

ACTLAA



**HOME TRAINING
GUIDE
FOR
LITTLE ATHLETES**

Forward

This guide has been prepared to assist young athletes to train at home so they can get fitter for athletics and be able to enjoy learning the correct techniques for the various events. Many boys and girls cannot get to Centre coaching afternoons and miss the opportunity to train. This can result in a loss of enjoyment for the sport since others who train or attend coaching seem to improve each week.

Read this guide to get some ideas to get started. Talk to a Coach at your Centre to work out a program. Persuade your parents to take an interest in your program and make sure they buy the ACTLAA Coaching books now available. Better still get them to attend a coaching program this season.

Acknowledgements

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Training Guide for Little Athletics

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Introduction

Many little athletes do not get the chance to train or practice for athletics events between their regular Saturday morning competitions. It is often difficult for boys and girls to get midweek training or coaching sessions at regular Centre grounds.

Most children enjoy competing in Little Athletics if they can perform their events properly and with confidence. Good styles and techniques result in greater improvements in performance. Our aim in Little Athletics is promote fun and fitness - these help to make other sports more enjoyable.

These notes have been produced to give Little Athletes some guidelines for training at home or on ovals close to home. There is no need to miss training by not being able to attend a regular session at the Centre oval. By following these guidelines athletes who regularly attend Centre sessions can use them to practice and learn techniques and skills rather than using them for training.

Good Hints

1. Try to train with a friend - it is more fun.
2. Choose a safe place to train - sometimes exercises can be done at home and others, such as sprints and long distance, should be done on ovals or smooth tracks.
3. Get an adult to check where you train and the equipment you use.
4. Try to get Mum or Dad to help - by holding a stopwatch or using a tape measure.
5. Talk to a coach to check your timetable and report on your progress each week.
6. Start off slowly and build up as you get fitter.
7. Always warm-up before training.
8. Make sure you have the proper clothes for temperature or climatic conditions at the time you are training.
9. Don't do heavy training after eating.

Warm-up

It is most important to warm-up your muscles before any exercise or training, in particular for any explosive events where fast actions or movements are needed ie sprinting, hurdling, jumps (all types) and throws (all types). Many injuries such as muscle strains and sprains are caused by tight and cold muscles being overstretched.

Warm-ups are important before training as well as competition because the efforts required are about the same. Jumps, sprints and throws all involve jerky movements and sudden actions where heavy efforts are needed. Don't risk injury.

Injury Prevention

Don't be careless about training especially if you do it without supervision or you run or jump in areas which are not regularly used for training or competition. Make sure you check your running track for possible dangers. Don't jump into unfenced pits before checking for sharp objects. Always wear suitable footwear. In hot weather take drinks with you and be prepared in cold weather with warm or protective clothing.

Levels of Training

All events need fitness, speed of movement and strength. Rather than specialise in one or two events Little Athletes are encouraged to become good at all events or to concentrate on the events at which they have problems or cannot perform satisfactorily. Part of the fun of Little Athletics is learning how to do an event properly and making improvements in times or distances regularly throughout the season.

Not everyone can start off at the same level. How hard you try or how much time you spend training depends on your level of fitness and your skill at the particular event. A good thrower may do difficult training for throws events but may need to start from scratch for sprints or long distance.

This guide covers beginners and intermediate levels of training. An advanced guide will be available later in the season. Remember start slowly and build up bit by bit especially if you have not exercised regularly during autumn and winter.

Prepare a Timetable

List your training program for each week. At first start with 2 or 3 sessions per week and mark-off or write down what you did at each session. In later years start your training build-up well before the athletics season starts. Note your improvements wherever possible and check your training with competition results. Rest after a hard session and rest before competition - don't train or train too hard on Friday. After a good effort on Saturday do light training on Sunday or Monday.

Be sure to make training fun whenever possible and don't do too much so that it becomes boring. By training for all events your program should have plenty of variety.

A WORD TO PARENTS - DON'T PUSH YOUR CHILDREN TOO HARD. PROPER GUIDANCE RATHER THAN CONTROL WILL RESULT IN A BETTER, HAPPIER ATHLETE.

Sprints

Sprinting is running at or close to full speed over a short distance - 50 m up to 200 m. The aims of training are to:

- improve leg speed to increase the number of strides
- improve speed endurance (to be able to keep up a fast pace for a longer time)
- develop leg power for better push or drive and
- improve the starting and sprinting actions.

