



SUPERCHARGE YOUR SPEED WITH SUPERSETS

BY ASHLEY MATEO

Runner's World+
Coach Jess Movold
performs a jump lunge
to finish out a three-
move superset.

Amplify your
strength work
to run faster and
longer without
spending hours
in the gym.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT BREDVAD



WHEN MEGGIE SMITH, 35, lapped her Garmin watch at mile two of June's New York Mini 10K in Manhattan, she was shocked: She'd just run faster than she had in a mile time trial the previous winter, and it felt effortless. She hadn't started too fast (Central Park's hills make that difficult); by the time she crossed the finish line, she had negative-split the course and taken more than five minutes off her best 10K time from the previous fall.

"I was shocked at how good I felt throughout the race, and how hard I was able to push myself," she says.

Usually, a big performance leap like this comes from diligent, strategic speedwork. But intervals aren't what Smith credits for dropping her 10K race pace by more than 45 seconds per mile. "The only thing I had been consistent with throughout my training—more so than running—was strength-training," she says.

Smith, who lives in Nashville, had started working virtually with Runner's World+ Coach Jess Movold in July 2020. The first change Movold made to Smith's routine was adding strength work two or three times a week, including a session with supersets—exercises performed back-to-back.

Her progression was gradual: She began with bodyweight exercises, then graduated to dumbbells under 25 pounds. "As the weights got heavier, I started noticing this ability to tolerate more running volume and intensity," she says.

Before strength-training, Smith had a hard time running more than 20 miles a week without getting injured. But this past spring she was able to log 35 to 40 miles per week. "I had fewer aches and pains as I increased my mileage and added in speedwork," she says. "With strength-training, I was still feeling healthy and didn't worry I was on the cusp of injury."

That's because Smith was building up her supporting muscles, which helped her run more efficiently and stay healthy while putting in those faster miles and longer efforts, says Movold, who

used strength work to break through her own marathon performance plateau in 2016.

Movold understands that strength-training can be a struggle for many runners. Approaching weights can be intimidating, or worse, feel like a chore when you'd rather be running. So Movold designed a superset program she calls Strength for Speed that's efficient yet engaging, and can produce results with just one session per week.

The workouts follow superset blocks of three exercises, performed back-to-back-to-back, that complement each other. "The first one creates fatigue, the second builds strength, and the third generates power and explosiveness," she says. After the three moves, there's a short rest, and then two more rounds of the superset.

Stacking exercises like this also helps you get more out of explosive movements like a jump lunge or kettlebell swing, says Mike Young, Ph.D., a biomechanist and founder of the Athletic Lab sports research center in Cary, North Carolina. "Strength movements allow for greater recruitment of the muscle fibers and motor neurons, and if you follow them with an explosive exercise, you'll actually have greater output on that explosive exercise."

Movold's supersets (see page 48) focus on developing the legs and glutes. And beyond supporting longer miles and preventing injury,

the increased leg power and explosiveness directly translates to faster times. "Your lower body is where you put force into the ground," says Young. "If you can put more force into the ground with every step, you can increase your stride length, decrease your ground contact time, and improve running economy—all of which improve performance."

You can also develop those attributes by logging more volume or upping your speedwork, but getting those extra miles in might require a time commitment on the order of an additional hour or two per week, says Young.

Movold's longest superset workout is 35 minutes and she says it can fit anywhere into your weekly workouts, except the day before a hard workout, like speed intervals.

The superset workouts are also completely adaptable, so you can modify them to meet your strength level. For example, start with just your body weight for the squats and lunges if you're a beginner.

When you get comfortable with your initial weights, bump up the difficulty by increasing the reps one week, then dialing the reps back to the prescribed number and increasing the weight the next week, says Movold. Continue alternating increased reps and weight—without sacrificing your form—as you get stronger.



"These moves also strengthen your supporting muscles, which boosts your efficiency and allows you to increase your miles and intensity."

Adding strength work helped Movold set a 35-minute PR at the 2016 NYC Marathon.

Getty Images (background texture)

BUILD SERIOUS STRENGTH FOR SERIOUS SPEED

Try two of the superset blocks that Runner's World+ Coach Jess Movold uses to build running strength and power. After a 5-minute warmup, perform the exercises in each superset back-to-back with no rest. After each superset, rest for 30 to 60 seconds before starting the next round. Complete 3 rounds before moving on to the next block. You will need one kettlebell, a set of dumbbells, and one heavy dumbbell. They should be heavy enough that the last 2 to 3 reps of each set feels challenging.

▼ SUPERSET 1



KETTLEBELL DEADLIFT

Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart and a kettlebell between your feet. Bend at the hips and knees and grab the kettlebell with both hands. With your spine neutral and your arms extended, forcefully exhale and use your glutes to thrust your hips forward and straighten your knees as you lift the kettlebell off the floor. Slowly reverse the motion, keeping your back straight and core engaged, to return to start. Do 12 reps.



ROMANIAN DEADLIFT WITH DUMBBELLS

With a dumbbell in each hand, stand tall with your feet hip-width apart, shoulders back, and a microbend in your knees. Slowly bend at the hips, sending your butt back while keeping your torso straight, abs tight, and chest lifted. Engage your hamstrings and glutes and lower the weights as far as you can until you feel a pull along the backs of your legs. Push your hips forward to return to standing. Do 12 reps.



KETTLEBELL SWING

Place the kettlebell on the floor and step back so you're about an arm's length away, with your feet a bit wider than hip-width and knees slightly bent. Bend at the hips and grab the handle with a two-handed, overhand grip, then tip it toward your body as you engage your lats. Draw the weight back between your legs (like hiking a football). Then squeeze your glutes to thrust your hips forward and swing the bell out and up to chest level. Allow gravity to draw the bell down, then repeat. Do 24 reps.

Wardrobe by Lululemon

▼ SUPERSET 2



GOBLET SQUAT

Hold a single heavy dumbbell vertically in front of your chest with your hands around the top portion. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, toes pointed slightly out. Send your hips back and bend your knees to squat down until your thighs are parallel to the floor while keeping your chest lifted. Return to start and repeat. Do 12 reps.



SPLIT SQUAT

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and hold a dumbbell in each hand. Step back with your right foot, and bend your knees to lower as far as possible—with control—into a lunge. Without moving either foot, push back up to straight legs. Do 12 reps, then switch legs and repeat.



JUMP LUNGE

Drop into a lunge position by stepping your left foot forward and bending both legs to 90-degree angles, so the right knee hovers above the floor. Keep your chest lifted and left knee centered over your ankle. From here, explosively jump straight up and switch legs in the air, landing softly in a lunge with your right foot in front. That's 1 rep. Do 24.

HOW TO SCHEDULE YOUR SUPERSET STRENGTH WORKOUTS

SUNDAY

Long Run

MONDAY

Easy Run

TUESDAY

Intervals + Core

WEDNESDAY

Rest or Recovery

THURSDAY

Tempo

FRIDAY

Superset Strength

SATURDAY

Rest Day

TRY MORE SUPERSETS WITH COACH JESS!

Movold's Strength for Speed program is designed specifically for runners. It includes five key workouts that feature strength supersets and stability exercises with an emphasis on the lower-body, core engagement, and explosiveness.

Runner's World readers get the first month free with code **SPEED30**, redeemable at watch.alloutstudio.com.