

## Less Is More for Champion Runner

Scott Hartley thought his running career was over. Then he discovered CrossFit at 44. Now he's among the fastest masters runners in the United States, running many fewer miles than his rivals.

---

Parker Morse

---



Scott Hartley is defying just about everything: the odds, conventional wisdom and his own running past.

---

1 of 6

---

There is no unanimity about the correct way to train middle-distance runners, but most coaches follow a model laid out by the legendary New Zealand coach Arthur Lydiard in the 1960s. Lydiard coached Peter Snell, Murray Halberg and Barry Magee to Olympic medals. Lydiard's system centers on high volume aerobic development as a base, followed by a cycle of training for strength (through hill running or bounding and springing drills), followed by speedwork on the track. The program concludes with tapering before a peak race.

In the base phase, Lydiard's athletes ran a volume that will strike CrossFitters as so outlandish that it looks like a misprint: up to 100 miles a week. Today, few runners beyond collegians and professionals run that many miles. Almost all runners find a lesser program adapted to their abilities, but most nationally ranked runners still rely on Lydiard's principles and run a lot of miles a lot of the time.

Not Scott Hartley. His system involves fewer than 20 miles per week and (so far) very little of the Lydiard-style training phases.

Early in March, Hartley, from Nunn, Colorado, won the 800-meter and one-mile races at the 2009 U.S.A. Masters Indoor Track & Field Championships. In April, he won the masters mile at the Drake Relays, one of the biggest and oldest track meets in the United States. On a 200-meter indoor track, Hartley ran 1:57.89 for 800 meters—within four seconds of his all-time PR, which he set half a lifetime ago as a Division II collegiate athlete at the Colorado School of Mines. The American Record for that distance in the 45-49 age group is 1:56.29.

Put another way, Hartley is running between 20 and 40 percent of the miles run by other athletes at his level. He's working just as hard, though, because his training calendar is liberally sprinkled with names like Michael, Fran and Cindy. Figuring out how those workouts made a frustrated, retired runner with back problems into one of the top masters middle-distance athletes in the country requires going back to Hartley's college days.



***Workouts like Fight Gone Bad helped Scott Hartley improve performance while sharply decreasing mileage.***

### A Background in Speed

Hartley was a track runner in high school in Colorado but hadn't intended to run in college. But like many engineering schools, the Colorado School of Mines had problems with first-year students gaining weight. One of the ways they chose to address the issue was with a compulsory physical-education course for credit. The only requirement was that the students in the course had to show up, run two miles and go home. "Some guys," Hartley recalls, "took the whole hour. I'd get there, run as quickly as I could, and go home."

---

**Hartley is running between 20 and 40 percent of the miles run by other athletes at his level.**

---

Hartley was spotted by the track coach. He wound up on a partial scholarship, running for Mines in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference, one of the toughest in the NCAA Division II ranks. Hartley ran 400 and 800 meters, racing around 47 to 48 seconds in the 400 and 1:52 for the 800. He held the Mines indoor record at 600 meters (1:25.7) until 2008.

Like many talented runners, Hartley was at loose ends for competition after graduation. Most track meets are closed competitions for collegiate athletes, so the most obvious route for runners hoping to continue running is road racing. "I did some five-Ks," Hartley recalls, "training five to 10 miles a day. I broke 15 minutes one time."

This period was also the beginning of Hartley's cycle of injury.

"I would train for three or four months and start feeling like I was getting into good shape," he explains. "Then I'd get hurt. I would pull a quad or my back would start to ache, and it would take months to heal. I'd only get to a certain level before I'd have to stop. I'm pretty stubborn, and I'm sure I did that several times before I gave up."



***Scott Hartley decided to lift his way out of back pain—and it worked.***

By the time Hartley stopped, his five-K times had climbed two or three minutes.

"It got to be agonizing," he remembers. "My lower-back problems had reached the point that I couldn't ride in a car for long periods because my legs would go numb. I'd went to see doctors and physical therapists who told me I would just have to live with it, that there was degeneration in my lower back, and that was the way it was. I'd pretty much written off running."

### Lifting Your Way Out

A middle-distance runner looking for a coach would not likely pick Conrad Shaefer's resume out of a stack. Shaefer is a champion water skier who came to CrossFit "in order to maintain a competitive edge (and) stay healthy and injury-free." Shaefer is a Level 1 certified CrossFit trainer at CrossFit Eaton, a few miles south of Nunn. Shaefer was a co-worker of Hartley's at an Anheuser-Busch brewery.

"We were talking about how I couldn't drive in a car because of my back," Hartley says. "Conrad said, 'Maybe you should think about lifting your way out of the problem.'"

Shaefer suggested Hartley's back problems and his recurring quadriceps injuries could be addressed by balancing the strength Hartley had built from running. They started with air squats.

"I couldn't do it," Hartley recalls. "I couldn't keep my weight on my heels. I would go down and my weight would go to my toes and my knees would go forward."

It took months of patient stretching and strengthening, along with core strengthening and work on other aspects of his fitness, before Hartley could do proper air squats. Now they're a mainstay of his training.

"It's hard to even think I was at a stage where I was concerned about that kind of stuff," Hartley says.