The most important is the improvement of speed and this comes from improvements in strength and style.

The Don'ts of Sprint Training

- don't run with an arm action across the body. (it causes body swing and causes the legs to move in an arc rather than a straight line.)
- don't bend from the hips forward (this causes overbalancing and prevents full stride length).
- don't lean backwards to run in a "sitting" position (the benefits of the driving action are not fully used)
- don't run fully on the soles of your feet. (Run on your toes for extra spring and drive)
- don't place your feet too wide, swing from side to side.

Training

Bounding exercises - develop leg muscles and increase stride length. Do these over distances of 20-30 m.

- bounding over obstacles placed about 1 metre apart
- bounding upstairs
- bounding over hoops or old tyres placed different distances apart
- bounding set distances

Running exercises - to improve speed.

- run on the spot with a high knee lift.
- running along a straight line to check foot placement
- start off slowly and gradually increase speed each 10 to 20 metres until top speed is reached.

- catching a partner who is given a 2 metre start within a set short distance
- accelerations to top speed from a walk or jog over distances from 20 to 50 metres.

Running practices - to improve running style.

- straight runs over 50 m to 120 m at about 3/4 maximum speed concentrating, in turn, on arm action, leg drive, hip position and relaxation.
- bend running with a slight inwards lean and close to inside line.
- finish practices over distances of 30 m - 40 m at full speed aiming to run 10 metres past finish line before slowing down.

Self or home Training

BE SURE TO WARM UP FIRST.

On a lawn or oval measure a distance of 30 m-40 m

1. Hop on one leg with your best hops the full distance. Repeat on other leg. Do 2-3 of each of these exercises.
2. Stride or bound the full distance with your biggest steps using your arms for power, lift and drive. Repeat 2-3 times.
3. Run tall. Hold your arms above your head and try to run as fast as possible for 20 m-30 m. Repeat with one arm only up and then the other. Repeat with one and two arms held straight outside the body. Make sure the top of your body does not swing or twist.
4. Jog 10 m then burst into full speed for 10 m slow down and jog 10 m then go flat out for the remaining 10 m. Repeat 3-4 times. Make sure you rest between each session so you can put maximum effort into the training.
5. Step-ups. Find a bench 45 cm-60 cm high and step-up one foot at a time and step down. Repeat up to 20 times.
6. Starting practice. Learn how to do a crouch start properly. practice increasing your start reaction. Have someone say "on your mark", "set" and then clap their hands. Concentrate on improving speed and drive from the start, knee lift, arm action and the proper stance.

Circuit Training

This is good all round training for all events but it certainly benefits sprinters by building up arm, chest and stomach muscles and develops lung power for maximum speed over short distance.

Circuit without equipment

1. Shuttle run (1 minute maximum) - Mark two lines 5-6 metres apart. Start at one line accelerate to the other line, touch down behind the line and immediately change direction and race towards other line. Repeat for 1 minute.

2. Squat Thrusts (20-30 seconds) - Start in raised push-up position. Jump legs forward to squat position then jump back to push-up position. Repeat.
3. Back Arches (20-30 seconds) - Lie on back with knees bent and hands bent from elbows placed near shoulders. Press body upwards with stomach highest to form an arch. Repeat.
4. Trunk Curls/Sit-ups (40 sec-1 min) - Lie on back with knees up and hands resting at side of body. Raise body until it points upwards, then lower body until head and body touch the floor. Repeat.
5. Knee Lift Jumps (20-30 secs) - Take off from both feet and jump with both feet lifting both knees as high as possible. Keep the body straight and don't drop the chest down to the knees. Repeat.
6. Squat Jumps (20-30 secs) - From a squat position, with one foot about 30 cm in front of the other, jump upwards and straighten legs and cross over legs in mid-air so that lead leg is changed on landing. Don't drop into a full squat ie bottom close to heels.
7. Press-ups (20-30 secs) - Best performed from knees rather than toes since it places less strain on the lower back. Start lying face down with hands flat on floor near chest, push body upwards until arms are extended straight and lower body slowly back to floor. Repeat.

First - learn to do exercises correctly.

Secondly - try to do a small number of each exercise one after the other without stopping.

Thirdly - work up to full number of repeats and try to improve time and performance.

