

Jun 22nd, 2024: Understanding Form and Fatigue

I've been trying multiple ways to understand how to maintain fitness over time, especially during summer, when I go on holiday and I travel a lot, so that I can't hit the gym 2-3 times a week like I'm used to.

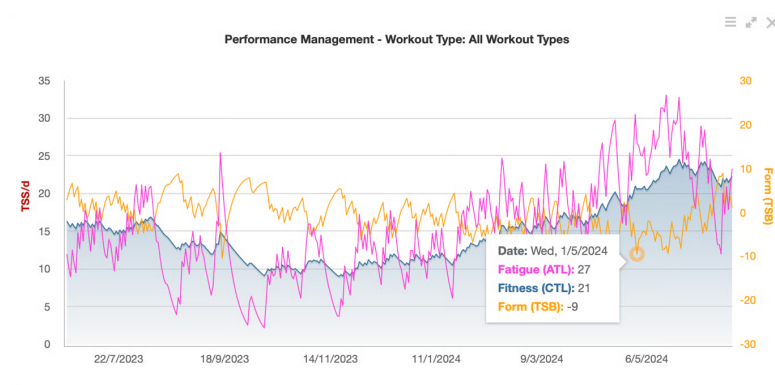
And it's all about understanding **Form** and **Fatigue** on TrainingPeaks, and trying to work with those two numbers as an amateur athlete like me.

First thing do to is to actually set up a goal and try to understand how far from that goal I am: my goal for 2024 is to **reach a fitness score (CTL) of 30** (I'm currently hovering around 23, and I started at 11 in January) and train 4 to 5 times a week. And, most importantly, **have fun**.

Having fun is important for me because I do not have the required commitment to run competitive races (I work quite a lot, and my focus is there during the day), and at the same time I do need to grow fitter and fitter because I know I'll physically feel bad if I'm not in shape. I used to train all my life, and if I stop I'll feel bad like I did when I stopped for a couple of years - I couldn't even take the stairs without feeling tired. Instead, I like having a lot of energy and being able to accomplish many different things during the day. That's what motivates me.

So, to avoid getting sick because of overtraining (it happened quite a few times over the past couple of years), I need to manage both my form and fatigue.

According to the TP documentation, form is known as **TSB**, or **Training Stress Balance**, and is the "ready to race" metric where the more negative the number, the deeper in "the hole" an athlete is and the more positive the number the more recovered and ready to perform the athlete is. In my direct experience, the higher the TSB, the most likely I feel tired earlier during the day, and the more likely I need to train in the morning because I have more energy. I train 3 to 5 times a week, and I try to order my workouts so that my TSB never falls below **-10**. When I'm at **-10**, it means I either played tennis two days in a row and then I trained in the gym, or similar. If I'm at **-10**, I need to rest because I'm likely overtraining. And as Gentler Streak tells me, I can overtrain for not more than 2 days. If I increase my fitness score beyond my limits for more than 2 days in a row, I'll get sick with a high probability because I'll get weaker, not stronger.



I reached a minimum TSB of -9 in early May when I was in Los Angeles - I try to get a workout in wherever I go

Fatigue, instead, is represented by the **Acute Training Load (ATL)**, and it's the *rolling average of your workout TSS over the last seven days*. In general, if your ATL is higher than your CTL, you're about to increase fitness (CTL) and losing form (TSB), while if the ATL is lower than the CTL, you're about to lower fitness (CTL) and gain form (TSB). I try to maintain my ATL on a range between +3 and +7 at all times, that corresponds to roughly being in the **upper greener area** in Gentler Streak, while never going above that.

For these metrics to be as accurate as possible, I strive to log **every type of activity that I do**, from a brisk walk to a yoga session or a few minutes in the swimming pool. Sometimes, a small workout can make a huge difference in increasing my fitness, or keeping the same level over time.

But TP and GS are not the only tools I need. As I found out over the course of the last three months, my fitness is heavily influenced by my health care - it seems super obvious in theory, but it makes a huge difference when you *actually* understand what that means in practical terms.

But that's for the next entry in this diary.

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