

Intro to Obstacle Course Racing (OCR)

Background

Obstacle course racing (OCR) is one of the fastest growing sports in the world today, with thousands joining the sport every year in search of an opportunity to put their fitness to the test. Whether climbing walls, crawling under barbed wires, jumping through fire or hauling sandbags up a 45 degree slope, OCR challenges your mind, body and character.

- OCR involves running over technical terrain over medium to long distances while overcoming various physical challenges that are in the form of obstacles along the way.
- OCR originates from classic military training, particularly from the special forces (SEALs, etc.) and out of adventure racing world and triathlon world
- It's relatively young sport, having its origins with the Death Race, started by Joe DeSena, one of the co-founders of Spartan. It really started to take off in 2010 with Spartan races and Tough Mudder.

Races and What to Expect

OCR involves many different organizations—from Spartan to independent permanent courses—and each offer different distances, obstacles and atmospheres. Distances vary from shorter sprint distances (2-4 miles) to ultra distances (20+ miles).

There are many different organizations out there—from international to local. Some of the best organizations on the playing a leading edge in the New England race scene today include:

- **Spartan (www.spartan.com)**
 - Distances: Sprint, Super, Beast, Ultra-Beast. The Tahoe Beast is the 2015 Spartan World Championship
 - Style: Competitive. You against the clock.
- **Tough Mudder (www.toughmudder.com)**

- Distances: Tough Mudders are normally 13+ miles. The World's Toughest Mudder is Tough Mudder's world championship.
 - Style: Team-based. No clock.
- **Bone Frog Challenge (www.bonefrogchallenge.com)**
 - Founded and run by US Navy Seals
 - Distances: 9 miles, 40+ obstacles
 - Style: Competitive. You against the clock.
- **Battle Frog Challenge (www.battlefrogseries.com)**
 - Founded and run by US Navy Seals
 - Distances: 15K, 25+ obstacle
- **Civilian Military Combine (www.civilianmilitarycombine.com)**
 - Distances: Typically sprint
 - Style: Competitive. You against the clock. The races have a "pit" with CrossFit style WOD to start the race
- **Warrior Dash (www.warriordash.com)**
 - Distances: Typically shorter, sprint
 - Style: Team-based. No clock.
- **GoRuck (goruck.com)**
 - Longer, military-style "boot camps".
 - Distances: Light (4-5 hours, 7-10 miles), Challenge (10-12 miles, 15-20 miles), Heavy (24 hour, 40+ miles)
 - Style: Team-based. You're paired up with several people and must complete various challenges as a team.
- **OCR World Championship (ocrworldchampionships.com)**
 - Started in 2014 to be the over-arching "World Championship" event across all OCR organizations
 - Had great success and is catching on, although it's still TBD. Does not have support of Spartan.
- **Independent permanent courses:** Shale Hill (Polar Bear- 10K, 50+ obstacles, other races, per diem)
- **Governing bodies:** there is no one governing body for the sport (which is a challenge). Various attempts have been formed to create one, but so far none have taken hold.

Gear

Gear for OCRs are very minimal. In fact, you probably own most of what you'll need. The basic principle is to wear things that allow you to be light, fast, won't absorb a lot of water and won't catch onto things (no baggy clothes). The essentials include:

- **Shoes:** lightweight trail runners, zero or 4mm drop. However, be sure you progress your way into these shoes!
- **Top and bottom:** tight fitting spandex-like material is best. Baggy shorts also useful if you're uncomfortable wearing tights in races.
- **Socks:** Compression, knee high best
- **Backpack:** Something durable to pack all your stuff

Optional gear includes:

- **Gloves:** Only if you feel you want extra grip
- **Bandana:** useful for sun protection
- **Water bottle belt:** Optional in most cases, but required for Beast or Ultra distances.
- **Headlamp:** Needed if you have a late start time (1pm or later) and are participating in longer races, such as the Beast where you're likely to finish after dark

What not to wear: hats, baggy clothes, sunglasses, camelbacks/bladders (way to heavy and you'll need to constantly remove it for obstacles)

Nutrition

Race-day nutrition is critical, particularly as the distances get longer and the weather gets hotter. The basic idea is to fuel your body with lots of fluids, carbohydrates, electrolytes and some fats/proteins during the race. Ideally what you put in your body is minimally processed. That stated, minimally processed doesn't always go along with convenience, so look to strike the right balances. The ratios you'll require vary from athlete to athlete and should be tailored to your needs (work with a coach). However, the basic guidelines are

for about 7-10 oz of fluid every 15-20 minutes, including sodium; and 30-100 grams of carbohydrates (120-400 calories per hour). Proteins and fats should be kept minimal.

