

“ ... say an athlete is having problems with arms by crossing mid-line of body, while sprinting.”

A bit rushed, but, in general:

Fundamental position is to recognize that “**an eye-ful is better than a mouthful**” and that the athlete will progress better if **they** understand **why** a specific change in their behaviour is suggested.

All athletes (swimmers/runners) who work with me have a video record of their early and developing skills; at present my video camera is presenting problems, so some young ones at the moment only have photo records.

Explain the role of the Part-Part-Whole (Drills) Approach in skill development; practice the parts, then assemble the whole.

1 - Data Collection 2 - Diagnosis

Assuming you have noted the need for change over a period of time; you will have filmed/photographed the athlete, and, most important, the athlete will have reviewed the images **with you**.

It is important at this stage that you outline the changes you recommend and **why**. I call this, *what's in it for me?*

I recommend you look at the following on my site:

www.nwaswimaths.com

PROGRAMS > Athletics Programs > **Standard Strategies** (Athletics)

PRESENTATIONS > Swimming Presentations > **Why Drills?**

It is very important to appreciate (especially young athletes) **what is a drill?** the importance of drills .. the importance of doing drills repeatedly and doing them well .. always seeking to improve. (Running really fast is something very, very, very few will achieve, BUT, **All** can learn and execute drills .. learning occurs at different rates, but I have never encountered an athlete who could not make significant, tangible **progress that THEY recognise**.) A very small percentage of young people, when they understand the work that **MUST** be done, really want to excel at the highest level .. but, almost all youngsters want to achieve at a level they and their peer group acknowledges (this justifies their endeavour).

3 - Prescribed Plan of Action

- 3.1 Show athlete performing. .. video the performance, or, in front of a **mirror** (excellent immediate feedback)
.. e.g. A-Skip Drills, or running on a mini-trampoline .. I like in front of a mirror, since feedback to the athlete (visual) is immediate (e.g. reflection in front of a window; dance studio or gym not always available .. there a lots of possibilities. Do the best you can, where you, with what you've got.
- 3.2 Show example(s) of the outcome you are seeking .. advanced athlete performing.
I suggest that you not just choose an elite performer, but also show an advanced adolescent, since often elite athlete performance can seem too far away .. I recommend my Drills for Speed DVD; I am not sure which DVD's I have sent you, but the Advanced Junior segment and the A-Skip/B-Skip examples later in the Drills for Speed DVD would be good examples.

Do not expect athletes to be able to follow your verbal instructions .. **show them** .. direct demo, senior athlete demo, advanced athlete demo, even a DVD (not as good as “live”, but very useful until you have developed your own group demonstrators ... **an eye-ful is (far) better than a mouthful**.

4 – Implementation

Introduce drills to change the habit .. for hands crossing too far (remember *every athlete is an experiment of one* .. you have to be sure that the changes you are recommending have advantages for the athlete) .. I like to place something in their hands (e.g. a 6-10 cm. piece of poly pipe, or, a VERY light dumbbell or hand weight, and have them do A-Skip and **repeated** 60-70% runs (50-70m), focusing on form .. upright posture (Cue: *Tall – Tall – Tall*) .. the implement in their hands helps them focus on the skill (movement) you are recommending. Film/photograph their improvement cf. advanced athletes (DVD).

This will need to be repeated many time .. **VERY carefully monitored**: 50m repeats forms a habit .. thousands of repeats to change the habit so learn **carefully, patiently** and **correctly**.

At the end of repeats you prescribe with the pipe .. complete 1-2 runs without the pipe, but the same focus; be patient .. if a habit exists, it will take many repetitions over many sessions to correct.

5 – Evaluation

Video / mirror feedback .. comparison of the athlete (before and after, and with advanced performer).

This should be done regularly so the athlete can see the changes taking place. I use my tags (and my NWA Newsletter) to recognize and reward young athletes on their endeavour .. not for winning .. on their endeavour and capacity to demonstrate acquired skills, thereby enhancing their self-esteem. Not enough coaches who really appreciate the importance of regular recognition .. lots of talk-the-talk .. but more need to walk-the-walk.


One of the tags I use to introduce A-Skip drill is shown .. the young girl is Courtney; you will meet her (now in Year 7) when you visit:

It is absolutely vital that patience is exercised .. it takes VERY little time to introduce (or allow) an error; correction takes much more time ... the aim is to have an athlete able to produce form under pressure, amid maximum distractions, not just in a one-off situation.

As the **great** swimming coach Bill Sweetenham says .. very few changes to fundamental technique take place after early teens .. so it is vital that skills are taught precisely, and, very, very well to all young athletes.

A challenge for coaches is to make the repetition required interesting, varied and fun, and make the search for skills and recognition of skills a foundation of junior programs. I have lots of programs related to this need .. unfortunately, working alone I sometimes do not have time to implement them all .. hopefully by sharing the ideas will get around, at least to open minds.

Training of young athletes should be skill based, not performance based .. unfortunately, too often, far too often the latter is the focus.




North West Athletics 1

Improving my A-Skip

*“Toe Up — Heel Up — Knee Up”
“Step over the support leg knee”*

*Arms: approx 90°; hand back to hip
“Tall” .. be the tallest you can be
Lots of perfect practice .. 10L / 10R*

www.nwaswimaths.com



Also on the mid-line issue (any issue) – **lots** of visual rehearsal (mirror); not just a few goes and *I've got it*.

Short runs over 8-10 low hurdles (<10cm); A-Skip / B-Skip simulations .. closely monitored to reinforce habits.

I'm sure we can talk about plenty of these things next week.

Russell Parsons
North West Athletics
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P.S.

Take care ... coach expectations should be guided by the athlete's potential.

I once read an article by famous US coach Bud Winter (now deceased) .. he said that young female sprinters who are going to reach elite standards can usually run 100m in 12.2 in their early teens.

Extending this back .. a 10 year-old girl who is running 14.4 seconds for 100m is unlikely to progress to the elite level, BUT, there are many things, many learning experiences we can place before her that will enhance her self-esteem. If they better appreciate the skills of the sport, they will better appreciate the sport .. kids appreciate quicker than we think, whether they have what it takes .. coaches have to be ready to respond with interesting and challenging outcomes as a realization of *maybe I'm not going to make it to the Olympics* breaks through.

It's not just how fast you run .. it's how well you run.

The fundamental question for coaches: do you want to wait around until an athlete of super-star potential “walks through your door”, or, have a major impact of the lives of many young athletes, very few of whom may continue in the sport, but all of whom you can help? And, importantly, all of whom can become long-term supporters of the sport .. why? they understand and respect the skills of the sport, and therefore understand and respect excellence in others.

If you are finding any of this helpful, it would be appreciated if you drew your thoughts to the attention of Glynis Nunn-Cearns, ATFCA CEO ..

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We are looking forward to the visit of your group, and there will be several youngster from here involved, so it should be a good social and athletics experience .. learning and refining skills is FUN.

I will be in contact after the weekend. I will put this on my website: may be easier to access:
www.nwaswimaths.com > PROGRAMS > General Programs > Skills – An Approach Strategy