

# Cinco do Mayo

From the May '99 Port City Pacers PaceLeter

I've spent a fair amount of time in Mexico training with the Mexican Olympic racewalkers. The Mexicans are among the best— and best- coached— walkers in the world, so every time I go I learn a great deal about technique, training and racing. In celebration of Cinco de Mayo, the following are five training tips I've appropriated from the Mexicans.

**Practicar la tecnica.** Work on your technique. The Mexicans spend a lot of time refining their racewalking technique. Most of the Mexican athletes don't have the benefit of video analysis, but all workouts are supervised by their coaches who constantly comment on the good and bad elements of the athletes' techniques. The Mexicans also work to improve their technique through technique drills, and they work to improve their flexibility through dynamic flexibility drills, stretching and swimming.

**Variiedad es la especia del vida.** Variety is the spice of life— and training. The Mexicans work hard, often very hard, on their hard days and take it surprisingly easy on the easy days. Hard days include things like very hard 20 to 25 kilometer tempo walks, interval workouts totaling 10-12 miles of repeats, and 30 to 40 kilometer not-so-slow distance walks up the flanks of Mt. Popocatepetl— although since it's now erupting I suspect they've found another mountain to replace it. Most work is done at about 8,500 ft. altitude, but there are also periodic trips to Bolivia for very high (14,000 ft.) altitude training, and Acapulco or Veracruz for heat and humidity acclimatization training at sea-level. That may be a bit extreme for most walkers, but most Americans have no variety in their training. They do about the same thing every day: three to five miles of moderately intense walking just about every day with a 5K race for speed work every few weeks. Good for your general "well-being" but not anywhere near enough to prepare you for the rigors of hard racing.

**Escuchar a la cuerpa.** Listen to your body. My Mexican coaches were extremely proficient at monitoring my body's response to training. Rather than assigning a particular pace, they assigned a target heart rate to each workout and later analyzed the sessions via a computer-downloadable heart-rate monitor. Track workouts were even more closely gauged, by using a portable blood lactate analyzer. Although you don't necessarily have to go to such extremes, it is important to keep a close watch on how you're responding to your workouts. Even without high-tech equipment you should be able to learn how it feels to work hard on a hard day, and how comfortable you should feel on easy days. You should also look for signs of over-training: persistent muscle aches, elevated resting heart rate, "general malaise," and insomnia.

**Tienes solamente una cuerpa.** You only have one body. (So take care of it!) The Mexicans work very hard, but suffer surprisingly few injuries. They are able to handle these heavy workloads by doing everything they can to recover from each workout. Recovery is facilitated by massage several times per week, plenty of sleep (including daily siestas), good food, and—even in Mexico— lots of water. And their flexibility training isn't just for technique, flexibility is critical for injury prevention as well. Stretch!!!

**¡Te diviertes!** Have fun! Consistent hard training over many months and years is the key to success. To accomplish that you have to enjoy what you're doing. The Mexicans train very hard but they have a great time doing it. If at all possible, find a training partner for your long or hard workouts, take a day or two off if you feel like it's getting to be a grind, and most important, get together for group training at Mo and Dave's Daredevil Racewalk School, 7:00pm every Wednesday evening at USA track. And if that ain't fun enough, join us for cerveza and margaritas afterwards.

**¡Felíz Cinco de Mayo!**

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[\\*Return to homepage](#)

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