

Johnny Gray on running the 800m

One of the great 800-meter runners in U.S. history, Johnny Gray turned to coaching. He coached at the high school level and also trained U.S. 800-meter champion Khadevis Robinson.



<https://www.gettyimages.ae/detail/news-photo/frances-mahiedine-mekhissi-benabbad-competes-on-his-way-to-news-photo/453736958>

What Makes a Good 800-Meter Runner?

Gray: Usually an 800-meter runner is someone who can run a fast quarter mile [400m], but isn't fast enough to compete with the quarter-milers, and can run a pretty decent mile [1500m], but isn't strong enough to last the whole way for the mile, so they go for the 800-meter distance.

Same thing that makes a 400-meter runner. They're fast, but they don't have the strength to run the 800. As for milers, they are strong but they don't have enough speed to run the 800.

I could've run the quarter, the 800, the mile, or the 5K.

I could've done it all because I prepared my body to be able to do it all. I did trust my shape. I was a positive

individual because of the experience I had throughout the two decades that I competed.

As a youngster, I chose the 800 because it was two laps. I started with the 2-mile, which was eight laps, so I was trying to be lazy when I chose the 800. But it ended up being a good move because it ended up being the race that I was able to master and do well at.

What Do You Mean by “Trust Your Shape?”

Gray: Trust your shape means don't hold back. Keep it moving and trust that your shape will get you through. That's what I used to do. I would go out 49,50 sek [for the first 400m], and boom, I'd pick it up again. Because I trust that I can get it done, because I know my shape is there, because I've been training. And the kids don't use their shape to the fullest because of lack of faith in their conditioning.

You have kids who train hard but when it's time to go out to the race they're scared, they're not able to get it done. They run that first 400 meters, but then by the third 200, they sit back and want to rest because they think, 'OK, I'm tired, I don't want to be too tired to kick, so I'm going to hold back so that I can have a kick.'



The Value of Racing Experience for

Coaching Others

I was lucky enough to have six chances at trying out for the Olympics. That's why I'm so confident in what I say because everything that I'm talking about, doesn't come out of a book. You take these coaching Level I, Level II, Level III (courses) – which is great to have, we need that. But nothing teaches you more than experience.

It feels good as a coach to be able to tell someone that if you do this, it works because I know it works, rather than reading it out of a book. If it doesn't work then you question whether or not the book was right.

If it doesn't work for me, I know that they didn't do whatever they were supposed to do. Those easy days you haven't been running. You've been partying at night and not resting, it's something you're doing off the track. So then I can call an athlete into the room and just say, 'Hey, you know what? You're not running what you should be running, so I'm kind of wondering what's going on?' And that's when you start hearing, 'Well, coach, I didn't want to tell you but I'm pledging right now and I'm on line, they keep me up late every night.' Then you start seeing what's really going on. It's not the training, it's what you're doing off the track. And that's why I say, what you do off the track is just as important as what you do on the track."

How Do You Train 800 Meter Runners, as Opposed to The 400 or 1500 Meters?

Gray: The 1500 and 800 are pretty much similar. But for the 1500 meters you want to do a little more mileage and a little longer intervals compared with the 800.

For 400 meter runners, you're going to do more speed, a lot harder running, maybe more weight training for the power you need to generate to be a sprinter. So that's the only major

difference.

In any of them it takes proper preparation, it takes hard work to get it done. If you train hard and you're a great half-miler, you should be able to run a good mile, you should be able to run a good 400. A great 800 runner should be able to run at least 46 (seconds) or faster for the 400. A great 800 runner should be able to run at least 4:05 or faster for the mile."



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[Strength and Endurance](#)

Strength and Endurance

*by Annie Marais, Free State Middle Distance Item coordinator,
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When talking about strength and training primary school middle

distance running, I am sure most people will have some or other problem ...and it usually comes from the novice trainer/coach! Top coaches talk a different language when it comes to strength training of very young children – and it is clear that all of them include this factor into their athletes training.

I would like to tell you my story, so that you don't make the same "mistake"!

In 2014 at SA's my u/12 boy ran a 3:38 in the 1200m. This time made me proud and it was a PB [personal best time] for him, but still he came 8th in the competition...the winning time was 3:31! I realized that my athlete needed something more to be more competitive at national level. So I mixed in a lot of power exercises into the next year's programme. It looked to me that my 1200m-athletes needed more strength to carry them into a competitive position.

So I put all my middle distance [800m/1200m/1500m] through some strength training:

75% of my training time in the off-season

50% of my training time in the pre-season

15-20% of my training time in the competition season.

Let me be very clear, this was not basic strength training, in other words, no moving of iron in a gymnasium setup. [Maybe the high school and senior athlete could look at this]. The strength training I am advocating is more specific strength training like ...

Circuit training

Plyometrics/bounding

Running uphill and other inclined runs

Resistance training like pulling tyres

Steps

But I must confess I also rethought my endurance training load in the program.

So I put all my middle distance [800m/1200m/1500m] also through some endurance training:

75% of my training time in the off-season

50% of my training time in the pre-season

20- 25% of my training time in the competition season.

This helped my athletes to cope better with fatigue and improved their tolerance for higher levels of lactic acid. The heart rate volume increased to let the heart carry oxygen more quickly to the muscles. This also developed a good stamina base before going into the harder training sessions like speed and speed endurance. Examples of muscle endurance training exercises are ...

Road running 1 – 10km

Cross Country during the track and field off-season

Longer fartleks

Interval training

Terrace running

Polish Cross Country

The 800m/1200m/1500m events are becoming more brutal and aggressive events and plain, natural talent is not enough anymore. The result of my improved strength and endurance training was a gold medal in the 2015 SA's, Boys under 13, 800m (2:07min)

