

Split Time Chart and How to Use It in Your Training

Cathy Sellers - High Performance Director for Track & Field

Splits (times for different segments of race or training distance) are a useful and versatile tool to use in improving your performances.

To make working with split times easy, I would encourage you to get a measuring wheel or tape measure (the wheel is much easier) and mark off different segments on the curb of your track or the side of the track using a paint marker that you can get at a craft store. 10 meter segments are ideal, but marking every 25-50 meters is beneficial.

During workouts, placing cones at key segments helps both the athlete and coach know where they are on the track and if the coach calls out the time for that segment, the athlete can learn the skill of pacing and racing.

I do have to mention that short distance splits will be affected by the acceleration of the athletes' wheelchair start. How quickly the start gets assimilated into the splits will depend on the speed of the start. One possible way to accommodate for this would be to time the athlete's starts over 20, 30, 40 and 50 meters and compare them to the split sheet. This will give a gauge of how quickly they accelerate. For example, if they go 7 seconds for 50 meters (split time) and their first 20 is 3 seconds (2.8), 30 meters is 4.4 seconds (4.2) and the 40 meters is 5.6 seconds (5.6), then you will know by 40 meters they will be on the split time or on pace and they are off by about .2 seconds. This is just an example and in reality the difference maybe more significant than .2 seconds.

Pacing

Most people use splits to figure out what pace they should be training or racing at. For example, I am an elite racer and my goal is to race a 3:07 in the 1500 meters. By looking at the split time chart, I can see that I need to be able to come through the 200 meters at 25 seconds, 400 meters at 50 seconds, 600 meters in 1:15.0, 800 meters in 1:40 and the 1,000 meters in 2:05. In your race, if you can come through those "check points" (meter marks) at those times-you have a good chance at hitting the 3:07 time.

Using the 3:07 for 1500 meters example, in training you may want to work on your race pace. A sample workout might be 10 x 400 at 50 sec (my race pace) with 30 seconds to 1 minute rest between each 400. The focus of this workout is to teach your body and mind how a particular time feels, so that you can repeat it during a competition. The rest interval will depend on how well you are able to hit the time. If you are a beginner and do not have a sense of pace meaning you struggle to hit the 400 at 50 sec. consistently, then you would give more rest. The coach can adapt the workout by doing one of two things either reduce the distance or give the split time at intermediate distances (100,200,300).

This type of workout could be done with more distance or less distance. When you increase the distance you must also increase the rest and decrease the volume (number of repetitions). If you decrease the distance, you can decrease the rest and increase the volume.

Training

A 3:07 is really quite good and your personal record (PR) for 1500 meters is 5:00 minutes. Using the chart, you see that to improve your time to a 4:52 in the 1500 meters, you will need to train going 800 meters in 2:36, 600 m in 1:57, 400 m in 1:18, 300 m in 58.50 and 200 m in 39 seconds. A workout focusing on this might be a "Ladder" workout, going 400 in 1:18, 300m in 58.5 and 200 in 39 with 2-3 minutes rest in between and doing two sets of this workout with 4 minutes in between each set.

Evaluation

There are different strategies for racing. Two of the most common are racing even splits or negative splits. Even is what we have been using with the examples above. Negative is when you race the second half of a race faster than the first half of the race. Both are very valid racing strategies.

You can use split times to evaluate your racing strategies and see how well you have done. Let's use our 1500 @ 3:07 example. I come through the 1,000 meters at 2:05. I am on target to hit my time, but I don't make the 3:07. What has gone wrong? Maybe I don't have the endurance or speed to make that time. I can race a sub 20 seconds in the 200, so I do have the speed necessary, so this tells me I have to work on my endurance.

Another way is to evaluate what happens in the race. If my first 200 split is sub-20 seconds, I may have gone too fast and have no reserves for the rest of the race, so I can go back and work on my pacing technique.

The key to evaluating your race strategy is to have your coach capture your splits. During races see if the meet director will allow cones to be placed next to the track at the 100, 200 and 300 mark, so that you can check your times.

Conclusion

Using split times are an invaluable tool in coaching track and field racing. It gives you another tool to develop training. The information that you gather from the times can help evaluate what your athlete needs to focus on in training. Play with the different concepts in training. Split times are just another tool for your coach's toolbox.