You can get much of your fuel on the course (make sure you read the race packet to find out what they'll have), but shouldn't depend upon it. Typically for shorter races (2 hours and under), you can utilize what is provided on the course. For longer races, it's good to use what's on the course, but also bring your own.

Ideas for fuels that work:

- **Gels:** One of the best things since they're quickly absorbed and easy to carry. Get ones that have complex carbs and some sodium and potassium. Be sure to drink with water! Good brands include VFuel, Hammer
- **Gel shots/gummy shots:** similar to gels, but in gummy form factor. Harder to carry. Good brands:
- **Nut butters:** Great for longer distance events. Provide lots of calories. Good brands include PocketFuel
- **Other ideas:** Dried fruits, minimally processed bars, mustard packs

Safety

OCR is a very safe sport, but when tear gas, fire, cold water and electricity get involved, there are certain things you need to think about. Common injuries to be careful of:

- **Cramps, weather-related illness** (about 4% of injuries)
How They Happen: Hot humid days bring on dehydration while cold days bring on hypothermia.
Avoid Them: Stay hydrated and fuel properly. Dress for the weather. World's Toughest -Mudder racers often compete in wetsuits during cold seasons.
- **Ankle injuries** (about 20% of all injuries)
How They Happen: Tripping over roots, rocks and other hazards along the course.
Avoid Them: Pay attention. Always.
- **Lacerations** (about 10% of all injuries)
How They Happen: Crawling under barbed wire and over

sharp rocks.

Avoid Them: Wear tight clothes that cover your body.

- **Shoulder injuries** (about 5% of all injuries)

How They Happen: The majority come from monkey-bar-style obstacles or anything where you're helping pull a friend over something.

Avoid Them: Incorporate upper-body strength training.

- **Other (Bruises, splinters, snapped femur, paralysis)** (about 25% of injuries)

How They Happen: Jumping over ditches, diving into water—all the stuff you're required to do during an event.

Avoid Them: Don't throw caution to the wind just because the clock is ticking. When you step on a course, use good judgement.

Planning Out Your Season and Community

You can approach training for a single OCR or for several-- either way you should have a plan for your training. It all starts with defining your goals and what you would like to achieve. For most people starting off, simply completing the race is the goal. For others, it's about completing it in a certain time. Once you have your goal(s) defined, approach your training so that you can achieve the goal(s). At a very high level, your training should incorporate trail running along with high intensity, cross-functional, varied movements (such as gymnastic, metabolic conditioning and weightlifting movements). If you need help defining your plans around your goals, work with a coach.

For many people, training with others for OCR provides support and motivation to train and complete races. In fact, this is at the heart of OCR, with many races being team-based (i.e. Tough Mudder, Warrior Dash). A vibrant community surrounds the sport, at the local and national level. Each of the race organizations have communities they sponsor around their events. Many local organizations, such as CrossFit boxes and other gyms, businesses and other organizations have training groups and teams they put together. And of course, asking friends and family to train with you or complete a race is a great way to get your own group together.

Skills

There is no such things as training for specific obstacles. Similar to CrossFit, OCR requires all around fitness focused on core skills (strength, stamina, agility, etc.), with the best way to train being high intensity, functional movements across different modalities. Running up hills will also be critical.

That stated, we'll work on specific skills for certain types of obstacles:

- **Climbing:** for wall climbing, wall traversing, rope climbs
- **Swinging:** for cargo net climbs, monkey bars, Tarzan swings
- **Carrying:** for bucket carries, sand bag carries, Atlas carries
- **Pulling/hauling:** for sand bag hoists, tire pulls
- **Crawling/rolling:** for barbed wires crawls, tube crawls

Questions

If you have any questions, contact:

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