Hartley's tight hamstrings and tendency to rock to his toes during a squat is unsurprising when you watch the video of his victory at Drake. Hartley's stride, like that of most successful middle-distance runners, doesn't put any weight on his heels. There's no over-striding, and at toe-off his leg is at a 45-degree angle from the vertical—just what Lydiard advised. Hartley attributes this to his approach to training.

"I don't like jogging," said Hartley. "I want to go fast and get it done."

### The Low-Mileage Training Plan

Hartley's combination of middle-distance training and CrossFit has meant an extraordinarily low-mileage program. A typical week in February included no runs longer than four miles and frequent speedwork.

#### Sunday:

Eight sprint intervals with treadmill at extreme incline, using either Tabata intervals or 30 seconds of work followed by 20 seconds of recovery. Workout is occasionally taken outdoors and performed on a hill.

#### Tuesday:

3x400 meters at 1:00 (4-minute-mile pace)

#### Thursday:

4x400 meters

#### Friday:

Michael: 800 meters, 50 back extensions and 50 sit-ups for three rounds.

The high percentage of speedwork (what runners sometimes call "quality" workouts) shows how judging Hartley's program by mileage shortchanges it. Hartley



**Scott Hartley: proof that you can be strong and fast.**

is running as much speedwork as is recommended in a typical Lydiard program for 1,500-meter runners. He's skipping the base phase, the point of which is to build up the strength the runner would need to handle the speedwork. Thanks to CrossFit, Hartley now has strength in reserve. The schedule, he says, "maximizes work."

Hartley has been tinkering with his training program less than a year now. One piece he's still working on is periodization: the adaptation of daily workouts to a larger cycle geared toward delivering the athlete to competition well rested and in peak condition. The current cycle works like this: after a competition, Hartley's mileage comes down and his strength work goes way up. "I'll do lots of heavy lifting" in that stage, he says.

He ramps up the running component as the next competition gets closer. Only in the last week before competition does he back off both running and lifting. Shaefer says, "Scott programs his own in-season training... This leads to some degradation in other physical capacities. He returns to solid CrossFit programming in the off-season to rebuild himself."

---

**"My weight hasn't changed at all. My appearance has. It's been nice not to have to give up strength in order to run."**

**—Scott Hartley**

---

One of the more quoted lines from doctor, author and late-in-life runner George Sheehan is his characterization of each runner as "an experiment of one." Hartley says of his new regimen, "This just happens to work for me."

Shaefer says Hartley's program is "all Scott. I work on making sure he does the movements in CrossFit correctly in order to maximize his benefit and give him the solid foundation (for his running training)."

Hartley says, "Conrad introduces the workouts. I pick the ones I like."

"I hadn't lifted much before CrossFit," he adds. "There's an element of danger, and I won't lift by myself. When you have it right, it gives you great explosiveness."

He continues: "My weight hasn't changed at all. My appearance has. It's been nice not to have to give up strength in order to run."

## The Last Piece: Racing

Both Hartley's program and Lydiard's are designed to prepare the athlete for competition. But finding quality races was a problem for Hartley.

"I might not have heard of masters track at all," he says, "but I just happened on these two old guys throwing a hammer at the Colorado State University track" in nearby Fort Collins. They told him about a meet coming up, and there he learned about the indoor season.

The paradox is that even masters meets don't have much to offer Hartley now. Only events such as the Drake Relays, which draw a national-class field, offer him much competition.

"I'm planning on running in an open meet in Fort Collins on June 13," he says, hoping to find younger runners who can give him a challenge. Then it's on to the outdoor Masters Nationals meet, to be held this year in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in July.

"If I can't find open or college meets, it's hard to push myself," says Hartley.

## Masters Miling

Hundreds, if not thousands, of runners have run under 4:00 since Roger Bannister first ran 3:59.4 in 1954, and the mile remains the only frequently run "imperial" distance in an otherwise all-metric sport. (Olympic and World Championship competitions feature the 1,500 meters instead, a slightly shorter race which was established on French 500-meter tracks around the time the English were building quarter-mile tracks.)

However, only one runner over the age of 40 has ever run sub-four: Irishman Eamonn Coghlan in 1994. Coghlan ran his record 3:58:13 indoors, where he was most comfortable. As a professional, Coghlan ran 83 sub-four miles and won the Wanamaker Mile at the Millrose Games seven times, earning him the nickname "Chairman of the Boards."

What Hartley has found is a small community of older runners, spread around the country, redefining what “older runners” are really capable of. He’s raced many of the same athletes at the indoor nationals and at Drake.

“It’s fun to see these guys” at the different races, he says, and as he learns their racing styles he gets better at planning his own races.

The motivation is evident in Hartley’s voice when he sums up how far he’s come since he started CrossFit: “I’m feeling stronger now than I’ve ever felt in my life.”

The chuckle in his voice makes Hartley’s next words sound like a joke, unless you know the context—the blistering 800-meter times discussed in the second paragraph.

“I’m not faster yet, but I’m working on it.”



#### About the Author

*Parker Morse is a web programmer and freelance track writer in Amherst, Massachusetts. He has covered three World Championships in Athletics, the Beijing Olympics, and more national championships than he cares to count, writing for **Runner’s World**, **Running Times** and **New England Runner**, among others. He has run 2:02.4 for 800 meters and 34:04 for 10,000 meters, and his heels still come off the ground when he tries to do air squats.*



**Parker Morse running the “media 800 meters” at the Osaka World Championships in 2007.**