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# 10 Tips to Prepare for the Obstacle Course Racing World Championships



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**Ryan Atkins**

2023 15K Male Champion



**Lindsay Webster**

2023 15K Female  
Champion



**Nicole Mericle**

2023 3K Female  
Champion



**Rylan Schadegg**

2023 3K Male Champion

**If you're here, you're likely thinking about racing at the OCR World Championships.**

**Do you want to make sure you show up to the start line of the 100M, 3K, 15K, or Team Relay Championships ready to give your absolute best effort on the course?**

Perhaps you're interested in the 5K Charity Open and are relatively new to the sport of OCR. Either way, preparing to tackle a World Championship OCR course requires the right combination of mental strength, physical fitness, and race-day preparation.

There are many ways you can prepare for OCRWC.

**The right preparation can mean the difference between accomplishing your ultimate goal or getting to the finish line wishing you had done more.**

Whether you're a first time competitor at OCRWC, or a seasoned veteran who's raced at every OCRWC since 2014, read on for our favorite tips to help you prepare for race day.

# Mental Game

## ★ 1 Develop Belief

If you're racing for glory and a place atop the podium for the 100M, 3K, 15K, or Team Relay Championships, OCRWC differs from other obstacle course races because it requires 100% obstacle completion.

At OCRWC, athletes start with a wristband, and in order to keep it, you must complete every obstacle on the course. You will get as many tries as it takes and there are no individual penalties if you are unable to complete an obstacle; but if you cannot complete the obstacle your wristband will be cut. You'll still be allowed to complete the course and receive your finisher's medal, but you won't receive an official time, and you won't be eligible for podiums or prizes.

"OCRWC revolutionized competitive OCR in 2014 by introducing mandatory obstacle completion, fundamentally altering the dynamics for athletes

What this means for athletes is that it is compulsory to complete all obstacles in order to podium, or get a finishing time. There are no penalty loops, or ways to earn this back, which can become a real mental difficulty for many people, and this is what sets OCRWC apart from any other event out there.

All athletes begin the race with one wristband. This can be lost upon failure of an obstacle; but don't worry, it's your choice when you stop! You have as many tries as you need to complete an obstacle (not one try and you're out), and if you decide you can't do it, an official will cut your band and mark your name down.

You are still allowed to complete the course and receive your finisher's medal, but you won't receive an official time, or be eligible for podiums or prizes.

Upon successful completion of the course with the wristband intact, athletes have their photo taken in front of the 100% completion wall and receive a commemorative rubber band, which, for many, holds more significance than a traditional medal.

## ★ 2 Be Positive

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As with any goal or new endeavor, it takes time to skill and experience. In sports, the body must adapt, and so must the mind. It is a great idea to practice concentration, focus your attention, and quiet the voices that do not serve your greatest good.

Listening to the “I can do it” voice is best, but not always easy. One of the hardest things to overcome is the voice that tries to tell you your effort isn’t going to be good enough.

Let’s say you are just beginning a running routine, and one that will be mixed with hiking and walking (which is a highly effective way to start or continue training for OCRWC). One voice says: “You should be able to run up this hill, why are you so lame, weak, slow or tired?” Another voice says: “It is ok to walk a little, hike a little, jog a little, move into the road, or off onto a trail. I can mix it up and get up this hill while conserving energy for other places on the course.”

Taking that second option is okay. In fact, in many cases, it’s the right approach to hill running. Giving ourselves permission to take steps in our own way and time is powerful. By paying attention to how we feel, we can become highly attuned to our bodies, letting our “monkey mind” move into a new space which has more to do with spirit and soul.

**The more you focus on your mental state and how you positively talk to yourself, the farther you’ll go and, eventually, you will surprise yourself once you look back.**



