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WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT?

To Stay Speedy in His 70s, He Got Buff

A Masters runner rethought his approach to fitness after doctors told him he'd never run again—now he's setting track records for his age group

By Jen Murphy

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Call Grady Cash old and he'll challenge you to a race and most likely win.

At 71, Mr. Cash can still throw down a 2 minute, 38 second half-mile and continues to set records in the 200-, 400- and 800-meter distances. "If you start talking about yourself as old, you'll become old," he says.

Mr. Cash failed to make his high school and college track teams and became a mid-pack 5K and 10K runner as an adult. When a sports hernia sidelined him at age 50, doctors told him he'd never run again. But after a two-year hiatus he returned to the track.

Vowing never to take his favorite hobby for granted, he started reading obscure clinical studies and online posts about running and aging. In 2002, he hired former middle-distance Olympic runner Jim Spivey to help him fine-tune his body mechanics.

Mr. Cash entered his first national track and field competition in 2004. Eleven years later, at the 2015 USATF Masters Indoor Track & Field Championships, he experienced a training revelation. He'd competed in the 200 meters for the first time and finished last in the finals. "When I looked around the finish line, I noticed all of the men were shaped differently than the fit and trim greyhounds who run the 800 meters and 1,500 meters," he says. "These guys were V-shaped, with broad shoulders, big leg muscles and tiny waists."

Though he'd dabbled in weightlifting, he'd never had a consistent, running-specific routine. When he returned home to Nashville, Tenn., he joined a gym and hired a personal trainer. He credits the added strength with helping him achieve state, national and world records in middle distances for his age group.



Mr. Cash after winning gold in the 1,500-meter run and bronze in the 5K at the 2016 Huntsman World Senior Games in St. George, Utah. PHOTO: DAVID SCHMANSKI

Mr. Cash and teammates Tim Wigger, Salih Talib and Gary Patton ended the 2018 Masters outdoor track season lowering the 4 x 800-meter relay world record by about 12 seconds at the USATF Missouri Valley Association Masters Championships in Wichita, Kan., with a time of 10:51. “To celebrate, I did a slow run on the trails, a fierce weight workout and had a beer,” Mr. Cash said.

The Workout

Mr. Cash retired from financial planning last year to work on a book about retirement, giving him more time for workouts. He runs with a group at the Vanderbilt University track two afternoons a week. Ages range from mid-20s to 76. A typical Tuesday workout is eight repetitions of 200 meters that get progressively faster, with an all-out effort on the final rep. On Thursdays he does a longer interval routine, alternating 30 seconds of sprinting with 30 seconds of jogging for 2.5 miles.

On the weekend he does a track workout with David Schmanski, a former Masters national champion in multiple events. “He’s way faster, but I like the challenge of trying to keep up,” Mr. Cash says.

Depending on how he feels, he may do one or two days of easy recovery runs on the trails. “Finishing a workout today is never as important as being able to run injury-free tomorrow,” he says. “I’ll modify a workout if my body doesn’t feel right.”

He works out at Boost FitClub in Nashville five mornings a week. After foam rolling, he hits the weights, often with 60-year-old lifting buddy, Sherri Hahn. They focus on upper-body and core work. “I can plank for five minutes, compared

Mr. Cash, far right, with his teammates in the world-record setting 4 x 800-meter relay at the USATF Missouri Valley Association Masters Championships in Wichita, Kan., on Sept. 29. From left to right, Gary Patton, Tim Wigger, Fred Lindsley (an alternate) and Sali Talib. PHOTO: GRADY CASH

to 20 seconds three years ago,” he says.

He avoids traditional lower-body exercises like dead lifts, which he believes have a higher risk of injury. Instead, he pushes a weighted sled six times across an indoor soccer field. “I usually collapse on my hands and knees between sets,” he says.



Mr. Cash lifts weights five days a week at Boost FitClub in Nashville, Tenn. He credits strength training for speedier times in the 400- and 800-meter distances. PHOTO: JASON MYERS FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Diet

Mr. Cash fasts for up to 18 hours five days a week. He has a cup of coffee with a splash of coconut oil at 6 a.m. After his workout he has coffee with cream. He eats his first meal, usually tuna salad with olive oil and avocado slices, between 1 and 2 p.m. Dinner might be black bean chicken chili. He always eats evening snacks before 8 p.m. A protein shake or scoop of peanut butter are the norm. On occasion he has a small scoop of ice cream. On race mornings he eats low-carb pancakes with local honey and two or three eggs.

The Gear & Cost

He spends around \$400 a year on sneakers and modifies each pair with homemade elastic laces and extra arch support. He wears Hoka One One Napali for the road, Hoka One One Cavu for trails and Rocket MD spikes and Newton Distance 7 for the track. Thin socks are a must. He spends around \$200 a year on tops and bottoms from TJ Maxx. “I always cut the liner out of my shorts,” he says. “It’s too scratchy.” His Boost FitClub and Vanderbilt Wellness Center memberships combined cost \$1,100 annually.

He estimates he spent \$3,000 to travel to national track meets this year.

The Playlist

“I never listen to music,” he says. “It distracts from listening to my body. I’m mindful about my diaphragmatic breathing and my form. Am I lifting my knees high enough and are my shoulders relaxed?”



Mr. Cash does speed work with training partner Graham Hemingway at the Vanderbilt Recreation and Wellness Center in Nashville. PHOTO: JASON MYERS FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Grade Your Running Time on a Curve

We inevitably slow down as we age. If you’re getting discouraged about your times not being what they used to be, give yourself a break and remember these things can be judged on a sliding scale.

A new study published in the Review of Economics and Statistics shows that when you look at time relative to age, your slower times may not look so slow. Ray Fair, a Yale University economist who has been analyzing runners’ finish time regression since 1994, tracked the 5K, 10K, half-marathon and marathon times of male runners ages 40 to 95. Between age 40 and 70, runners slowed by about 1% each year. When runners reached their late 70s, they began to decline by about 1.5%.

Caolan MacMahon, director of The Long Run Coaching in Boulder, Colo., uses age-grading, an attempt to adjust times for ages, to compare times of Masters runners who’ve been running for decades to boost their self-esteem.

“Usually their age-graded times correspond well with times they ran when they were younger,” she says. Maintaining speed at 400- and 800-meter distances requires power and mobility. “Older runners tend to see a decrease in stride length, the distance from

push-off to landing,” she says. “Dynamic exercises and maximum-effort weight training need to be part of an older runner’s training.”

Running with people who are younger than you can provide an ego boost if you can keep up. Having someone to push you is beneficial as long as you listen to your body, she says. “Always pushing oneself is the major cause of injury and overtraining,” she says.

What’s your workout? Tell us at workout@wsj.com

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