

Running hills only builds endurance

■ One of the biggest keys to running hills is to keep positive thoughts flowing through your brain and avoid dwelling on the pain.

Former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson used to say that everyone comes into the ring with a fight plan, but all of that changes once they get slugged in the face.

The same can be said about running, except the jabs arrive in the form of hill climbs.

Saturday's 27th annual Nor-Cal John Frank Memorial Run at Margaret Polf Park in Shasta Lake features a great one-two punch.

The event's 10-mile course contains a 1½-mile climb to Shasta Dam on Highway 151, followed by another challenging ascent from the dam to the turnout to the Centimudi boat ramp, which is just over a half-mile long.

The elevation gain of the first climb is some 500 feet.

It was a regular training run for the late John Frank, a former high school state champion who was killed in an industrial accident in 1986. It gives people some idea why Frank became such a talented runner.

Running hills builds strength and endurance and it's the best way to train for a race like the John Frank.

Redding runner Jim Price, who won the 13th annual Record Searchlight Redding Half-Marathon in February, said hills are the "center" of his training.

"It's the best workout with the least amount of jarring," Price said. "It forces you to use better form. It enhances your form."

Price said he tries to use the same amount of exertion on hills that he does on flat sections, though he's certain to move slower while climbing.

"I gauge it on effort, not speed," Price said.

Climbs sometimes feel good initially because they tax slightly different leg muscles than flat sections.

Many runners also use mental tricks to help them through an ascent.

"What I like to do is focus on an area 200 meters ahead of me," Price said. "Then when you reach that spot, focus on the next landmark. That helps pull me along and it keeps my mind off that uncomfortable feeling of a long climb."

Another tip is to imagine yourself attached to a huge bungee cord or rubber band that's fastened to some object ahead of you. The bungee cord is pulling you up to that spot.

As silly as it sounds, positive thoughts can be a huge benefit when the body is suffering. Dwelling on pain is certain to slow you down.

Perhaps the most underrated part of running hills is the descent, which jars the ankles and knees.

I remember limping around for several days after running a marathon in 1995. The downhill portions of the course wasted my Achilles' tendons.

Price said it's important for runners to fight the urge to lean back.

"My advice would be to run as relaxed as you can," Price said. "There's a certain amount of braking you have to do but I try to minimize that. When you lean forward, your speed does increase a little bit."

For runners who want to avoid big hills, the John Frank run also offers one- and three-mile races.

The one-mile fun run/walk kicks off at 9 a.m. Saturday, with the three- and 10-mile races starting at 10 a.m.

Registration is \$18 through Friday, or \$20 on race day. The fee includes a barbecue chicken lunch and a T-shirt.

Race packets may be picked up from noon to 8 p.m. Friday at the Hilltop Inn in Redding.

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