

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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