

AGE-GROUP LEGENDS

Managing work, life, the universe and triathlon is a tricky balancing act. But it is achievable. Just ask this rapid quartet of GB age-groupers...

Alistair and Jonny Brownlee, Non Stanford, Helen Jenkins, Rachel Joyce... the list of world-leading British elites reads like a *Who's Who* of triathlon. But it's not just the professionals whose trophy cabinets glitter with gold – our age-groupers dominate across the multisport sphere.

In 2013 Britain's age-group team racked up 294 medals in triathlon, duathlon, off-road triathlon and aquathlon major championships. One-hundred-and-eight of those were gold, 95 silver and 91 bronze. That's an average of just over 18 medals for each of the 16 teams that competed for world or European titles. Not a bad tally for recreational athletes who'll be working hard or raising a family while the elites are resting their trained limbs. It's impressive stuff, but just how do they manage to reach peak performance without neglecting the rest of their lives? To discover the secrets of age-group success, specifically on the run, we grilled four of our best... →

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THE PHYSIO

Parys Edwards is a physiotherapist who lives and resides near Wimbledon in London. Her age-group CV is more decorated than the Brownlees' and includes gold at the 2010 European Duathlon Championships, the 2012 European Triathlon Championships and, of course, the 2013 World Triathlon Champs in Hyde Park.

Currently she's recovering from a bike crash earlier in the year that happened on a training camp in Majorca with coach Tom Bennett and his T2 squad, which includes Tamsin Lewis and Vanessa Raw. Rubbing shoulders with the professionals will become commonplace for Edwards in 2014, as she's competing in 70.3 elite racing. Here the 38-year-old reveals why not smashing the run training pays off come the races...

Last year, as an amateur, I ran no more than three times each week. I've had a lot of injuries, and this is something I'd like other triathletes to learn: don't overdo the run training. We enjoy the cardiovascular and strength benefits from biking; you can transfer that fitness from bike to run so all you really need to work on is pacing. In the build-up to the Vegas World Champs in 2012, I was really struggling with my Achilles and so only ran twice a week. The longest run I did was 14km and Vegas hit 40°C... but I won my age group [35-39].

If I'm running three times a week, my longest run would be 14km. I'd have an interval session in there, which would measure about 10km and focus on race pace. So I'd run train for 1min at 5km race pace, 2mins at 10km race pace and 3mins at half-marathon race pace with the same time rest interval in-between. Remember: we're triathletes and have to consider all three disciplines.

Instead of doing speedwork, add

PARYS' ESSENTIAL RUN GEAR

In 2013 Parys ran a 36:49min 10km en route to winning Olympic-distance world gold. Here she talks about the run kit that propelled her to the podium...

"I run in Adidas AdiZeros, and I always say once you find the shoe for you, stick with it. To keep changing your footwear can be risky. I

resistance. In other words, head to the hills. It's great for strength and you don't have to do a lot of it. Get off hard surfaces as well. I run a lot around Richmond Park.

I undertook run technique work a couple of years ago because I wanted to run quicker and be less prone to injury, and ironically I got injured – but only because I changed my technique too quickly. The whole barefoot thing really interests me but, for me, only truly works if you've run like that the majority of your life, like the Kenyans. Their feet have strengthened over years to cope with the impact stresses.

I recommend you imagine running barefoot. Immediately you'll stand taller, hold your hips higher and run lightly on the balls of your feet. And that's enough to have someone running that bit better. A lot of us don't have a good arm action and lose a lot of energy there, too.

I think about one or two cues of good technique during a race and it helps take the pain away. But if anyone does change technique, please do it gradually.

If you want to run better, you need to work on your core. It improves balance, which helps technique. For instance, most people can't stand on one leg and fail to do single-leg drills without falling over. You need strong glutes because, when you're running, you're either on one leg, in the air or on the other leg. So when you're on one leg, you want a stable base so that all of your forces are driving forward. You don't want to be swaying or dropping your hips. At Ful-On Tri [Parys' club] we do a core session whenever I'm available, like glute drills and single-leg work, and always use a Swiss ball and glute bands.