Don't do circuit work on same day as other training nor the day before training.

Extra Exercises for Sprinting

Hill Runs

Find an even but fairly steep slope and run up it fast using high knee lift and strong arm drive. Turn around and run downhill with controlled speed being sure to improve stride length. Rest and repeat several times.

Frog Jumps

Start still with both feet together, squat halfway down and use arm action to bounce forward. Do a set of 3 then 5 then 7 and finally 10. Rest when tired. Repeat series once or twice.

Long Jump

Many of the exercises for sprinting will help with Long Jump since they develop speed and upper leg strength

Bounding
Fast running
Step-ups
Hops
Frog Jumps

The purpose in training for Long Jump is to

- concentrate on developing an even fast run-up
- improve run-up speed and keep that speed right up to take off
- improve height after take-off to increase flight distance before landing

Therefore the aim is reach maximum speed in the run-up, to maintain that speed up to and through take off, to use leg drive to reach a satisfactory height and to enable the legs to be extended forward for landing. The coach will concentrate on style and technique.

Home Training

1. Step Ups - 45 cm-60 cm depending upon the size of the athlete. Don't make the step up too high.
2. Jumping over beanbags - too improve height.
3. Frog Jumps - don't drop too low in the squat position
4. Run-up-practices - Standing start accelerate to maximum speed and keep this speed until take off point. Measure standard length of run up. If the athlete is confident about his or her run-up more attention can be paid to the important take-off.
5. Skip Jumps - Practice high knee lift skips, change to opposite leg each skip.

Important to note

Always train on grass and wear thick soled shoes (joggers). Do not train in spikes. Avoid heavy bounding exercises. Be careful of jump downs - they can cause knee problems.

Acceleration Practices

Accelerate to maximum speed over 20 m, hold that speed for 20 m and slow down gradually over 20 m. (60 m in total).

Rest and Repeat several times.

Height Training

Practice jumping up to touch a hanging object. Run forward and take-off to reach as high as possible. Run towards a line and jump forwards as high as possible using arm action and knee lift to gain maximum height.

Points to Remember

- Don't overtrain and keep training fun. As you get fitter the work should get easier. The natural result is to try harder but don't overdo it.
- Do wear suitable shoes with good padding for bounding, springing, hopping and squats.
- Always train on grass or on sand so the soft surface absorbs most of the shock.
- Check with a coach for a regular program and the number of times you do each exercise. A maximum of 5 or 6 repetitions is advisable.

Shotput and Discus

The training drills using the Shot and Discus outlined here should be done under adult supervision. Attention to safety at all times is extremely important because throwing is a dangerous activity.

Introduction

Shot Put and Discus require strength and skill, so you should be prepared to work hard for a long time to develop these qualities.

To be a successful thrower you need:

- Speed
- Strength and Power
- Flexibility

which are all part of your overall fitness.

You can attain all of these by doing drills and exercises at your local oval or in your own back yard, 3 times a week, in between formal coaching sessions. The following drills can be done by athletes of all ages and ability. (There are some exercises for older throwers shown later.) The running drills can be done by yourself.

I have not included any technique work, as this should be done with your coach.

Speed

Speed is essential for a thrower. The faster you release the implement, the further you will throw it.

Drills for Speed

- accelerate to top speed from a walk or jog over distances from 20-30 metres
- change of speed runs over 20-50 metres changing speed every 10 metres until top speed is reached
- top speed sprints of 30 metres

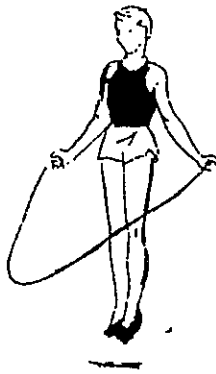
5 repeats of each of the above, walking back to the start in between.

Strength and Power - Legs

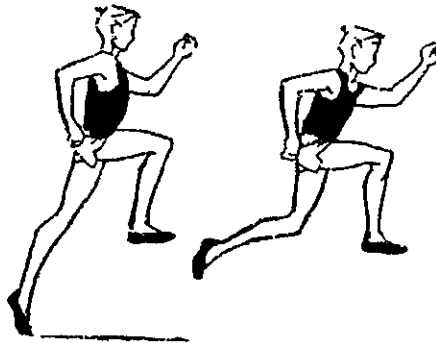
Believe it or not (most young throwers don't believe it), your legs are where you get your strength and thrust for throwing. The longest muscles in your body are in your legs, so make the most of them!

