

Stage 4: Time to Turn on Baby Beast Mode... Only During the Decline

Having ran Stage 4 in 2017 and in 2018, I can say it is an uphill battle. Get your heart ready so it can max out. My sustained heart rate is around 167 bpm for intense exercise; however, during the relay it peaked at 199 bpm twice! The good thing is that my training regimen got me ready for the challenge and I saw a great improvement on my run this time around. Keep in mind the desert weather and evaluation is a harsh combination that might not be mimicked during your training sessions. However, with hydration, rest, cardio and strength training, you'll be ready to set a record!

Here is the technical information on Stage 4. Based on the data recorded on the phone app, Runkeeper, the course starts at an estimated elevation of 1,190 feet. The climb is steady and reaches a summit of 2,100 feet at the 3.5 mile mark. This is an elevation gain of 910 feet for that stretch. Then the decline begins and ends at the 5.1 mile mark at an elevation of 1,916 feet.

It is of utmost importance to pace yourself during the first 3.5 miles. Do not let your adrenaline take over. You will most likely slow down as your quads burn, but keep jogging. You are warming up so you can get ready to turn on beast mode during the decline. That is where you make up for your lost time by running, no longer jogging, so you can sync your overall pace to what you normally run at or even faster. Throughout the run, have some water so you can keep your mouth wet, it will dry out. I had a runner's belt with a small six ounce bottle of water on me for that.

So how did I get a pace of 8:16 for Stage 4? Here are the general details of my workouts. My training was 4.5 months long. I ran 35 separate times for an estimated total of 104.4 miles. Keep in mind, 90% of my runs were on a treadmill with an incline of 1 – 3.5. Wait... that's not much of an incline at all! I'll get to the alternative in a bit. My pace was between 7 – 9.5 mph sustained. I ran faster for short runs than I did for longer runs; it is all about pacing. Anyways, I tried to run at least three times per week. I never ran more than 6 miles, which I only did once for a time trial. About 2.5 months into training, I incorporated moderate to very heavy squats after my run, which I would do no more than twice per week. This is to strengthen my lower body so I can be ready for the hill. The squats can be performed on the squat rack or the leg press machine. About a month later, I transitioned from weighted squats to just body weight holding squats. This is what is known as the Sally Up Challenge; YouTube it and you'll see different exercises applied during this challenge. The purpose behind the Sally Up Challenge is to deprive your quads of oxygen during exercise. As you get used to the exercise, you will increase your tolerance of lactic acid build up in your legs. This will mimic the burning sensation you will feel when you run up a steep hill. These squats will burn like no other squat exercise, but you will tone, firm, and further develop your quads and gluts. On top of all this, I always maintained a strength and weight training regime that targeted my core and some upper body. Sometimes I'll use weights and sometimes I would do calisthenics that focused primarily on my core: pushups, sit-ups, flutter kicks, planks, mountain climbers, and steam engines. After each workout, I always stretched for 15 - 20 minutes. Good luck!