When racing Olympic-distance, my tactic is to swim hard, bike hard and then go as hard as I can on the run! You're always more motivated in the

second half of the race so it's not a bad tactic. And as it's only 10km there might be some attrition but you don't blow up massively. I try and hold similar splits – around 3.35-3.40mins per kilometre – but it depends on how hilly the course is. I always run as hard as I can for the last kilometre and always sprint for the line.

It's different for half Ironman. I treat the race as two 10km runs. For the first 10km run, I try and hold a good pace where I don't blow up; during the second 10km I run as hard as I can.

During the winter I run a lot, including the Surrey cross-country league. They're brilliant but brutally hilly. I'd also recommend the Cabbage Patch 10-Miler and the Coastal Trail Series (www.endurancelife.com) races, especially the Devon and Dorset ones.



THE CIVIL SERVANT

Christopher Owens turns 62 later this year, but age hasn't stopped the Walton-on-Thames civil servant from unleashing a number of world-class age-group performances. Just last year, he grabbed bronze at the World Duathlon Championships in Ottawa before coming home and winning gold at the Triathlon Worlds. Age really is no barrier to excellence...

What's your sporting background? Before triathlon I ran a lot of cross-country and a bit on the track, and that's given me a good strength background, as I used to run five or six times a week. Since switching to triathlon, I run two or three times a week. One is a track session with my coach, James Beckinsale, at Optima Racing. And maybe once a week with my run club.

Tell us about the composition of your run sessions... My longest run is 45mins to a maximum of 75mins. Speedwork will be a series of repetitions from 45mins to 60mins of different intensities. Essentially it's broken down into three different levels of effort: race pace, faster than that and flat out. A recent session we did was 200m pretty hard, then 400m above race pace followed by a 5km timed run. I train with some of the best young triathletes in the country and some of the best young runners, and keeping up with them isn't possible. But I try.

Have you had many run-related injuries? I've been relatively injury free and that's down to four main reasons. One, I'm lightly built. Secondly, I run a lot off-road. Thirdly, I do a reasonable amount of stretching. I also have preventative massage every two weeks. I've been doing that for four or five years and found it really beneficial.

What about gear? I usually have four or five pairs of shoes on rotation. They vary between Asics and Adidas. I like the DS Racer and Trainer of the former. The AdiZeros are also very good. →

THE INSURANCE BROKER

The 2013 World Championships was a successful one for Norwich's Matt Ellis. The 36-year-old won gold in the 35-39 Olympic-distance age-group followed by bronze in the paratriathlon Tri6 category, acting as a guide for Iain Dawson. By day he's an insurance broker working with professional indemnity; by early morning, evenings and weekends

he's a triathlete. Ellis has defied serious ankle issues since taking up the sport, and shows that volume isn't everything when it comes to the run...

I've always had to manage injury. I used to play basketball and broke my ankle after leaping up and landing on someone's foot. That's how I got into triathlon; I was trying to rehabilitate and build back strength. Because of that, running's always been the discipline I've found the hardest.

I'd normally run a 5km loop on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday lunchtime, and then maybe an effort session on a Tuesday night with the local club. That'll be something like 3 x 6min hard efforts with equal recoveries over a 500m-1km loop. Thursday night I'll do a slower-paced longer run but no more than 10% increase each week. My leg's always going to be weak – it's just a case of managing the situation.

Running for me is all about consistency. I'm a firm believer in doing shorter sessions but running with correct form rather than doing one long run a week where your form goes towards the end of your run. It's a bit like the immersion theory with regards to learning a language. If you speak a little a lot, you'll learn it far quicker than going abroad for a week and not speaking it for a year.

I believe in swimming with swimmers, cycling with cyclists and running with runners. But you've got to be careful as when you're not running with a runner, they might be resting but you're off swimming with a swimmer.

I slow down or stop if my form goes. If your hips drop because you're tired, your

muscles aren't supporting your body on footstrike, and you can easily step on something uneven and pick up an injury. That's why I did a lot of drills when I first started running with the Human Performance Unit over in Essex. My coach was a chap called Dave Parry and we did a lot of drills over hurdles and working on foot speed. We also worked a lot on boosting core strength and working the hip muscles.

