



Lord Sebastian Coe training philosophy.

How did you get involved in athletics?

Seb Coe was born in London, but his early years were spent in Stratford-on-Avon where he was keen on football. His first success in athletics was coming 3rd in the 60 yards sprint in 1967 at the Warwickshire Schools competition. He then moved to Yorkshire when he was 11 and it was watching local athletes John and Sheila Sherwood win medals at the Mexico Olympics in 1968 on television at secondary school that inspired him to take up athletics.

Was Peter, your father, always your coach?

Seb joined Hallamshire Harriers, winners of the National Cross Country Title 7 times, where his first coach was Trevor Wright, who won silver in the marathon at the European Championships in Helsinki in 1971. Training focused on track, road and Cross Country competitions. There was a vibrant schools Cross Country scene in Sheffield, with meets every other Saturday with 35 to 40 schools competing, organised by Dave Tomlinson. Here Seb would run 4 or 6 miles, sometimes thinking nothing of competing in the morning for his school and in the afternoon for his club and at the age of 14/15 he would include long runs of 1 hour in his training. Sam Smith was the winter endurance coach and at this stage Peter Coe, who came from a cycling background, would just observe Seb's training and travelled everywhere with him for a couple of years before taking on the role of his coach. Seb's house backed onto the Hillsborough track at Herringthorpe where the surface baked rock hard in the summer and was very wet in the winter, and Seb quickly learned to adapt his training to grass surfaces and paths.

Peter pushed the boundaries and looked at coaching from a different perspective.

How do you feel this was reflected in your training compared to the training of your contemporaries?

Once Peter Coe became his coach he never stopped learning – both searching

for the latest scientific advice and in a more informal way making friends with other coaches such as Gordon Surtees, Frank Dick, Frank Horwill and Wilf Paish, so that he could pick up the phone to them at any time in order to understand more about how to coach. This informal mentoring seemed to be lost amongst coaches during the 1990s and Seb was glad to see coach mentoring introduced as the focus of the England National Coach Development Programme.

What did Peter identify in you in your early days that made him believe you could be so successful?

Peter instinctively recognised Seb's talent early and after one hard training session commented "I think you'll be going to the Olympic Games and we had better start now rather than in a few years' time". Seb went to Loughborough in 1976 and by 1981 he was already capable of 21 seconds for the 200m and 45 seconds for the 400m.

Can you remember what frequency you were training at through your teenage years and what sort of mileage you averaged and also what sort of sessions you did?

Seb's training is very well documented in the Coe/ Martin book 'Better Training for distance runners'.

Before 15 Seb was training six days a week with one rest day. As a senior Seb would have a rest day every 10 days. At 16 Seb was training twice a day and would include a conditioning programme (multi type gym) including leg presses and work on the upper body during the week.

He would keep his hill sessions (short and long hills) going throughout the summer as well, but with less intensity in the summer. Once he became a Junior he had one rest day per week and every ten days when a Senior athlete. As a teenager you were more successful at 3000m and Cross Country.

Was this a plan to build up your aerobic base first? How much and what type of speed work were you doing alongside this aerobic work?

Seb mentioned that he felt that his background of lots of Cross Country training and races (his last one was in 1980) gave him an edge in Los Angeles when he won what was his 7th race in 9 days. He believes cross country is a supreme form of conditioning, which is sadly neglected by many of today's athletes. The top Kenyan and Ethiopian athletes have all won World Junior Cross Country titles. Throughout his career Seb would once a week concentrate on speed work, or go to the gym for a workout geared towards improving power. This was a divergence from his earlier view

after winning the English Schools at 3Km when he was 15, that at that rate he would be doing marathons at 21. His conditioning programme of weights, hills and circuits continued throughout the track season but not the same volume, involving more power work at speed in the summer. He believed that the years of conditioning stood him in good stead later in his career when injured and he had missed so much prior to the 1984 Olympics. Peter recognised that Seb needed to always be close to speed. As an example of why this was important Seb mentioned the European Championships in 1971 where Dave Bedford had been up against athletes who were running 51/52 seconds for the last 400m, when he ran 60 seconds. It was his view that it didn't matter how much distance an athlete did - if you didn't have speed you were not able to compete at the highest level. From the age of 19 he joined the sprinters once a week at the Harvey Hadden Stadium in Nottingham.

Did you think at that time that you could reach the highest levels in sport?

1976 – the year Seb went to Loughborough, meant a change of environment and in the trials he was not running well. In August, with a p.b. of 1.51.8 for 800m Seb went to a BMC race at Stretford where Dennis Watts (coach to Andy Carter – 1971 European bronze medallist) had a chat with him and suggested Seb should run from the gun. He ran 1.47.4 prompting his father to comment "I think we may have found the distance!"

Indoors Seb won the AAA's making his debut on the same day as Daley Thompson and Keith Connor. 1977 was a good season winning his first major title the European indoor championships in Spain. In 1978 Seb broke the World Indoor 800 metre record against the East Germans at Cosford. At this time Seb was still competing in road relays!

How was the coach relationship with your father sustained at University?

Peter always believed that good coaches always build towards their own obsolescence and to make the athlete self reliant. Peter would turn up for every session when Seb was younger, but when he was older Peter would only get to half as many. He would come down to the track where Seb was training with a dispassionate eye and suggest maybe reducing mileage if he felt this was what was needed. He began as Seb's coach moved to being an advisor and then became a confidant. He believed in knowing what you don't know and bringing experts in to fill that void, using for example a medical advisor - Dave

Martin and a conditioning coach.

Did the Moscow 800m in some way make you an even better athlete?

