

# The US endurance model

We should be spotting talent and then cultivating it as the Americans do, says US-based distance running coach, JAMES HARVEY

Pictures: Mark Shearman

IT SEEMS that everyone has a comment about the poor situation that British male distance running finds itself in, but very few people offer solutions. The following is what I would suggest.

UKA is one of the best-financed or possibly the best-financed governing body in the world of athletics. This is true at least up until the London Olympics. They should go back to basics and reintroduce track and field into the British comprehensive school system. This should be done by paying coaches (preferably teachers already in the school system) to coach after-school track and field three or four afternoons per week. There could be a designated school in each town or city with a paid coach who could recruit, motivate and channel promising young athletes in the right direction. It would be a relatively inexpensive way to identify talent and pave the way for future success.



Scott Overall: has benefited from US system



It is claimed African distance runners lead the world because of their high training mileage and, in particular, long track sessions

Mark Shearman

The talent to compete at world level does exist in Great Britain. It is not being identified, nurtured or coached correctly. A major ingredient in the demise is that UKA introduced a coach education system that was ill-founded and taught flawed fundamentals. It placed too great an emphasis on hard interval training and decried the merits of high mileage. The newcomers to the sport from the jogging fraternity absorbed what they were taught on these courses. They went back to the clubs and imparted this misinformation and, over a period of a decade or more, we arrive at the present dismal situation. We must reintroduce a drive for excellence and settle for nothing less.

The US system is indeed currently the best in the Western world for producing high-quality competitive distance runners. It has achieved this standard by a change in coaching philosophy that preaches high volume and stresses the value of a large aerobic base. The latest example of this came at an unexceptional meet at Stanford on May 2. The 5000m A race was won in 13:22.26 by Alistair Cragg of Ireland from Matt Tegencamp's 13:22.60. Five men ran sub-13:30, 13 sub-13:40 and 21 sub-14:00. The B race saw a win for Hassan Mead in 13:28.45, but more significantly

two athletes went under Galen Rupp's American junior record – Chris Derrick in 13:29.98 and German Fernandez in 13:31.78.

Also in this B race were three athletes sub-13:30, six sub-13:40 and 15 sub-14:00. There were also two 10,000m races, with 27:36 taking the win and more than 20 athletes at sub-29:00. The races were run in good weather conditions and set up and paced appropriately to allow all the athletes every opportunity to post decent times. These performances are not unusual in the US where sub 13:20 5km and sub-27:30 10km races have already taken place this season. There are several other meets of a similar nature over the course of a few weeks that foster a similar environment and we will see times become progressively faster.

British athletes Lee Emanuel (3.37) and Andrew Lemoncello (27:57/13:33) along with Scott Overall and Rory Fraser have posted decent performances in the last two weeks and benefit from this kind of setting. The system also offers high-standard competitive championships where racing tactics and skills can be honed in an appropriate, meaningful setting with titles on the line.

UK coaches should take their blinkers off, get their heads out of the sand and

encourage the best endurance athletes to seek scholarships at select schools in the US. It would give an extra four years of development in an age group where they would be competitive and able to find appropriate levels of competition. They would also have a sound network to deal with injury problems which invariably arise. This would go a long way to providing a relatively quick fix until we can turn things around.

To have any chance of becoming competitive, we have to realise our distance runners need a huge aerobic base that can only be obtained through high weekly mileage. Not only does the total need to be high, but the

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volume in each individual session in the base period needs to be a minimum of 10km of reps with short recoveries being taken. The main development in a workout of this volume comes in the final third as the athlete begins to fatigue. It places the athlete in a similar situation to that he will encounter in a race, where pace has to be maintained despite the increasing levels of discomfort. It teaches patience, discipline, relaxation and willpower and allows the body to adjust to the required demands.

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As a general outline for the kind of work to be done in the base conditioning period, I would suggest the following:

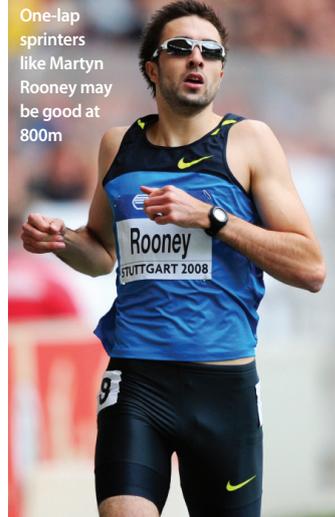
A maximum of two workouts per week with each workout containing



Mo Farah: one of the few GB men competitive at world level

10km or more of work at or near current 10km racing pace for reps of 800m and above (reps less than 800m to be based on current 5km pace). If more than two workouts are attempted they will probably contain too little volume or not allow sufficient time for recovery. Every third or fourth session should be a tempo run of between eight and 12 miles using a heart rate monitor.

Total mileage should be 95 to 120 miles per week, including a long run of



One-lap sprinters like Martyn Rooney may be good at 800m

18 to 22 miles and a medium-long run of 13 to 15 miles, most of it run at a very easy recovery pace. It is very important that the bulk of the mileage covered is used for recovery. This way very little falls in the grey area that gives little or no development but leaves the athlete too fatigued to consistently perform the required workouts.

This very brief outline, but with fine tuning, was the philosophy that allowed Irish record-holder Mark Carroll, whom

I have coached since 1996, to achieve a base that produced performances of 3:34 for 1500m, 13:03 for 5000m and 2:10 for the marathon. Obviously he is a very talented athlete and, like so many other Irish athletes, he came to the US to enable that talent to flourish.

A word to Ian Stewart. Apart from Mo Farah and Andy Baddeley at their respective distances, the only male event in which we can realistically hope to be competitive at in the London Olympics 2012 is the men's 800m. It is an event relatively untouched by drug abuse because of its unique physiological demands. Times have not improved dramatically in the last 30 years, remaining in the 1:42/1:44 range with one or two notable exceptions.

We should be looking to find four or five strong 400m runners at or around 46 seconds who would be suited to an increase in distance. They should be willing to train as a group, and be groomed and conditioned for the 800m with the best coaches and expertise available. With good support, planning and coaching we could expect a finalist with potential to contend for a medal.

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