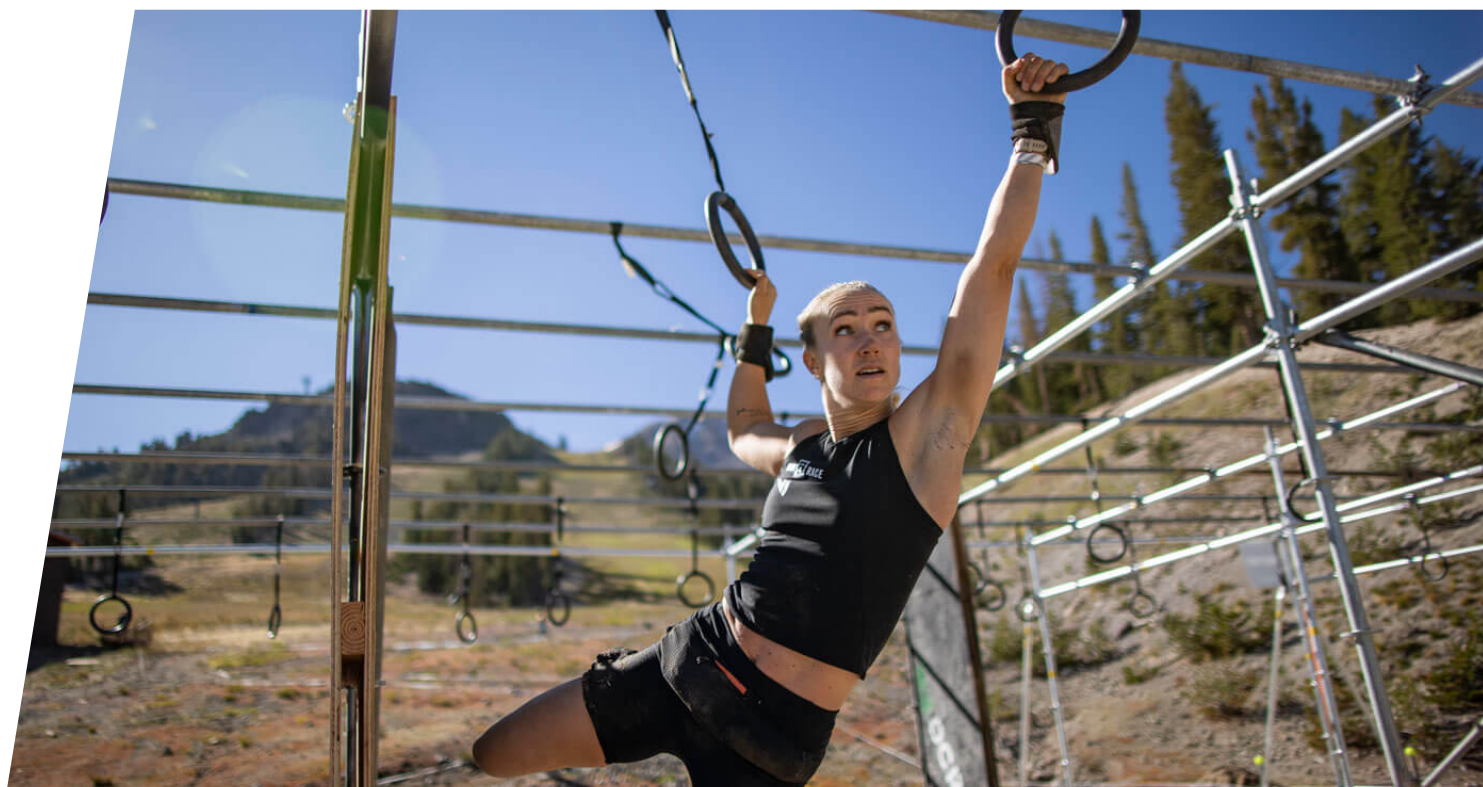
## ★ 3 Pace Yourself

We've witnessed many OCR athletes become obsessed with training and racing — this sport is highly addictive.

Though we all love to see our friends at races fly through course after course, the truth is that the way to keep progressing is to pace yourself. And not just during training periods (rest days are imperative and so are weeks of higher volume interspersed with lower volume training weeks) but, most importantly, during life itself. The best athletes out there find a training schedule that fits their very own lifestyle.

Overuse injuries are common in the sport of OCR, and we've all experienced the mental burnout that can come with a lack of balance in our lives.

**Make sure that getting to the start line in one piece is as much a focus of your training as any physical routine.**



# Train Your Body

## ★ 4 Find Balance In Your Training

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There is a learning curve that comes with achieving elite status in OCR and every athlete takes to it a little differently. Some will only take on long distance challenges that maximize their running prowess, while others will focus solely on strength training, which might slow them down a bit. Both of these approaches are a mistake. While running is the foundation of OCR and should be the foundation of your training, it's important to also find a program that allows you to build full body strength. Find a program that both plays to your strengths and challenges your weaknesses, and stick to it. By striking a balance between the two and incorporating both strength and speed movements, you'll build yourself into a more well-balanced athlete, which will pay dividends in obstacle course racing.