Drills for leg Strength

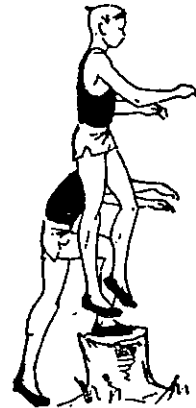
- skipping 50-100
- running up flights of stairs, if available
- hopping and bounding through sand (use a long jump pit) 4 each leg hopping, 4 bounding runs
- sprints through sand, 4 repeats
- step-ups onto a box or log fence, 10 each leg (20 all up)



Skipping



Bounding in sand



Step ups

Strength and Power - Arms

Strength will come to your arms as you grow older and will develop naturally as you continue throwing training. You should not begin resistance (weights) training before 15-16 years of age. You could damage your bones, ligaments, tendons and muscles, as they are still growing, and at this stage are very susceptible to damage from overuse.

Flexibility

Improve your flexibility by stretching all your muscles every day. This is extremely important both before and after training.

Shotput Drills

Drills which should be done under adult supervision

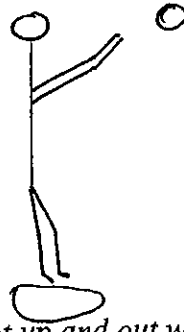
Here are some Shot and Discus drills you can do in between coaching sessions.

Remember your safety and that of others!!

1. Two handed push - do 6 repeats.

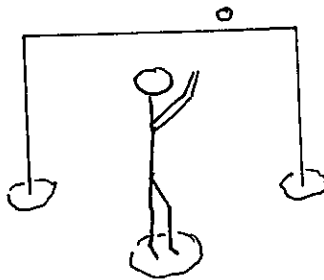


Start with your knees bent, feet slightly apart, shot held under chin with both hands.



Push the shot up and out with an explosive straightening of the arms and legs - feet will lift of the ground.

2. Pushing the shot over a soccer goal post - do 6 repeats.



3. Throwing the shot backwards over head - do 6 repeats.



Feet apart, bent at knees, shot held in both hands between knees.



Drive up with legs and throw shot back over head.

Discus drills

Become familiar with handling the discus so you lose your fear of dropping it before the throw.

Discus Swing

Rest the discus on the first joints of your fingers and swing it up and down. The left hand supports the discus at the highest point before it begins the downward swing. Gradually flatten the swing into the throwing action - note that the discus is not falling out even when your hand is facing down. Do not grip the discus hard.

