

Rock the Parkway Half Marathon Pacing Strategy

Fact No. 1: The body needs to warm up for at least two miles. During that time, it goes from an inefficient fuel-burning (converting oxygen, sugar/fat, electrolytes to energy) and waste-removal (getting rid of lactic acid and built-up heat) machine to a more efficient one.

If someone pushes too hard (even at an even pace) in that time period, he will use up an inordinate amount of stored glycogen while accumulating an inordinate amount of lactic acid to set up an extra amount of fatigue and “heavy legs” for the final few miles of the half marathon.

We are in the business of preparing our participants for the last 1/3 in a more intelligent and effective manner, so we’ll ease into the half marathon. With the most noticeable hill (a long gradual climb) in the second mile, it only will exacerbate this situation for anyone determined to set an even pace from the get-go. Besides, what goes up must come down so you’ll be able to make up any lost time on the way back. By not respecting the terrain and the body’s need to warm up, we’ll end up like most other pace teams in races around the country — having little to no one to pace in the final miles since we innocently wasted them in the first 1/3 of the half marathon.

Fact No. 2: Honor the domino effect. Imagine 13 dominos lined up. Which domino has the greatest impact? The first one, right? In the same manner, the first mile is the most crucial, make-or-break mile of the half marathon. Therefore, you need to be the most conservative with this one. Vice versa, the last mile is the least critical so you can afford to be the most aggressive on that one. But most people do the opposite.

Just like the first mile, the first aid station is the most important, make-or-break aid station to determine how well people can keep their “gas tank” from going on empty while the last aid station is the least important toward overall race performance. Again, what do most people do? They rush through the first ones until they’re forced to walk through the last ones. We’ll encourage you to get what you need in the first eight miles of aid stations if you want to have any hope of getting what you want in the last 5.1 miles. It begins most importantly with the first aid station.

Fact No. 3: Uphills take more out of you than you realize. Going up a hill is like going from running at your normal weight to adding 20-40 pounds of extra weight. While people do slow down on an uphill, they try to push the pace too hard in an effort to not lose too much time. The tradeoff in doing this is not worth it as they create too much metabolic waste and heat which creates a mess the body has to deal with and leads to extra fatigue from that point on. It makes much more sense to maintain an even effort and give in on the uphills while doing your best to make up the lost time on the downhill — when gravity goes from being your worst enemy to your best friend and you can afford to be more aggressive and not suffer any real consequences. By easing up on the uphill portions, you’ll have more energy to go faster on the downhill portions. So become a downhill specialist with a greater respect for going uphill. Our pacers will make up time on all the downhills by taking it easier on the uphills.

In summary, by avoiding the three most common mistakes people make in a race — starting out too fast, rushing through the early aid stations and pushing too hard on the uphills (especially in the early going) — we’ll start smart to set you up for a great race!

Pacing Strategy: Hold back, settle into a strong rhythm, and hang in there.

Hold back. We’ll run the first mile about 30 seconds per mile slower than the average pace of your goal time to properly warm up. We’ll run the second mile at an effort that is 15 seconds per mile slower than the average pace of your goal time to continue the transition from warm up to settling in (the hill will add about 10 seconds to the actual pace). Finally, we’ll run the third mile at the average pace effort of your goal time to complete the transition (again, the uphill will add 10 seconds to the actual pace).

Settle into a strong, but doable rhythm. Then we’ll go 5-10 seconds faster per mile than the average goal time pace to get back the time we gave at the beginning. The terrain will cause the actual pace to vary for each mile.

Hang in there. We'll give lots of encouragement to you at this time, but know that you can go 5-10 seconds slower than what you've been averaging. Our job is to set the actual pace so even if participants lose contact, we may get one or two that pick it up in the final mile to finish with us. If they do, they'll want to know they ran at least 1 second faster than their goal time (i.e. a 1:59:59 for the 2:00 group).

But, finish strong if you feel good! We have found that many of the runners in our pace teams feel good and pick it up to leave the pacers behind in the final downhill mile, especially when the pacers focus on sticking to their set finish time. This is a best case scenario — that we helped you run a smart race so that you can take off and finish as fast as you want!

Aid Station Strategy: Don't rush, drink enough.

Depending on the pacer, they'll briskly walk for 10-60 seconds through the first 10 miles of aid stations to ensure that you get enough to prevent an empty "gas tank." We'll compensate by going 5-10 seconds per mile faster when running, but it's an excellent trade off to keep you properly replenished.

Example of a Specific Rock the Parkway Half Marathon terrain based "Smart Pace" strategy

Example for a 2:00 Pacer

Mile	Terrain description	Smart Pace Strategy	Terrain Effect on Pace for same effort	Total Change to pace	Split / Total Time	Average Pace/ Total Time
1	Flat, gradual uphill	+30 seconds	+5 seconds	+35 seconds	9:44 / 9:44	9:09 / 9:09
2	Long gradual uphill, downhill	+15 seconds	+10 seconds	+25 seconds	9:34 / 19:18	9:09 / 18:18
3	Rolling w/ a gradual uphill	0	+10 seconds	+10 seconds	9:19 / 28:37	9:09 / 27:27
4	Gradual downhill, gently rolling	-5 seconds	-5 seconds	-10 seconds	8:59 / 37:36	9:09 / 36:36
5	Gently rolling	-10 seconds	none	-10 seconds	8:59 / 46:35	9:09 / 45:45
6	Gently rolling	-10 seconds	none	-10 seconds	8:59 / 55:34	9:09 / 54:54
7	Rolling	-5 seconds	none	-5 seconds	9:04 / 1:04:38	9:09 / 1:04:03
8	Rolling	-5 seconds	none	-5 seconds	9:04 / 1:13:42	9:09 / 1:13:12
9	Gently rolling	-5 seconds	none	-5 seconds	9:04 / 1:22:46	9:09 / 1:22:21
10	Gently rolling	-5 seconds	none	-5 seconds	9:04 / 1:31:50	9:09 / 1:31:30
11	Gradual uphill & downhill	0	none	none	9:09 / 1:40:59	9:09 / 1:40:39
12	Rolling with a net downhill	0	-5 seconds	-5 seconds	9:04 / 1:50:03	9:10 / 1:49:49
13	Long gradual downhill, flat	0	-13 seconds	-13 seconds	8:56 / 1:59	9:10 / 1:58:59
13.1	Gradual downhill	-1 second	-1 second	-2 seconds	:59 / 1:59:59	1:01 / 2:00

As you can see, the pace depends on the terrain, factoring in the warm up at the beginning, settling into a strong rhythm in the middle, and hanging in there at the end. In using this strategy, a higher percentage of race participants will be able to stay with our marathon pacers into the latter stages of the half marathon.