## ★ 5 Incorporate Endurance Running

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We all know obstacle course racing is a sport based on running. If you don't do a lot of run training leading up to the event, you will quickly find yourself deep in the pain cave, especially on a 15K course going up and down a mountain. We recommend incorporating elements of a high-volume training plan with lots of easy aerobic longer-distance running into your training regimen. This will not only build your cardiovascular system but also strengthen the musculoskeletal system of your body through periods of stress followed by recovery.

## ★ 6 Set a Goal (Or Two or Three!)

**There's no question about it – OCRWC is a tough race. The best way to prepare yourself physically is to break the course into manageable goals that you're focused on – both mentally and physically.** Usually the ultimate goal for our athletes is to get through the course with 100% obstacle completion. This is a fantastic goal, but it's tough to train for because it's so broad. It also leaves you feeling like a failure if you cross the finish line having achieved anything less than perfection.

Instead, break the course up into several smaller goals. Maybe you really want to get to the top of Mammoth Mountain feeling like your legs are still fresh. You could then focus training on hill repeats, leg strength, and endurance. Perhaps you were unable to complete Stairway to Heaven last year, and want nothing more than to breeze through it at this year's OCRWC. Your training routine could incorporate single-arm pullups and lockoffs with grip strength exercises to prepare for the specific movements required to climb a staircase from behind using just your arms.

While everyone wants to leave OCRWC with their band still on their wrist, setting yourself smaller, manageable goals along the way will help you to focus on more nuanced training. The bonus is the feeling of personal achievement that can come with tackling many goals, even if the ultimate goal of 100% completion can't be achieved (this year!).



# Race Day Strategy

## ★ 7 Fueling is Key

For any obstacle course race, and especially OCR training, consistent fueling is vital.

Your body will be trying to generate energy along every available pathway as you train and race. This means you'll want some easily digestible carbohydrates and fats for a mix of slow, medium, and fast-burning fuels, plus some protein to prevent your body from cannibalizing muscle for fuel.

You play the way you practice, so you'll want to test the way your body will respond to different types of fuel in the lead-up to OCRWC. Experiment with different types of fuel and various product brands. Regardless of what the right approach is for you personally, the proper fuel is essential to achieving a high level of performance.



## ★ 8 Choose the Right Gear

You can't predict the weather for race day, which means you can't predict exactly what gear you'll need for the conditions. As such, train in different shoes, clothes and accessories so that you're ready for anything.

**Fall on the stunning Mammoth Mountain could bring everything from sunshine and warmth, to rain, and even snow – sometimes all in the same day! For a multi-day event like OCRWC, it's highly likely you'll be dealing with varying weather across the span of the weekend.**

You'll want to test your race-day kit in all these conditions if possible. Don't skip a training run because it's raining, use it as an opportunity to find out where you might experience chafing with the hydration vest you want to wear on race day. Hot outside? Learn your threshold for how hot it can get before you decide to make the switch from leggings to shorts.

Most importantly, give yourself options so you can be comfortable in any weather conditions when you toe the start line on race day.



## ★ 9 Always Keep Moving

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While having the right clothing might help make competition day more comfortable, it is crucial that you always keep moving on race day. Even though it's likely you'll be experiencing different types of weather, plan for the cold.

At OCRWC, the biggest mistake we see people make is getting too focused on keeping their hands intact and ultimately are unable to finish the race. You need to keep moving to generate body heat – which keeps you both physically comfortable and mentally sharp. Often what happens is while resting between multiple attempts at a failed obstacle, the athlete's body temperature will start to fall and they'll begin to shiver. Mental faculties deteriorate quickly at this point.

Prepare for this situation. If you find your body temperature dropping while you wait to attempt an obstacle yet again, especially if you're at the top of the mountain where it's much colder, you need to ask yourself an important question. If you spend hours trying to complete this one obstacle, even if you finally complete it, will you have sacrificed your ability to complete any other obstacle? Have you cooled down to the point where you won't be able to get warm again and may not finish the course? What will make you more disappointed, missing one obstacle, or completing that tough obstacle but not having any strength to finish the rest of the course and ultimately run across the finish line?

