. Holman  
**Publisher:** E.P., Wakefield, 1983  
**Price:** £7.50 hard back £4.95 paperback

Marathon running is presently one of the fastest-growing participant sports in this country. Following in the wake of this expansion of interest has been a stream of publications dealing with all aspects of the subject. Many instant experts on sports medicine and physiology have appeared, and have in many cases been dispensing information which is at best misleading, and at worst dangerous. It was a relief therefore to turn to this book, written by Humphreys, a lecturer in physiology at Leeds Polytechnic, and Holman, one of the country's leading marathon coaches. "Focus on the Marathon" concentrates on the physiological aspects of training for and participating in marathon races although it does include a chapter on sports injuries (written by Ian Adams).

My pleasure on opening a book by such a reputable trio of authors was unfortunately short lived. The publisher's information reveals that the book is aimed at "athletes, coaches and aspiring runners". It is certainly not aimed at the medical profession, and offers little to commend itself to the readers of this journal. The main problem facing a book of this nature is to translate the vast amount of available information into a concise form which is intelligible to the layman, without diluting it to such an extent that errors of fact appear. This task is far more difficult than is generally recognised, and the authors have not been entirely successful in their attempt to accomplish it. While the small errors present may make little practical difference to the athlete or coach their presence is to be deplored, and awareness of them removes any enjoyment which might otherwise be gained from reading some of these chapters.

Both main authors appear to be under the impression that endurance training results in a decrease in the respiratory rate at rest, and even go so far as to suggest that this can be used as an index of the response to training. This suggestion is not supported by any published experimental data. Again, there is no evidence to substantiate the statement that trained marathon runners have a blood haemoglobin concentration greater than that of untrained individuals.

An extensive section on diet deals largely with procedures designed to increase the muscle glycogen content prior to racing. While the performance of exercise on a bicycle ergometer is undoubtedly enhanced by these procedures, marathon running may not be greatly influenced by an increase in the muscle glycogen content. There seems little point, therefore in recommending this practice to the novice runner. The impression is gained that the early work of Bergstrom and Hultman referred to running exercise. This is not the case; the experiments were invariably conducted using cycling exercise.

These few points are indicative of some of the misinformation conveyed by this book. It is a pity that some of these errors could not have been edited out as there is a great need for an elementary guide to successful marathon running, and this book does present some useful information on the design of training programmes. In the meantime, Dr. David Costill's book "A scientific approach to distance running", although now slightly dated, must be the book of choice for the interested amateur who wishes to learn something of the physiology and biochemistry of marathon running.

The chapter entitled "Sports injuries and the marathon runner" amounts to less than six pages of text. Such brevity is inconsistent with an adequate coverage of the subject, although a good attempt has been made given this restriction. Anyone reading the report on page 164 of this issue, however, will realise that I disagree with the author regarding the relative frequency of knee injuries in marathon runners.

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