



Buddy Up

The ideal (and not-so-much) running partners to pair up with

by Laurel Lejcht

While training alone has its advantages, like learning to pace properly on your own and listening to your body, occasionally running with a partner is just as essential to effective training. Having a variety of running buddies can enhance the different components of your routine—from picking up the pace of speedwork to keeping you slow and steady during a recovery run. So what makes the perfect partner? Here are the best types of buddies to run with—and two to run away from.

PARTNERS TO PICK

The Challenger. Someone who's a bit faster can give you just the push you need. Bobby McGee, biomechanics and sport psychology expert and author of *Run Workout for Runners and Triathletes*, says such a running buddy is especially good toward the end of workouts: "The Kenyans have as many as three sets of training partners and use the weakest group at the beginning of the workout and the strongest group at the end," he explains.

The Chatter. "A good story teller is most always welcome," says Shelly Florence-Glover, program director of the NYRR running classes and coauthor of *The Competitive Runner's Handbook*. And never is this more true than during a long run, when running too hard to carry a conversation is counterproductive. Agrees McGee, this partner "forces you to slow down, get a load off, chat a little and not be so serious all the time."

The Coach. An experienced partner is a great asset for any runner and can serve as a mentor about anything from hydration to tackling a marathon for the first time. Having a knowledgeable runner by your side can push you through the longer runs, especially when it comes to offering advice for overcoming cramps or powering through the miles.

The Counterpart. Someone with a similar speed and fitness goals is an ideal person to tackle a tempo run with, to help you settle into a fairly hard, slightly uncomfortable pace but keep you from pushing yourself into a full-out sprint. "A partner can be indispensable if you are not racing them," McGee says. "Suffering together always beats suffering alone, and the added motivation of being held accountable makes for a better-quality workout."

PARTNERS TO AVOID

The Competitor. Sure, it's great to be pushed by a partner once in a while. But if your buddy is always trying to beat you or is constantly comparing stats, you'll wind up just exhausted—mentally and physically. McGee says many runners and triathletes train alone to avoid constant interaction with their competition. "You don't want to exert too much energy and, in essence, race during what should be training," he explains.

The Complainer. A running buddy should help you handle the stresses of training, not bring about added anxiety. Having to constantly act as a sounding board or sympathizer will just minimize your motivation, not to mention annoy you. As Florence-Glover says, "The distance and pace are the challenge—not the company."

Where to Find Running Partners in the City

- ▶ **Lululemon:** The yoga-based brand is branching out with a run club, meeting Tuesday mornings and Wednesday evenings at the Lincoln Square and East 66th Street store locations. lululemon.com
- ▶ **Niketown New York Running Club:** Groups gather Tuesday and Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings in Manhattan, Saturdays in Westchester. nikerunning.com/runningclub
- ▶ **NYRR:** Members can post and search partner listings including info about location, fitness level and pace. nyrr.org/resources/partners
- ▶ **Meetup:** Search for a running group—or start your own to find partners in your neighborhood. meetup.com

ASK THE EXPERT



Q: How can a stronger core help me become a faster runner? And what can I do to improve my core strength?

A: Everyone knows the Kenyans are great runners. Proper core use is one of the many reasons why. Watch their waistbands, hips, chests and shoulders. The only part that most Kenyan runners hold still is their heads—everything else, including their core, is part of the locomotive.

Recently, the emphasis has been on strengthening your core to act like a girder and prevent movement in your trunk, but this makes you waste energy working against yourself and doesn't make you faster. When your core works properly you counter-rotate your hips and shoulders, helping your arms and legs swing opposite each other.

You can strengthen your core by working on diagonals through your body (connecting your opposite arm and leg), and moving your pelvis in the transverse and frontal planes. Good exercises include the bird dog and bicycle maneuvers, transverse plane cable exercises and standing sidebends with a weight in one hand.

In strength training, focus on free weights. Use one side of your body at a time, and notice how your pelvis moves to balance you. Try single-arm rows, curl and press alternating arms, chest press with dumbbells alternating arms and lunges rather than squats. These mimic what you do when you run and will develop your core into a powerful engine.



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