



Trouble Shooting for the UTA

By Wes Gibson

Your training has been planned perfectly for your goals, lifestyle and ability level. You have hit every session spot on and have been able to train on course regularly taking in the “ins and outs” of the UTA environment. Your taper has been a perfect mix of rest, recovery and training allowing the adaptations to take foot in your muscles and you have been sleeping like a baby in the lead up to race day. Your accommodation is perfect, you eat super well the week before race day and at the expo on the Friday you get through all the lines quickly and with minimal fuss. Your final meal is perfect and you sleep soundly waking around 2.5hr before the start gun allowing a good breakfast and easy journey to the start where you get a park right near the chute. The wave you are in is surprisingly easy to get into a great position at the start and your race goes right to plan from start to finish, each leg a blissful journey across the magnificent Blue Mountains National Park culminating with you back at Scenic World to large crowd of cheering spectators and your eager support group.

Reality.....

It most likely won't happen like this and at some point before, during or even both you will have to troubleshoot your way around a situation that has come up. This is part of any sport but in mountain running and ultra-running in particular with both great distance/time covered and the need to utilise large amounts of gear there is always going to be variables that arise that you have not planned for, but need to deal with.

“Prior to Race Week”

- 1) **Don't Play Catch Up, EVER** - In the lead up to any UTA race the most common problem that will occur is athletes missing training for whatever reason (and they will come up for most runners). It is important that athletes do not begin to try to catch up missed training or try to “cram” training in before race day as this can lead to injury, burn out or motivational drops. You are better to focus on the plan you have in place, aim to complete all future sessions and re-think the reasons why a session was missed. Setting your training to a realistic level based on your goals, lifestyle and ability will assist with the consistency required when preparing for a UTA race and avoid missing sessions.

- 2) **Check your gear, properly** – you gear is an extension of you in UTA and being aware of how it works, what its capabilities are, how it wears as time goes on and so forth is vital come race day. In training is where you want to find the hot spots, tight straps, blister points, etc. that way you can practice ways around these little inconveniences that cause such grief in an event. By knowing that your bladder needs to be filled in the pack not out or that you need to wear a buff under your head light to avoid rubbing will minimise mishaps when they count and keep your mind at peace. More to come on gear in race week tips.
- 3) **Practice your preaching** – you are going to invest a great deal into UTA, and no doubt your family, friends, colleagues and wider social networking community will know all about it. Make sure you put out the real you and stay true to the real reasons why you are tackling the UTA, be authentic, be enthusiastic and be honest. This will assist in avoiding things like running the race before you have started and having lofty ambitions that aren't met. As race day approaches the real state of affairs is known by you and you alone and if you're painting a picture somewhat different to this then you could be setting your crew up for a longer day than expected, this will help them support you better throughout the race.
- 4) **Keep a balance** – managing your life, running, work and family is vital in the lead up to UTA. Things will come up and sometimes this will affect your training, this does not mean it has to affect your performance. Being able to adapt to the extra shift at work, a child's birthday party or that surprise visit from your extended family by adapting your program around these events is important. Yes, you have key sessions, yes you have a plan and yes you have goals to meet and by allowing flexibility, but not compromise, in your weekly schedule you are more likely to remain in control and stay on track. Be organised, be prepared for events and move the week around if something comes up, it could be that great opportunity to test the headlight for an early Tuesday 4am long run or something similar.

"Race Week"

- 1) **Stock up the bank balance** – it's no secret that training and racing in mountain races and ultra races places significant demand on your body and as an athlete you will ask your body to handle this stress. The race itself will be a massive withdrawal from the body's bank balance and in the week leading up to the race you will need to make sure you have stocked up as best you can. Taper time is about replenishment, recovery, adaptation and mental strategies. In training you would have logged hours of running and this will need time to settle into the body's physiology, a process that will be greatly assisted with a low stress environment.

