

Training Break Down: How I broke Sub 3 in the marathon

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Introduction

In summer 2022 I decided to run my second marathon. My first one was 4 years ago back in 2018. My time was 4:00:04.

After my first marathon I started doing endurance training: running, cycling and swimming. I was 23 years old at that time. Before that I only played soccer since age of 6 for three times a week.

Here I listed the training hours I put into endurance training over the years:
(All this data I tracked on Strava)

2018: 136h

2019: 333h

2020: 259h

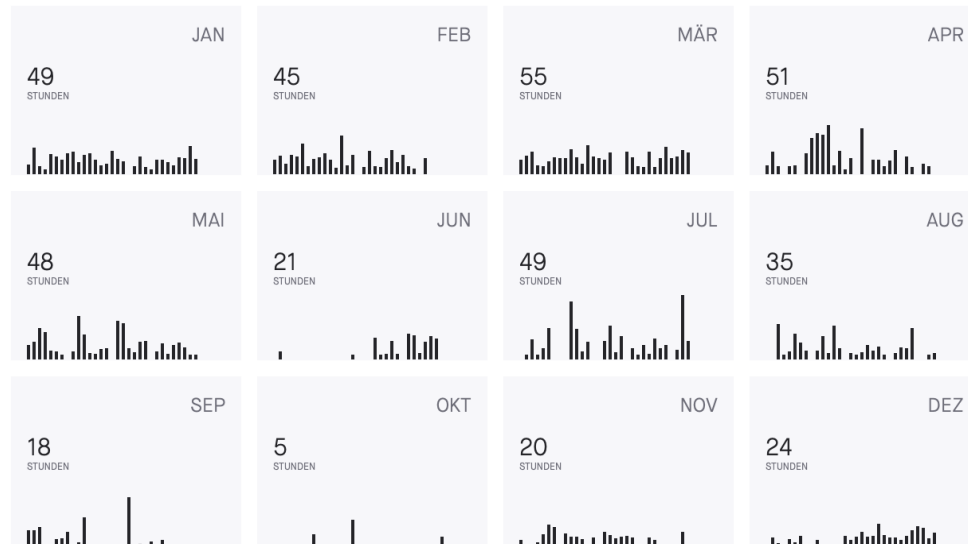
2021: 453h

2022: 418h

Of these hours approx. 1500-2000km are running per year.

In my opinion this a hell lot of volume for someone who works in a 40h+ 9 to 5 job. To train for 300-400h a year you have to be very committed.

Here's an example year (2022) of my weekly hours that I put into training:



I show you this because I want you to acknowledge the amount of effort it takes for fast times. In the years from 2018-2021 I also played amateur soccer in a team. Because of the corona virus in 2019 there were only a few soccer games and training during this time. So I was able to focus on endurance training. I don't tracked the time for soccer training in Strava so that these hours are not included.

Fitness level before the marathon preparation:

Before the training plan showed below, Corona had put me completely out of action for two weeks. I couldn't train.

My training level before that was very good. I had been able to run a time of 35 over 10 km in a road race and signed up to a couple of triathlons. In addition to that I had started playing amateur soccer again after a break of a year. In retrospect the training worked very well without any major injuries. It was still a bit chaotic at times and anything but a good, solid marathon build-up.

Playing football alongside endurance sports:

Playing soccer once or twice a week while also doing 10 hours of endurance training can be a bit risky, but it has some good points too. Here's why:

When you do endurance training, your body often doesn't get enough rest during the week. Adding soccer to your schedule can make it easier to get hurt. Soccer is a very fast and intense game with lots of short sprints and quick movements.

I think the chance of getting injured is pretty high, especially if you're also training for a marathon. Long runs can make you very tired, and your body needs time to rest.

But, playing soccer also has some benefits. It involves different kinds of movements that you don't usually do in endurance sports. If you think that being fit from endurance training makes soccer easy, you're wrong. Soccer is still very challenging.

The high-intensity exertion in football is something completely different. You can not compare it with endurance sports. At the same time soccer has a very social component whereas endurance sports are usually more solitary.

The goal for the marathon:

I had not really a realistic goal before the marathon. Because of my previous performances (10k in 35min) I was convinced that I could run under 2:50h.

Most of my training so far consisted as you would expect from triathletes not only of running but also cycling. In my opinion cycling is a very good complement to running training.

This is what my training looked like 12 weeks before the SUB 3 Marathon:

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Run	Cycling	Other (Soccer, Swim)	Time /Week
1	Run 30min easy	Run 40min easy	Cycling 2h easy	Run 40min	Rest day	Cycling 2h easy	Sprint Distance Triathlon + Cycling 1h easy (Ride to and back from the triathlon)	2:17h - 26km	6:48h - 198km	-	9:22h
2	Run 45min easy	Cycling 2h easy	Swim 30min easy Cycling 1:40h easy with short efforts 20min brick run	Cycling 2h with efforts	Rest day	Cycling 30min easy	Olympic Distance Triathlon (Sub 38min for 10k)	1:59h - 24km	7:25h - 228km	60min Swim	10:22h
3	Bike commute (1h) Run 30min easy	Run 30min easy Swim 40min easy	Cycling 1:45h	Soccer Training	Restday	Restday	Cycling 6h easy	1:08h - 12km	9:47h - 263km	40min Swim 90min Soccer	13:06h
4	Bike Commute (1h) Run 40min easy	Run 60min (7k Tempo)	Cycling 2h easy	Soccer Training	Restday	Run 50min easy Cycling 1:10h with efforts	Run 1h easy Cycling 2,5h easy	3:37h - 43km	8:19h - 222km	90min Soccer	13:37h