Discus Roll

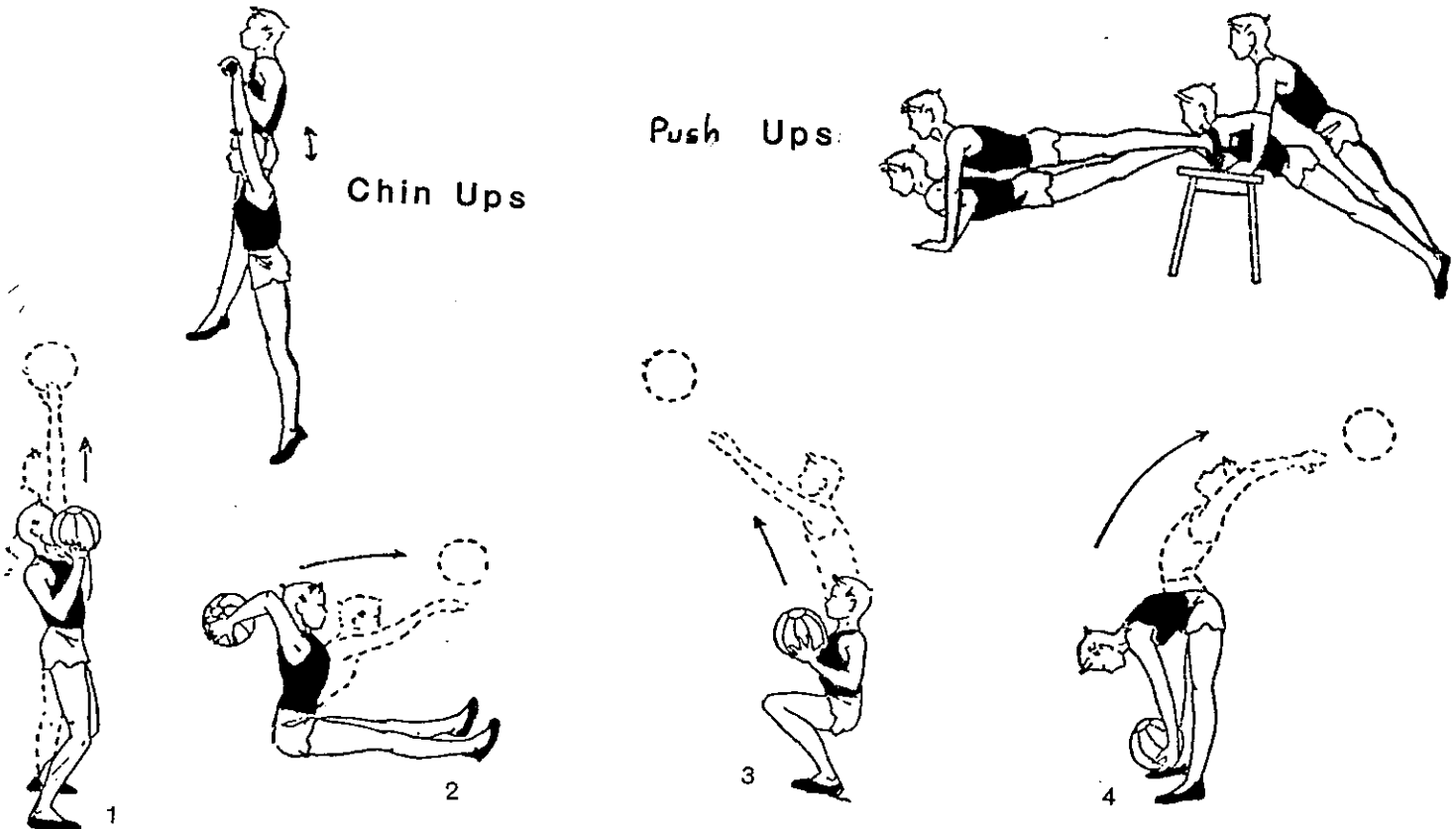
Hold the discus in the correct position in your hand with the edge pointing upwards. Roll it along the ground away from you, making sure the discus leaves over your index (first) finger.

Underarm Bowl

Hold the discus in the correct position with the edge pointing upwards. Now bowl it underarm straight into the air, making sure the discus leaves over the index finger.

Strengthening Exercise for Older, More Advanced Throwers

These exercises are recommended for the under 11's upwards and are done using your own body weight and a medicine ball. 1 - 4.



You can make your own medicine ball by cutting a slit in an old soccer ball, netball or basketball, putting sand in it up to a suitable weight - 3 Kg is enough - and resealing the slit with Superglue.

DOs and DON'Ts for young throwers

DO

- Warm up and stretch thoroughly for 10 minutes before training.
- Stretch for 5 minutes after training.
- Be aware of safety at all times, constantly check where everyone else is.
- Look before you throw.
- Fill in any holes in the ground that you make.
- Drink lots of water during training.
- Wear correct clothing and footwear.

DON'T

- Overdo training session. **QUALITY** is better than **QUANTITY**.
- Start without warming up.
- Throw if anything hurts.
- Train if your muscles are tired before you start, as this may result in injury.
- Train if you are ill or have a temperature.
- Overtrain. this can lead to boredom or injury.
- Begin weights training until mid teens - can damage joints permanently if started too early.

High Jump

The aim of the high jumper is to jump as high as possible and the run-up and the take-off are the most important parts. The run-up must be smooth and the take-off powerful.

Bouncing exercises develop leg strength. The run-up needs to be accurate and rhythmical.

Many of the exercises listed for sprinting are suitable for high jumping which involves leg strength, lift and endurance.

Bouncing Drills

Multiple hops on the take-off leg as well as the other leg. Do 6-8 hops on each leg. Repeat several times.

Perform the hops over a correct path

Pattern Bouncing.

Mark a series of lines 1 m, 1.5 m, 1.8 m or 2.0 m apart and try to bounce diagonally (from side to side) using each leg in turn. Gradually increase distances between lines.

Jumps Over Obstacles

Only attempt these at training where proper equipment and supervision is available.

