

# The Importance of Speed Training

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I'm so fast that last night I turned off the light switch in my hotel room and was in bed before the room was dark. - Muhammad Ali

As the football season approaches, one final push for preparation can be made. This preparation can take many forms but one aspect that every football coach in America will agree is important is speed. Matter of fact we all have heard the saying, "speed kills", but the question is "what are you doing about it?"

Training for speed is more than just running sprints. Rather it's a dedication to the development of all areas that surround speed, which include dynamic range of motion, static range of motion, and strength. Those terms probably mean very little, but working on each can help you improve your team's speed in no time.

Dynamic range of motion is basically a measure of how flexible you are when you're moving. Being able to squat below parallel, and catch the bar in a full squat position during Olympic lifts are examples of having superior dynamic range of motion. Why is it important? More range of motion means more speed, more power, and more agility.

The best way to improve dynamic range of motion is through the use of hurdle mobility drills. I like to incorporate many exercises that involve walking over or ducking under. These drills place a direct emphasis on the range of motion at the hip and hamstring and are vital for making significant gains in leg strength. A series of 5 to 10 hurdles is great and easily managed from a coach to athlete ratio.

The next vital component to speed development is strength training. At a very basic level, strength must be created so that force can be applied to the ground. In the weight room, exercise selection should include Olympic lifts, squats and lunges and emphasis should be placed on performing the eccentric (lowering) action of the movement in a fast, controlled fashion while exploding upward as quickly as possible. Another area to target directly is the posterior chain (glutes, hamstrings, low back). Such exercises as the Glute-ham Raise, Good Mornings, and Romanian Deadlifts are a great place to focus much of your attention.

Again, the emphasis should be placed on applying maximal force and not on a large set and rep scheme. Sets and reps should fall in the 3-8 sets by 3-6 reps and should be about 60-80% of the 1RM (rep max). Keep in mind the lighter the weight, the higher the volume (i.e. 8x3 at 60% of your 1RM), and the heavier the weight the lower the volume (i.e. 4x4 at 80% of your 1RM). It's also important to note that the reps and overall

volume will always be kept low in order to increase strength and power as opposed to body mass.

On the field, plyometric drills such as bounding, repeat broad jumping, and box jumps (up & down) all improve reactive ground force application. Each rep must be performed with strict attention to detail and maximal effort. These are not conditioning exercises, so maximum rest (2-3 minutes) is suggested between sets. The volume of exercise is very similar to heavy weight training and should stay in the 2-4 sets of 3-6 reps.

The other area of emphasis should be sprint mechanic drills, such as "A" skips, "B" skips, butt kicks, and high knees. These unique drills fall under both categories: strength and dynamic range of motion. With these drills the emphasis should be on working through a full range of motion with proper posture while applying maximal force into the ground on each rep. The practice of using sprint mechanic drills over long distances with large volumes will improve strength endurance and the ability to maintain proper running form longer and later into competition. Keep in mind that this type of drill work is not the type of work used in a warm-up, but rather placed later in the workout after the sprint work is completed.

The final component to speed development is static range of motion or static stretching. When performed at the end of a workout it serves two purposes; as a buffer between the intense hard-core nature of the workout and normal daily activity and as a means to increase the suppleness of the muscle. In order to be fluid through the movements discussed above, a soft supple muscle is needed and this is only achieved through stretching.

If you're serious about getting your team faster, speed should be addressed in all areas of your training. It is something that is targeted in the warm-up, on the field, and in the weight room. Will your team have the speed of Muhammad Ali? ■