

Metric Splits...the new Trend, Evenly Spaced and Paced

The first time metric splits came to my attention a few years ago I had the same response as most any other 47-year old man would. It was very typical. "Why rock the boat, I train in miles." Or what about the old cliché of, "if it aint broke don't fix it." In those days with a lot of effort and training for my weight I could suffer through a 25 minute 5 km. That was over eight minutes per mile. Most events had the miles posted or called.

In my first totally metric race the field was notified at the starting line that each km would be posted and an audible split would be called at the first one. I can remember a groan from a couple of friends about not understanding the metric system. At any rate, when we passed the first km my time was 4:53. It suddenly dawned on me that this would be a sub 25 race if I could sustain this pace. At two km there was a big split sign. My time was 9:58. That was a two second pad with 60% of the race to go. At the halfway point I checked my watch and it said 12:32. I was running two seconds behind. With some extra concentration and work the next couple of minutes the 3 km split was 14:52. I had actually picked up ten seconds! Again, I realized that 60% of the race had been covered and only 40% to go. I hit the 4 km mark at 19:53 and finished the race in 24:56.

I had never thought about a race in terms of percentages because it is not logical to do this with mile splits. In fact, everything about mile splits in a metric race is totally illogical. It never really occurred to me that it makes good sense to divide a race course into equal parts. This is true regardless of any training procedure based on miles or otherwise. In a 5 km race with mile splits they would be called at 32.2%, 64.5% and 96.7% of the race distance and then there would be .32% leftover. Makes no sense! About 94% of the race courses in this country are metric. This is expected since road racing is an international sport. No one seems to have any problem whatsoever with racing a metric distance. However, those introduced to metric splits without ever having tried it will complain that it is too complicated, If all these metric racing distances were changed back to the archaic mile distances you would have the same individuals complaining.

Besides exact splits in metric pacing the splits come up more often. If miles were called in a metric race, there is always a little bit of distance from the last split to the finish. If times are called or signs posted every 1,000 meters, I have more opportunities to adjust my pace. This is not true with mile splits. Even after only one race with metric splits I began encouraging every race director in my area to at least post the km's. Most have co-operated and to my pleasure. It is most satisfying to race at any metric distance with the km's and halfway point marked giving me and everyone else the opportunity of even pacing.

In the past six years I have known many runners, even those who were adamantly opposed to and very bigoted about metric splits, that have come around and would not even think of any other way to mark or call splits. Oklahoma is a leader in innovation. Oklahoma has led the way in certified courses, record keeping, race sanctioning and many other items. Now you are one of the few states to promote metric splits. This is a positive step. I can say from experience that you will be well received for doing this. At first you may have a few diehards who have opposed everything from the zip code to personal computers, but it becomes second nature after a time or two.

The least you can do for your runners is clearly mark each km and the halfway point on your course. This will be another high-quality mark for your race.

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