



WOMEN'S SPORTS & FITNESS Magazine
** "In Shape" column / June/July 1988 issue
(text version)

KEEPING THE DRIVE ALIVE

** *Advice From Top Athletes On How To Stay Motivated*

By Elaine Rogers

You could be an exercise novice or a world-class athlete. Either way, you'll still have days when you can't wait to work out and days when you'd rather not. There will even be times when your fitness routine ranks dead last on the list of things you'd like to do.

The problem, of course, is motivation, or lack thereof. "The hardest thing for me is getting out of bed and going to the track," says runner Evelyn Ashford, who won two gold medals in the '84 Olympics. "A lot of times, just making myself get there is hard. But once I get there, I'm usually okay."

It's hard to believe that Ashford, world record holder in the 100-meter dash and popularly known as "the world's fastest woman" sometimes doesn't feel like working out, but it's also comforting. After all, if a world champion sprinter has days when she flat-out skips her regular training regimen, then it follows that the rest of us will occasionally feel tired of our fitness routines.

According to Ashford and other top athletes, a primary defense against fitness fatigue is knowing when to give in to it and when to fight it. Alicia McConnell, America's top woman squash player, suggests that if you truly don't want to work out one day, "then don't."



“I give myself permission to not work out when I really don’t feel like it,” she explains. “And I give myself permission not to feel guilty about it too.”

But McConnell, who’s ranked 17th in the world in her sport, says that sometimes all you need is a little push, in the form of variety, to get yourself back on track with your fitness program. “If I don’t feel like playing squash because I’m a little tired of the pressure and the competition, “I’ll do something different. I might go out and play basketball or something – anything to add some variety to my schedule.”

Three-time world cycling champion Connie Young agrees: “It’s important to keep diversity in your training. If you go out for a bike ride every day and never do anything different, you’ll get bored fast.”

Young, a gold medalist in match sprints at the Pan Am Games, puts diversity into her workouts in a number of ways. She is a fan of circuit weight training, and she varies the exercises she does, the number of repetitions, the amount of time it takes to complete a lap , and even the music she listens to.

Young also “breaks things up” on her training rides by taking different routes from day to day and doing “city sprints” in which she picks a point ahead on the road and accelerates at top speed to that point. “It’s just a way of keeping things interesting,” she says. “Plus, changing your pace helps get you in better shape.”

Similarly, Ashford fights fitness fatigue by playing “little mind games” with herself. She sets goals, rewards herself when she accomplishes a goal and takes her workouts “one step at a time.” It’s a technique she believes recreational athletes might also use to their advantage.

“I might set a goal of just getting through my warm-up. Then, it’s bargaining time again, and I might reward myself for getting through a tough workout by cutting it a little shorter at the end.

For that matter, McConnell adds, you might make your workout a reward in and of itself by getting your friends involved and making it a social event. “If you’re working out alone all the time, it gets boring,” she says. “But all you have to do is call up a friend and do something active together, like riding bikes or walking.”

Staying motivated may seem as hard as these solutions sound easy, but these dedicated athletes agree that no matter what your sport or level of performance, monotony is a basic problem of any exercise program. Change should be a constant in your workout; that might mean cross-training or simply varying minor aspects of your schedule and sports of choice. And don’t feel too guilty when you do take time away from your regular routine. There’s always tomorrow.

*

Elaine Rogers is a free-lance writer and a frequent contributor to our magazine.