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Run	Cycling	Other (Soccer , Swim)	Time /Week
5	Run 30min easy	Cycling 2,5h easy	Restday	Run 10x800m 800m between 2:30-2:45 (very good session)	Run 40min easy	Run 50min easy Swim 30min	Run 40min easy	3:58h - 44km	2:35h - 60km		7:26h
6	Cycling 2:15h easy	Bike Commute 1h Run 1h	Bike commute 1h	Soccer Training	Run 1h easy	Cycling 7h (200km - Longest one so far)	Cycling 1:15h Easy Run 8x800m Tempo	2:50h - 33km	12:13h - 340km	90min Soccer	16:46h
7	Rest day	Soccer Training 90min	Cycling 3h Easy Run 45min easy	Run 30min easy	Run 1h easy	Triathlon Sprint Distance + Commuting to Race location by bike 1:30h	Long Run 25k (18k at Marathon Pace)	4:33h - 57km	5:12h - 158km	90min Soccer	9:57h
8	Bike Commute (1h)	Soccer Training (90min)	TWL 6x3/3	Cycling HIT 5x5 at what watt?	Run 30min easy	Run 50min easy Cycling 3h easy	15k at Marathon pace (32°)	3:41h - 47km	6:27h - 191km	90min Soccer	11:49h

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Run	Cycling	Other (Soccer, Swim)	Time /Week
9	Rest day	Swim 45min	Run 35min easy	Bike Commute (1h)	Half marathon race 1:24:43h (start was way too hard)	Cycling 1h easy	Cycling 1,5h easy	2:12h - 30km	3:13h - 73km	-	6:10h
10	Run 35min Easy	Soccer Training	Run easy 40min	Run 1h progressive up to marathon pace	Cycling 1:20h easy	Long Run 30k (26k in 4min pace) Cycling 1:20h	Restday	4:22h - 58km	3:04h - 74km	90min Soccer	8:57h
11	Restday	Bike Commute (1h) Run 30min Easy	Soccer Training 90min	Bike commute (1h)	Half marathon Race 1:23:07	Cycling 2h easy	Soccer Game (90min)	2:04h - 28km	3:38h - 92km	180 min Soccer	9:26h
12	Rest day	Run 40min easy	Pre Race tune up 1,6k/1,2k/800m/400m/200m in Race Pace	Cycling 1,5h easy	Restday	Run 20min easy 4x200m Race Pace	Race Marathon in 2:58:14 - 4:13min/k	4:39h - 64km	1:25h - 37km	-	6:04h
								In total: 37:20h 466km Avg/week: 3:06h 38,8km	In total: 70:06h 1936km Avg/week : 5:50h 161km	In total: 11:20h Avg/ week: 52min	In total: 123:02h Avg/week : 10:15h

The Training Statistics:

Running:

In total: 37:20h - 466km
Avg/week: 3:06h - 38,8km
Highest weekly distance: 58km

Cycling:

In total: 70:06h - 1936km
Avg/week: 5:50h - 161km

In total: 123:02h trained
Avg/week: 10:15h

The Marathon Race Report:

The first kilometers in the race went almost outstanding. I ran the first 30km in 1:59:44 (3:59min/km). So far so good. That was also what I had run for 26km in training. The nutrition was going well and I was able to take in 80g of KH per hour via gels (Ministry of Nutrition).

At the beginning of the race I was running around 30th place. The feeling of being one of the first to pass the spectators pushed me very hard. Especially running through the waiting relay runners was overwhelming. I also met a few familiar faces at the side of the course that didn't know that I was racing.