**Most athletes at OCRWC race an average of two events. If you destroy your hands or your strength on day one, it's likely to leave you disappointed on day two. Keep moving, remember your multiple goals, and leave the weekend feeling balanced and accomplished.**

## ★ 10 Practice Obstacle Efficiency

Even if you are able to get over a wall with a muscle-up, try not to do so; it's a waste of energy. Instead, focus on obstacle efficiency throughout your training.

**Despite having the physical strength to power through things, you want to complete each obstacle with the least amount of energy expenditure possible on race day. As the saying goes, work smarter, not harder.**

This is also true for high-risk maneuvers like jumping off the top of the wall and over the last couple of feet of a cargo net. Although saving seconds will make a difference for a 3K Championships, the possibility of twisting an ankle during a longer race like the 15K Championships makes riskier maneuvers ill-advised.



# Training Movements

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Your workout doesn't have to be complicated to be effective. The following simple exercises could be combined into an entire body workout focused on OCR strength and movements.

## The 400 Workout

Start with dynamic warm-up stretches, then repeat the sequence of exercises below until you reach 40 minutes.

1. Run 400 meters
  2. Jumping Squats, 20 reps  
*Develops explosive power for leaping up and over obstacles*
  3. Run 400 meters.
  4. Burpees, 10 reps  
*Improves full-body strength, power, and endurance*
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## Running

Try to incorporate running into your overall training program. We've already stressed the importance of endurance running and sprints, but there are also some intermediary running workouts and distances athletes should include. A sample running program could look something like this:

