

## Tech Runner: Just When You Think You Can't Run Another Step



**By Dr. Katey Baruth, Post University**

I can't really say why, but against my better judgment I think I might be considered someone who runs or is a 'runner.' Being an athlete all my life, I never really focused on running as a primary goal other than to get in better shape to play whatever sport was my main focus at the time. I also had learned that running was associated with being in trouble as coach after coach would make us run suicides or long distances as part of a punishment for a lackluster athletic performance. Essentially, running was always a means to an end and I never really thought that it was a sport in and of itself until recently. Much like Ivan Pavlov and his many studies about classical conditioning, the word running had become a conditioned stimulus and provoked a conditioned response which brought utterly dreadful thoughts to both my mind and body (Chance, 2008).

Now in my 30's, the idea of playing contact sports and sustaining injuries is more and more unappealing. I still value being active physically and mentally, and even competing when I can, and was extremely surprised that after a couple informal 5k events I was thinking of doing more and improving my performance. While I recognize I have passed my opportunity for being an elite runner, I still wanted to improve my time and run faster to improve my standings as long as I am crazy enough to want to complete. So I began to look around and see what others who were stupid enough to compete were doing to pinch off seconds to minutes race after race.

During a race when I was in particular mental and physical misery, a woman in her 50's bounced past me at a noticeable faster speed. While she passed, I heard a loud 'beep' and I noticed that she looked down at her wrist and seemed to be paying attention to the screen of her watch. After another quarter of a mile, I heard another 'beep' and noticed she did the same thing by viewing something on the face of the watch. It seemed that her watch was providing her with some sort of alert every quarter of a mile and she was adjusting her pace accordingly. This idea seemed extremely attractive to me since my favorite part of the race is when it is almost over! If I had her watch, I would also have the knowledge I needed in regard to distance as well as pace. Maybe I would know when to run faster or slower to improve my time as well? And more importantly, know when the race was about to end! The options seemed so enticing that I had to know more.

After the race and chatting with her, she shared that the miracle device she was using a Garmin Forerunner 620 (<http://garminforerunner.com/advanced/garmin-forerunner-620-best-gps-running-watch-2015/>) to improve her time and plan how to approach the 3.1 grueling miles which lay ahead of her during the 5k. The watch could help her by providing data about her running dynamics ranging from basic components such as pace and laps to more advanced features such as cadence, ground contact time, vertical oscillation, V02 max estimate, accelerometer, as well as even sharing the time needed to recover from the race (Engaget, 2015). Apparently for a runner, this watch would provide much of the data needed to help while competing. And for me, it could be programmed to alert me to when I had traveled 2.75 miles and the race was about to end! In thinking about classical conditioning again, perhaps there was hope for me yet to change my response to running in a more positive manner!

After purchasing the watch and preparing for my next 5K, I was ready to see how this simple yet complicated piece of technology would impact my performance both mentally and physically. I set the Garmin to alert me at every mile in addition to when I had reached 2.75 miles. As I prepared for the race, I felt more relieved that I would have more information to assist me perform at possibly a better level. As the first alarm went off signifying one mile was completed, I noticed that I was more relaxed and comfortable running and even decided to pick up the pace. I also recognized that I wanted to run faster as each alarm signified a mile

had passed as I reached the 2.75 mile and 3 mile markers. As I crossed the finish line, I was pleased to find that I had run my fastest time ever with the support of this useful learning device. While I wish the watch could do more, such as running the race for me, I was pleased with how the information and knowledge provided acted as positive reinforcement in the learning process (Flora, 2014). Not only was I happy with the outcome, I was eager to run again and improve upon my previous time. Both technology and I win in this case!

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#### References

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Flora, Stephen (2004). The Power of Reinforcement. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.