

Pace Yourself to a New PR With the 10/10/10 Strategy

As Joshua Carrafa trained for the 2019 Berlin Marathon, he spent less time looking at his watch and more time tuning in to how his body felt during long runs. In past races, he struggled with proper pacing and relying too much on the numbers. So with the help of his coach, Jes Woods, an ultrarunner and Nike Run Club coach in New York City, Carrafa focused more on getting a feel for how hard he was working so he could apply it on race day. The goal was to implement a 10/10/10 race-day marathon strategy.

Carrafa is not alone in his pacing struggles. A study published by the *European Journal of Applied Physiology* found that recreational runners misjudged their pacing efforts by 38 seconds per mile compared to experienced runners, who were only off by 12 seconds per mile. To put that in perspective, that's misjudging your marathon finish time by more than 16 minutes—a miscalculation that can seriously mess with goal-setting.

There's already so much that goes into training for a marathon, but pacing may

be one of the most difficult yet important elements. Just think about elite marathoners: They're not (usually) going out hot from the gun; the actual racing starts around 18 to 20 miles in, when everyone starts to dig deep for that final 10K.

Yes, finding an extra gear after 20 miles of a marathon is both physically and mentally challenging. But, as Carrafa discovered, the 10/10/10 strategy can train your body and mind to pick up the pace well into the race.

This approach to the marathon calls for splitting the race into three separate sections: the first 10 miles, the second 10 miles, and the final 10K. Run the first 10 miles with your head, the next 10 miles with your training, and the last 10K with your heart, says Woods. How? Let's break it down a little further.

● The First 10 Miles

Running the first 10 miles with your head means being smart, being patient, and listening to your coach. "You want to make a conscious effort to hold back and run



AUTHOR

ASHLEY MATEO



FROM
DENVER,
COLORADO



CREDENTIALS
UESCA-CERTIFIED
RUNNING COACH

I COULD IMPROVE AT
RECOVERY RUNS; I NEVER
SLOW DOWN ENOUGH.



FAVORITE PIECE OF GEAR



OAKLEY FROGSKINS SUNGLASSES:
SUPER LIGHTWEIGHT, DON'T
BUDGE, AND LOOK BADASS IN
RACE PHOTOS.

NEXT RACE
CHICAGO
MARATHON



LAST RACE
L.A. MARATHON



FAVORITE ASPECT OF TRAINING
HAVING A ROUTINE TO FOLLOW;
IT'S EASIER FOR ME TO STICK TO.



GO-TO RACE STRATEGY
IDEALLY, NEGATIVE
SPLITS—BUT THAT'S ALWAYS
EASIER SAID THAN DONE.

the first 10 miles at a pace that's slightly slower than your goal marathon pace," says Woods.

It's hard, for sure—there's a ton of nervous energy at any marathon starting line, and it's extremely difficult to not get swept up in the excitement or start weaving around the hordes of runners to find your space. But taking the first portion slightly slower means you're also giving your body a chance to properly warm up and adjust to the running ahead, because chances are,

COURTESY ASHLEY MATEO

you just stood in a corral for some time anxiously awaiting the gun. “You’re being strategically conservative with this method to ensure—or ensure as best you can—that you don’t go out too fast and die a slow death,” says Woods.

● **The Next 10 Miles**

Running the second 10 miles is all about trusting your training. “Let your body do what it has been trained to do,” she says. “This is where you want to hit goal marathon pace like a metronome. Let it feel rhythmic and settle in.” You know this pace; you’ve trained for this pace; so simply run that pace.

At this point, your legs should be feeling good—after all, you just ran 10 miles at a slightly slower pace than the goal marathon pace you’ve been training at. Ease down on the gas pedal until you’re cruising at goal marathon pace, which your body should feel accustomed to and comfortable with. “Mentally, you now ‘only’ have to run 10 miles at goal marathon pace. That is neat!” says Woods—and any psychological tricks can certainly help at this point in the race.

● **The Final 10K**

Running the last 10K with your heart is pretty self-explanatory: This is where you let it rip. “Your strength doesn’t come from

your body; it comes from your heart—OK, and that fire in your belly asking you, ‘How bad do you want it?’” says Woods.

The last few miles should be your strongest miles following this method. “This is your time to surge and start knocking down some roadkill—which sounds aggressive, but I think there’s no cooler feeling than picking off runners one by one in the final miles of the marathon,” says Woods (remember, any psychological trick can help!). If you’ve been patient during those first 10 miles and followed the plan during the next 10 miles, the final 10K is your time to shine.

Carrafa ended up executing the 10/10/10 strategy in Berlin brilliantly. During the first 10 miles, he was excited and had to really focus on not pushing too hard. When he caught himself hitting a few miles ahead of pace, he was able to reel it back before it became a big problem. By the middle 10, he locked in on his goal pace and felt great. Things were rolling smoothly. The final 10K proved to be tough, but it was also where the whole plan paid off and his training kicked in. Carrafa’s fastest mile split was mile 24, which he hit at 20 seconds faster than his average pace—only possible because he ran smart during the first 20 miles. In the end, Carrafa clocked in at 2:46, a 4-minute PR for him and the best he’s ever felt after crossing a finish line. 🏆

HOW TO TRAIN FOR THE 10/10/10 STRATEGY

● Try this method out in training to prepare your body for race day. “Once a month, practice a long run that includes a number of miles at goal marathon pace,” says Woods. For example: On a 15-mile long run, run the first 5 miles easy, the next 5 at goal pace, and the last 5 miles slightly faster than goal pace. “Your long runs should always

start off slow, then gradually progress,” says Woods. That’s going to teach you to practice patience, ease into race pace, and finish strong.

● Then, add strategic speedwork. Most marathon training plans call for one or two days of speedwork a week. Woods suggests incorporating split 800s—repeat efforts

where you shift from running 400 meters at marathon pace to 400 meters at 10K pace after a short warmup and finishing with a cooldown. “That drastic gear change helps you practice turning over your legs and running fast on tired legs.” That—plus the heart—is really all you need to close in on the finish line.

OTHER SMART RACING STRATEGIES

NEGATIVE SPLITS

This method involves running the second half of the race faster than the first half. Holding back a little on the front end helps you conserve energy so you can finish strong and lower your chances of bonking.

EVEN SPLITS

This strategy involves running a steady marathon pace throughout the entire race. It works well on flat courses but gets trickier on undulating routes.

YELLOW-ORANGE-RED EFFORT

This strategy, from running coach Jenny Hadfield, is geared toward first-time marathoners and emphasizes running on feel. Run the first 14 miles at an easy, happy, “yellow” effort, where you can breathe easily and speak in full sentences. Run miles 15 to 24 at an “orange” effort, where you can start to hear your breathing but you’re not out of breath, and you can only speak a word or two.

Run the final 2.2 miles at a hard but controlled “red” effort. This is not an all-out sprint, but you shouldn’t be able to speak in this zone.