Most people think the 1979/1980 season was Seb's most memorable, but he believed it was the 1977/1978 season that was a defining one, including the bronze medal at his first European Championships in Prague in 1978. But to make the jump to an Olympic medal it was identified that Seb needed to focus on speed and speed endurance which he did. Seb also believed that you could learn more from losing a race, for example in Prague he went through the bell in 49.1, - too fast - so pace judgement was also crucial. Seb also stated that mental toughness and belief were important especially when coming back from missing training time through injury.

With Steve Ovett around at the same time and a phalanx of other athletes behind you did this help to push you to greater heights?

Absolutely. Seb knew that Steve Ovett would be unbeatable if he was allowed to be ahead in a race with 200m to go. Therefore all their races were hard grind - with faster than 1.36 or 3.34 pace needed. Similarly, he would not want Steve Cram in front of him with 400m to go and would adapt accordingly. One of Seb's famous statements at the time was "Speed hurts, sustained speed kills".

Leading into major championships when would you begin to taper for them and would this involve reducing sessions, mileage, etc?

Over the winter Seb would average approximately 65/70 miles a week. This was pacey mileage (never running slow mileage). He would however sometimes go on a 'therapeutic' run for an hour after a period of hard work. At the end of the track season Seb would take 3 or 4 weeks off and do nothing, beginning the next season at the end of September with steady mileage and attention to drills. There would be a focus on cross country, road and indoor competitions until March/April when track work would start. Seb would use flats, like marathon shoes, and he advocates "spikes being used much more sparingly and the track being used much more sparingly". Seb would have one long run a week of an hour to 1.5 hours and reduce his 7/8 mile runs to 4 x 6 - 5 mile runs instead. Seb's once weekly power lifting session would be maintained throughout the competition period. His steady state running would be much higher than people would expect.

Key Sessions?

Seb recommended 300m repetitions as a good distance for both 800m and 1500m runners. He knew he was in good shape when he could do 8 x 300m with 20/25

second jog recovery over 100 metres in 36 seconds. Before his world record in '81 he also did a 6 x 800m sessions with 45 second recovery averaging 1.50/1.51 (with one rep at 1.47!) Seb also believed that speed work is often confused with speed endurance work. A speed work session could be 3 x 150m with 15 minute recoveries. Endurance athletes may think that if they had only done as little as that in training it would not be enough - but you lose the effect if you make it a speed endurance session.

Similarly what was your least favourite session?

The 8 x 300m session! But Seb even persuaded Daley Thompson to try it for 6 weeks and it improved his 1500m time.

Apart from Max VO2 Treadmill Tests did you use any other scientific tests?

Cybeck testing, CPK work. Lactate testing but nothing invasive like muscle biopsies. One might guess Seb has 50:50 fast and slow twitch fibres but he thinks he has more white fibres than red.

Seb's VO2 max was not particularly high - In the low 70's and he therefore had good economy of effort. His father did not have to do anything to his stride, but did correct his arm action by getting him to drop his arms.

At your peak how much of your success would you put down to your conditioning/ strength programme?

Seb did a daily conditioning session using his own body weight and helped build up his muscular endurance in his legs with 2000 or 3000 single leg squats. He also did specific weights, specific circuits and a variety of hill work to improve his overall conditioning.

Your illness and the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics?

In 1982 Seb would train well and then feel completely exhausted, but in 1983 his energy levels were up and down and he felt lethargic and tired and nothing could be identified from tests as causing the problem. Three weeks before the World Championships Peter contacted his medical advisor, who examined Seb's lymph glands and found them to be badly infected and swollen as a result of toxoplasmosis which Seb had probably picked up in Italy in 1982. These had to be removed and between August and Christmas Seb did not run a step. In November he began conditioning work again and with only 6 months to go before Los Angeles he was allowed to start training again with 2/3 mile runs with the younger athletes. In the Trials Seb was beaten by Peter Elliot, but he then suffered a stress fracture so Seb was picked. At the Olympics Seb believed that all the 800m races helped him get race fit, and then he had to contend with three

1500m races. Prior to the Olympics Seb had spent 4 weeks in Chicago with Joe Newton and trained at the high school. He then went to the Olympic village 2 weeks before the start with Daley. His father came over and watched him training. His last session of 4 x 400m with 3 or 4 min recoveries saw him achieving 50 seconds for each rep to which John Walker commented - "he will win"! Seb had two races 1.45 and 1.44 then a day off and then the final 1.43. This was followed by another day off before the 1500m started. Seb believes it is a shame that athletes don't double up anymore - just training for 800m is not enough to get through. Wilson Kipketer's world record for 800m is 1.41.11, but he could not run 3.42 for 1500m. He also felt that reducing the rounds in Championship races was to make them less of an endurance test, and favours the 400m type runner in the 800m. Seb also felt that because there is now a major Championships every year that it is not feasible to do them all. He believes there is too much pace making in races and not enough race scenarios where the athlete has to think on their feet.

Domestically leading into 2012 which athletes stands out for you?

Lisa Dobriskey/Jenny Meadows also Marilyn Okoro and Andrew Osagie.

If you could give one piece of advice to youngsters what would it be?

Nothing happens overnight - it is a tough sport be tough - especially in world terms - being mentally tough is a great asset and part of training. Other pieces of advice from the talk:- **zz** Lots of Fartlek work whether true fartlek or controlled fartlek is good for you. **zz** Don't warm down too slowly **zz** Conditioning needs to be carried on the whole year round and not stopped in March/April **zz** Favourite stadium Zurich **zz** Cross-Country a key ingredient for endurance runners including middle distance runners.

zz Domestic racing is important and international athletes have a responsibility to it. There has been a change of mind set where athletes think that they deserve to be looked after more. **zz** Seb gave up all other sports at 15 to concentrate on his athletics only playing social cricket.