

Improving Speed on the Field

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Improving speed

Experienced athletes will tell you that they are at their fastest at the end of the season when their skills are at their peak. This is especially true if they have continued to lift, condition and practice hard. Most athletes also observe they are slowest after the few weeks or months that they take off of training once the season ends.

Carl Lewis

The world record in the 100-meter dash has been reduced by 0.1 second in the last 20 years. In other words, the best in the world training full time and using a variety speed drills and techniques have improved the world record by about 1 meter. At 18 years old, Carl Lewis ran a 9.3 second hundred yard dash, which would be the equivalent of a 10.10 second hundred meter dash. At the peak of his career, at age 27 he had improved to 9.92 seconds. Do you think Carl Lewis did speed and track drills? Of course he did. He trained ten years full time at a couple of events to improve his speed by about 5.5 feet over a ten second run.

Get in shape and improve your mechanics

Just by getting stronger, we have consistently improved the 40-yard dash speed of most of our athletes by more than the 0.18 seconds that Mr. Lewis improved his 100-meter time. Getting in great shape and losing fat has produced further improvements in many players. Improving running mechanics and starting technique has allowed some athletes to increase their speed even a little more.

Sport-speed

Track-speed is nice to have, but sport-speed is more important. We have all seen people who can run fast in a straight line but cannot change direction. Or more commonly, can change direction at a cone or spot on the field but cannot change direction in response to an opponent or changing condition. Effort and experience, combined with good genetics results in sport-speed, or what we consider the fastest players on the field. For example, we witnessed a player with "4.8 speed" catch another with "4.6 speed" from behind in the heat of competition. He did so because he wanted (his effort was high) to get there and he knew how to get there (he had the experience and coaching to do so). What is the lesson of all this? As an athlete, you have to decide how much time and energy you are going to invest in different task in order to improve.

Practice, practice, practice

Before you can determine if an activity has a positive affect on your speed, you must first get yourself in great running shape. You must lift, run, condition, stretch, lose fat and practice running fast. Periodically time yourself electronically. Eventually your speed will level off. You simply can't run any faster. At this point, add one new activity to your training that you believe will improve your speed. After a short period of time you should observe an increase in your speed. If you do not, it's obvious the new activity had no impact on improving your speed.

Continue experimenting with one activity at a time until you have tried all the activities that purportedly improve speed. Don't expect to begin the off-season out of shape and then perform a multitude of activities and expect to know which, if any, actually had an impact on improving your speed.

The 'speed secret'

Now, here's the speed secret. In order to get faster, you must run fast. Really, it's as simple as that. It sounds too good to be true, but it isn't. Running as hard as possible will increase your speed. Think about it, how can you expect to improve your 40-yard dash if you are always running slower than full speed? How can you improve your game speed if you spend most of

your practice time running slower than all-out? Running and practicing hard are the only ways to improve speed. By consistently practicing your skills at game speed, you will become faster in the game. We promise.

No short-cuts

There is no substitute for hard running. This doesn't mean that all of our conditioning needs to be 40-yard sprints, just as all of practice does not need to be a scrimmage. Understand the purpose of the things you do. And when it is time to go full speed, sprint as hard as you can!