You may find it hard to **sleep** the night before the race, especially after the expo and excitement you would have just shared with thousands of other runners at KCC so consider the days prior to this as your chance to sleep. Sleep in, have naps and get to bed early, sleep is where the body does most of its recovering and you will benefit from it race day.

Eat well and if you can eat something you are familiar with, especially the day before. Take a packed lunch for the trip and even consider a meal cooked at your accommodation (if you can) or something you have tried previously for dinner. I would even recommend having dinner prior to attending expo to avoid getting hungry and eating something you may regret the next day.

A massage, spa or something similar will also assist in recharging the batteries and offering the **body** a little reward prior to the race. Also do not forget to do some running to allow the muscles to remain switched on and ready to go as this is important. Don't just sit around watching Netflix or pouring over your stats, you have been very active for months leading up to UTA it would be silly to stop completely a week out!

- 2) **Recheck your gear** – this may include using some of it in your runs but it should be a functional check not just an “it’s here” check. Make sure your light works, does the spare battery work, is your bladder leaking? These are just a few questions to ask but the most important question of, does it have a function and it is serving that function should be considered with every piece of gear you have. Take spares of things you can, such as socks, bladders, bottles, nutrition, hats, etc. and make sure you have all bases covered come race day.
- 3) **Houston, we have a problem** – these are the big issues that come up close to race day, think big here. Your plane is cancelled or late, your room is double booked, you get sick and so on. These problems are big time and require more than a Facebook cry for help. You cannot plan for these things and you shouldn't, but you can call on those around you to help you get through them. If you're travelling interstate or internationally take travel insurance, have at least one other contact in the Blue Mountains that you can call on if your accommodation has “issues”. If you are sick, well that becomes a very tough one where you would need to be true to yourself. While these things are rare, they can and do happen and it's just how you handle it as to how much it impacts on your race.

“Race Day”

- 1) **Plan B, C, D and Z** – any of the 3 distances at UTA will have the potential for best laid plans to go to waste. You go out too hard in the excitement; you do not handle the stairs across the cliffs as well as you thought you would or it's tougher than you expected today. These types of thoughts might cross your mind throughout the race and that is completely normal but make sure you have your mind prepared to deal with them. Have plans for when things are going perfectly and if they are stick to it. But also have plans for when times are tough, or when it rains or for when your running buddy drops away or surges forwards. You need to plan for an array of scenarios in both daylight and darkness, freezing cold frosts to sunny winter days and everything in between. Planning for one scenario is planning for failure so have your main plan and then a backup or two to make sure you get to the finish line in one piece.

- 2) **Be mindful and flexible** – trouble shooting on race day will generally revolve around problems being faced both mentally and/or physically. You must be mindful towards this any situation that you are faced with, employ mental strategies, set mini goals, focus on cadence, listen to music, the list goes on and it will help if these are practiced in training prior to the event. Your mind can be a wonderful tool to help overcome the trials of UTA.

The tip is to be flexible with your plan somewhat and to ensure you have a crew that will give you the support you need when you need it, whether that be a gentle push out of the CP, an encouraging word to boost your spirits or help with that new pair of socks. Having a crew that is aware of what you want from UTA and being both mindful and flexible throughout the event will help keep you out on the trails and heading towards the finish.

- 3) **Have fun** – the journey is close to being complete, you are 22, 50 or 100km from reaching your goal set several months earlier. Enjoy it, take the time to appreciate what is the greatest trail running event in Australia, Ultra-Trail Australia. Smile, chat, laugh, cry, celebrate and most importantly run! Yes, things will come up on the day, in the week before and in your preparation that will require you to adapt, but by accepting these challenges and finding the best strategy around them you are sure to walk away from Katoomba in May happy and satisfied.

All the best with the UTA event you have entered and I look forward to sharing such an important and enjoyable weekend of running with you and 5000 others in May.

If your keen on getting on board with me or any of the other coaches at UP Coaching email me wes@upcoaching.com.au or Brendan brendan@upcoaching.com.au