It is particularly important to work out a smooth and regular run-up rhythm. Place two stands in the grass to represent the uprights and mark a line (with rope or string) along the ground between them. Measure out and practice the run up until it is exact. Work out a way to measure the run-up when net competing so more concentration can be placed on the take-off and the jump.

Middle/Long Distance Running

Introduction

Many great athletes are born with the ability to run very fast for longer periods with their available oxygen and this is the reason why many young relatively untrained athletes record astonishing performances. For the remainder of the athletes proper training can result in top performances.

Intensive specific endurance training is not recommended since it does not suit the metabolism of young athletes, can retard normal development and can cause injury to joints which are not properly formed.

For young athletes running should be enjoyable and at the younger ages most of the running is done during play without formal training. It is important to remember that children benefit from a wide ranging program of physical activities rather than too much specialization at an early age.

The greatest danger in pushing too hard at endurance running is mental tiredness rather than physical tiredness. This is often called burn-out.

The most common way of avoiding mental tiredness is by varying the type of training and the place where it is done. Nothing is worse than doing the same thing in the same place every day and is the quickest way to get an athlete to give up running or training.

Not every child is suited for distance or endurance running and has the right temperament or attitude to continue. Most children are naturally active and will frequently play vigorous games for long periods. During this time they will cover quite long distances broken up by rest periods.

Training should be the same with breaks in between long distances. If the training is done at a reasonable pace, not forced, in pleasant surroundings the athletes may find distance running enjoyable.

When they are not pushed children will stop an activity as soon as fatigue or heavy tiredness is felt. If they get out of breath while running they will naturally tend to stop or slow down until they have recovered. This should be encouraged as a natural practice and a safeguard to overtraining.

Distance training should be enjoyable and is best done with partners and in different locations to provide variety. Some runs should be up and down hills and some on flat surfaces. Always tell someone where the running course is and be careful about running in isolated places.

Footwear is important. It must provide adequate padding and support to protect the feet from the repetitive pounding, from rocks and sticks and from uneven surfaces which can cause ankle and knee twists. Try not to run too much on hard surfaces like concrete, roads and cycle paths but also be careful about soft or uneven surfaces since these can cause injuries.

Endurance Training

Young distance runners should not use shortened versions of adult training programs. Fitness and endurance can be built up from playing other sports, swimming, cycling and general running around. A steady speed running program, increased gradually, paves the way for more serious training.

Beginners

Start with a 5-6 minute run at a steady pace. Run for half the time (2.5-3 minutes) turn around and run back to the start point at the same pace. Try to cover both halves of the run at the same pace. The pace should be 5.5-6 minutes per kilometre so the first distance is about 1 km. Repeat 2-3 times per week for 2-3 weeks. Increase your running time gradually until you can run comfortable for 15 minutes or longer. You should be able to talk to your training mates as you run.

Gradually increase distances covered at a steady pace by 200 m-300 m each time until the total distance is 4 km.

The Next Stage

Increase distances gradually so you occasionally run 5 to 6 km - a steady pace for about 30 minutes.

These runs can be done 3-4 times per week but have a rest the day before competition and make the first training run after competition a long slow recovery to let tight muscles loosen slowly.

Introducing Track Work

Young children can cope with a series of easy 350 metre runs broken up by 50 m walks. The aim is to gradually reduce the rest periods in order to build up stamina.

Start a track session with a 5 min-6 min warm-up run followed by a series of gymnastic exercises (not in a jerky manner) and then 3 or 4 gradually accelerating 120 metre to 150 metre runs. Between each of these runs walk for about 200 metres. Finish the session by running at an easy steady pace for about 5-10 minutes.

On an oval start with a steady run of about 5 minutes, walk for 1 minute and then do 4-5 100 metre runs gradually gathering speed in each one to finish at close to top speed. Rest and stretch between each run.

Next walk for about 5 minutes before doing 3 reasonably fast 150 metre runs (with two minute walks in between) and finish with a 5 minute steady run around the track.

Attempt this form of training once per week in place of a normal distance session. Distance training involves a combination of long easy pace endurance running; some hill work to develop strength and short fast running to improve speed and breathing capacity.

It is most important to remember that distance training should be enjoyable and that activities such as hiking, bushwalking, cycling and swimming will all help to develop endurance and can be substituted for running training.