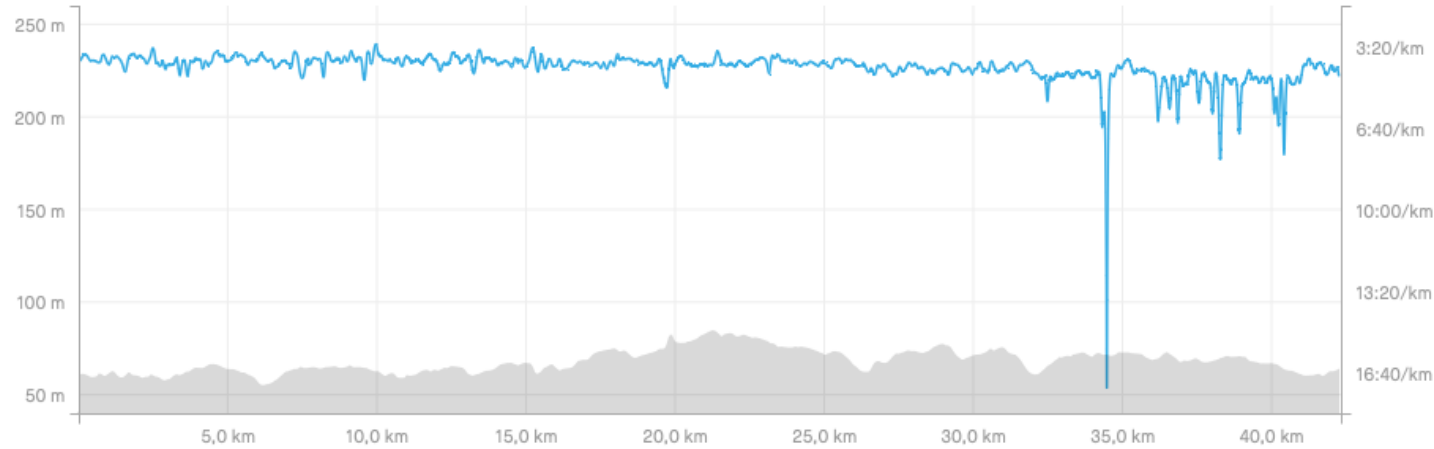
From kilometer 35 on a slight cramp in my calf became noticeable. I attributed this to a lack of fluids and tried to compensate for the lack of fluids at the next aid station. Unfortunately with way too much water. A few meters after the aid station I had to throw up for about 2min.

The majority of the supplied energy was also out again. I was able to continue running, but at some point it was

over. The body was completely empty. There was nothing left in the tank. I was forced to walk a few times and could only continue running very slow. All the goals I had set didn't matter to me at that moment. My body felt awful. I could no longer supply energy and my stomach rebelled. Again and again runners came by and pushed me to keep going.

Finally I finished in 2:58:14h. Place 57 of nearly 1500 participants. I was happy and disappointed. Because of that one mistake that I made, my time was much worse than expected. BUT I had finished a SUB 3 marathon in my second marathon ever.

Statistics of the race:





Marathon Splits:

KM	Tempo				
1	3:50 /km	11	3:53 /km	21	4:00 /km
2	3:53 /km	12	3:53 /km	22	3:59 /km
3	3:54 /km	13	3:57 /km	23	3:58 /km
4	4:04 /km	14	3:53 /km	24	3:54 /km
5	3:52 /km	15	4:00 /km	25	4:03 /km
6	3:49 /km	16	3:57 /km	26	3:58 /km
7	3:56 /km	17	4:03 /km	27	4:12 /km
8	4:00 /km	18	4:05 /km	28	4:16 /km
9	3:56 /km	19	3:52 /km	29	4:16 /km
10	3:50 /km	20	4:12 /km	30	4:15 /km
				31	4:13 /km
				32	4:07 /km
				33	4:39 /km
				34	4:29 /km
				35	5:59 /km
				36	4:14 /km
				37	5:08 /km
				38	4:43 /km
				39	5:23 /km
				40	4:39 /km
				41	5:21 /km
				42	4:09 /km

1	21,06 km	1:23:09	3:57 /km	3:56 /km	183 bpm
2	21,26 km	1:35:05	4:28 /km	4:28 /km	176 bpm

 **Marathon (2:57:38)**

 **30 km (1:59:44)**

 **Halbmarathon (1:23:16)**

 **20 km (1:18:51)**

The training and what I would do better:

#1 Do more long runs

For this preparation I only did 2 long runs at marathon pace (25k and 30k) and 2 half marathon races (1:24:43h and 1:23:07h). During the race I realized that my muscles didn't know what was coming after the 30k mark.

- Long runs
- Easy long runs before starting race pace long runs
- I found out about long runs + cycling as a way to extend long runs.

#2 Experiment with salt intake and nutrition

I didn't figured out the nutrition game in the marathon yet. For preparation I tried a carb intake of 80 g/h. During the training there were no problems. I have only tried one manufacturer so far. I think you should test different manufacturers of gels for yourself as many times as possible in training.

Also having someone with you to hand you bottles of drinks is essential. The small cups of water at the aid stations are very difficult to drink. So you might not always take in the right amount of liquid that is necessary.

#3 A good marathon preparation doesn't necessarily need a really big running volume

My biggest running week in this training period was 58k. This shows that cycling and other endurance sports also do the job.

#4 Do at least a bit of strength training

I didn't have done any strength training in this period. This became apparent in the marathon with the calf cramp. My muscular system didn't know what was coming after the 30k mark. So I think that doing that strength training would help with that.

#5 Consistency is the key.

My number one advice is try to be consistent. Showing up every day without getting any serious injury and making progress over months and years. In endurance training there is not the one magical workout, it's the dozens of workouts which add up to successes. I didn't get sick during the 12 weeks of preparation and was able to train continuously.

My marathon time is slow in comparison with my other personal bests on shorter distances.

Thank you!

I hope this insight into my marathon preparation helps you to gain some insights what is necessary to become a Sub 3 hour marathon runner. If you have questions or you miss some information feel free to reach out via social media or via mail@united-in-pace.com.

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