When I started I was a heavy heel striker. I'm 6ft 4in and 80-odd kilogrammes so not really built for running. That developed problems with my knee. But I've now learnt to land on the mid/forefoot. That said, I'm not a great believer in the barefoot running thing; I'm more of a follower of the zero-drop mentality but still having an element of cushioning in there. Barefoot proponents talk about back when we were cavemen and the like... but we didn't run on concrete.

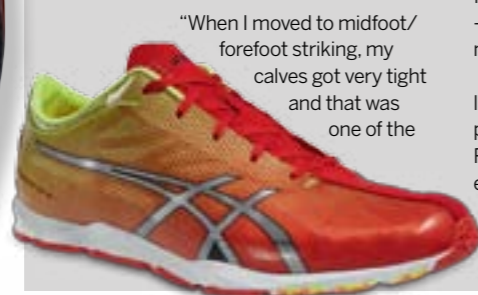
My longer runs tend to be on road because, living in the city, there aren't too many places where you can train on grass. You'd end up doing 40 laps of the local park! When I'm fit I run on the track but it takes me a bit of time to build confidence and many weeks of injury-free running.

I do some brick training but not much. These would usually comprise short turbo trainer sessions followed by a race-pace run off the turbo. That was the best way of doing it as you could do it from home. Effort on the bike would be based on rate of perceived exertion before running off it for 6-10mins. I'd repeat that a couple times and usually as the race season approached.

On a 10km run I reckon I'm a minute slower off the bike than fresh. In a race I try and run under 3:30mins each kilometre. I think I've got a faster run in me but I just can't put together the consistency. It's the joy of being a part-time athlete!

MATT'S ESSENTIAL RUN GEAR

Matt's had ongoing problems with his ankle since that basketball accident, so is very particular about his run footwear...



"When I moved to midfoot/forefoot striking, my calves got very tight and that was one of the

things that would limit me. When I did a hard session it'd take three days for my legs to recover, which is why I build up strength and flexibility by walking around in barefoot shoes – Vivo Barefoot Evos. They help to strengthen my feet but I don't run in them.

"I've also tried running in Newtons. I quite liked them but they're damn expensive. I've probably run my fastest in a pair of Asics Piranhas. They're lightweight but with an element of cushioning in there. No more than a 10km, though, because I'm a relatively heavy bloke."



THE DOCTOR

Catherine Faux beat many of the biggest names in triathlon when she finished 10th at Ironman Hawaii 2013. Not bad for a 26-year-old medical student who's only been in the sport a couple years. We caught up with Faux straight after Powerman UK where she finished first female and third overall...

Balancing your studies and triathlon must be a tricky task?

It's funny because people always use that word 'balance', which I deny doing at all. Balance means you're doing each one equally with the other but, when it came to my finals, I had to completely stop training. I tend to do one all out and then the other. I wish I applied the same approach to my medicine as I do my sport. You can't just train a week before Ironman but that's what I did for many of my exams.

How many times do you run a week?

At the moment a couple of short runs, plus one long run that builds from an hour to 2:15hrs. Also a brick session. As the season really kicks in I'll do more short runs of 20 or 30mins off a long bike. My run training probably reflects the proportions of an Ironman.

What about strength training?

I started doing hill reps this year, just for fun really. They're about half an hour a pop. I'd try to sprint uphill, which will be about 100m and each sprint takes 35-40secs. I'd try to do 8, 10 and then 12. I also do a bit of strength and conditioning with a guy at my local gym, and I kind of leave it to him to plan because I find it so boring. I'm not sure how it much offers but I've always done it and never been injured.

And intervals?

Intervals might be 6 x 800m around a lake, which is the only flat part of Sheffield! A tempo session would be 10mins with 5mins with recovery. Repeat that and have a good warm-up and warm-down.

Finally, plans for the rest of the season and beyond?

I've start work as a doctor in August, so I don't want to compete in anything after that because I don't think I'd be able to train properly. Challenge Roth in July is the one I'm investing in. After that I wouldn't mind going pro but I have two years as a junior doctor. I'll have a think after that. **220**