### Day 1

Distance run 5+ miles

### Day 2

Running intervals/fartlek

### Day 3

Speed day – sprints, starts, stops, directional changes

### Day 4

Recovery run

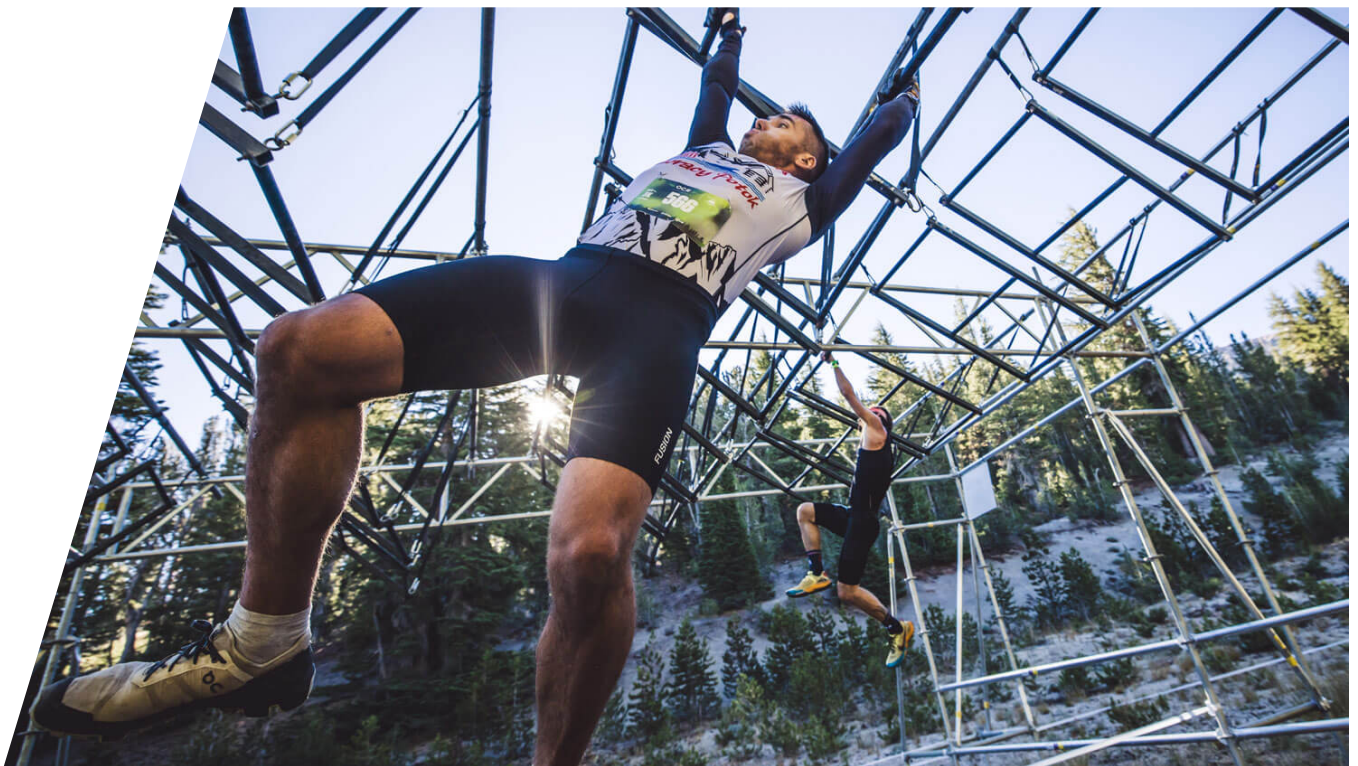
# Training Movements

Your workout doesn't have to be complicated to be effective. The following simple exercises could be combined into an entire body workout focused on OCR strength and movements.

## Monkey Bars or Dead-Hangs with Hand Release\*

\*Note: If you do not have access to monkey bars, substitute dead-hangs with a hand release. Try to take one hand off the bar for a few seconds before grabbing the bar and releasing the other hand. Repeat the release 10 times for each hand.

1. Start with two hands on the first bar in a dead hang. From this position, reach one arm forward to the next bar.
2. Swing your hips forward to generate momentum. Your hips will then swing backward and forward again. As you begin your next swing forward, reach your trailing arm ahead and grab hold of the next bar.
3. As soon as your trailing hand becomes the lead hand, let your body swing backward and forward again. Use the momentum to reach your trailing arm to the next bar.
4. Repeat for 10 rungs.



# Training Movements

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## Bench Routine

Alternate bench pushups and bench dips for sets of 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, and 2 repetitions, followed by a 400-meter run.

## Bench Pushups (12, 8, 4)

1. Start by facing a park bench or other elevated surface. Place your hands on the bench, slightly wider than your chest, and step your feet back into a plank position.
  2. Keeping your weight on the thumb sides of your palms and bend at your elbows. Keep your body in a straight line and your elbows at a 45-degree angle relative to your chest.
  3. Press your hands into the bench and extend your elbows to rise to the starting position.
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## Bench Dips (10, 6, 2)

1. Face away from a park bench or other elevated surface. Place your hands behind you on the edge of the bench with your palms down and fingers facing forward. Keep your arms straight and chest open.
2. Step your feet forward and away from the bench. Straighten your legs so that your weight is resting on your heels and the palms of your hands.
3. Bend at your elbows to lower your body toward the ground, with triceps parallel to the ground, keeping your butt close to the bench and your chest open.
4. Press your palms down and extend your elbows to rise to the starting position.



# Training Movements

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## Front Plank with Superman Reach

1. Start in a plank position on your forearms with your shoulders directly above your elbows, your entire body forming a straight line from head to toe.
  2. Reach your left arm forward while lifting your right leg off the ground. Focus on keeping your hips level. Note: If this is too challenging, extend one limb at a time, going clockwise — left leg, left arm, right arm, right leg.
  3. Return your left arm and right leg to the ground. Then, reach your right arm and lift your left leg.
  4. Alternate lifting your left arm/right leg and right arm/left leg for one minute.
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## Balance Beam

1. Find a narrow surface (no wider than 4 inches) similar to a balance beam. Step onto the “beam,” putting one foot directly in front of the other. Engage your abs and keep your shoulders back and down.
  2. Transfer your weight to your front foot, making sure to engage your glutes. Slowly step your back foot forward while keeping your abs tight and knees softly bent. Keep your arms close to your body.
  3. As you place your new lead foot on the beam, distribute your weight evenly between both feet. Once you feel stable, continue walking forward in this manner.
  4. Repeat for 20 feet (one set). Perform 10 sets.
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## Sprint

Give your absolute all while remaining in control; try for 400 meters to finish.





While there isn't a perfect formula that applies to every athlete preparing for the OCR World championships, getting your mind, body and race-day spirit in shape simultaneously will serve you well regardless of whether this is your first or fifth season of OCR.

**Follow these tips and before you know it, you'll find yourself a faster, stronger, and happier athlete, ready to take on whatever OCRWC throws at you.**

**See you in Mammoth!**