



Speed Development

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“Can you really train to become faster?” I get this question from parents and coaches all the time, and the answer is YES. The problem is most athletes spend so much time training for their specific sport that they do not spend time training important movement skills such as speed, agility, quickness, and jumping actions. How many times have you taken batting practice or practiced passing the soccer ball? Now, when is the last time you practiced improving your running technique? The answers to those questions for most athletes are drastically different.

Below I have listed some important tips for improving speed and quickness. These tips apply specifically to generating speed from either a standing/athletic position or even a jog/shuffle.

Leg Drive:

- The first initial movement should be a powerful leg drive off with both legs.
- The emphasis should be on pushing backward and downward with your legs. This will help propel you forward.
- Leg drive should look like pistons – quick and powerful upward and downward action landing under your hips.
- A coaching cue is to drive your knee and toe up.
- Leg drive mechanics only start to change as you approach maximum speed (however, most athletes do not reach maximum speeds unless your running for longer sprinting distances such as track and field)

Foot Contact:

- You want to drive off the balls of your feet – Not your toes!
- Driving off the ball of the foot creates power and stability in the lower leg.
- Foot contact should be down on the ground right under the body’s center of gravity – under the hips.

Torso Positioning:

- The torso should be erect with a slight body lean.
- Do not bend at the waist – The body lean comes from the ground.

- The body lean helps create a positive acceleration angle to maximize speed.

Arm Action:

- A powerful arm action helps drive the legs.
- The opposite arm and leg work together to keep the body balanced and stable.
- Think of initiating the arm movement through the shoulders and not the elbow.
- Keep the hands relaxed and focus on driving the elbows backwards.
- The hands will travel from the chin to just behind the hips.
- The elbow may slightly extend on the downward phase when approaching the hip.

Overstriding:

- When the foot lands in front of the body's center of gravity, it causes a braking effect and you actually slow down.
- Many times when you overstride the heel strikes the ground in front of your body causing you to lose speed.
- The key is not to think about reaching out, but instead driving your foot down under you body.

Understriding:

- Understriding will result in covering less distance – The stride length will be shortened.
- Understriding usually results from trying hard to get too many quick strides in.

Acceleration mechanics are the same for every sport that requires a sudden burst of speed. It is imperative that athletes practice speed training with perfect mechanics to enhance sprinting performance. Just as with any motor skill, if the technique is not correct the movements will not be efficient.