A Simple Approach to Speed & Agility

I enjoy coaching speed and agility. I enjoy talking about the finer and more technical points in great detail. Is this what my program needs? No way. Simplicity is grand.

I try to keep things simple. Simplicity works best for me and for my athletes for 2 main reasons:

- *Time:* I only have my out of season athletes for 1 season per year, in an after school setting, and I only have them for about 1 hour per day. That is about 5 hours per week for about 8 weeks to teach them EVERYTHING I need them to know to carry them throughout the remainder of the year. The clock and calendar are not my friends.
- *Philosophy:* I want to get my athletes as strong as I can and teach them to move well. I believe that strength plays a huge part in speed/agility development. I’m confident that I can teach my athletes basic mechanics to use while applying as much force into the ground as possible. That is my formula. Strength + Mechanics = Speed/Agility *(No this is not a revolutionary theory and yes I am aware other coaches have said similar ideas)*

There are focal points of technique that I emphasize through stationary mechanical drills. I then have my athletes perform half speed drills while reinforcing the techniques throughout the drill. I then progress the drills to full speed. I will vary through a number of drills so my athletes do not lose interest. Regardless of the drill I am still emphasizing the same desired techniques. I spend the majority of my linear speed work on acceleration rather than top speed because I feel it is more applicable to sport – keeping in mind that we do not have track as a sport at my school. BOOM! That’s it. That’s all I do. Here is how I break it down:

**Acceleration**

*1st Technique:* Arm Action

*1st Mechanical Drill:* Standing or Seated Arm Action

*Focal Points:* Regardless of doing this standing or seated, I emphasize elbows being locked at 90 degrees and having all the movement come
from the shoulders. I want violent elbow drive while keeping the arms close to the body as if they were running in a very tight hallway.

2nd Mechanical Drill: Easy Skips with exaggerated arm action.

Focal Points: While doing a very easy skip, have the athlete focus on applying the good arm action from the previous drill. I will encourage them to over exaggerate their arm action even though it may feel awkward so they really emphasize the movement.

2nd Technique: Knee Drive

1st Mechanical Drill: A Marches ➔ A Skips (both with arm action)

Focal Points: Emphasize this is not a high knee where the ankle is in front of you, nor is it a butt kick where the ankle is behind you. I want the ankle dorsiflexed (“toes up”) as the ankle essentially slides up the other leg and traces a direct line to underneath the hips. During this process the calf and hamstring will fold together. I will start with a walking march and then progress into a skip where the athlete violently strikes the ground and causes their body to pop up off the ground just a tad (not a power skip). I will emphasize arm action during both the march and skip.

2nd Mechanical Drill: Wall Drill

Focal Points: I have the athlete lean against a wall at about a 45 degree angle. They should be on the balls of their feet. I want their posture to create a straight line from their shoulders down to their ankles; a common mistake is that they will break their hips backward a tad. The athlete starts with one knee forward. It almost looks like they are in an A Skip position while leaning against the wall, with the small difference that the foot may drift forward so their shin is at the same angle of their torso (close to 45 degrees). On my command the athlete will switch legs simultaneously. As we repeat this, the athlete should be stepping back with the foot and not down. If they step down they end up walking up the wall and we don’t want that.

Full Speed Drills

There are an endless amount of drills. Here are a few of my favorites:

Pushup Starts: The athlete starts on their stomachs as if they are lying at the bottom of a pushup. On my command the athlete does a
pushup and brings one knee forward so that foot is equal with the opposite knee and is digging into the ground. On my command they sprint a given distance at 100% effort.

Stomach Starts: This is the same as the pushup start but without the command to bring the knee forward. On my command they react and sprint at 100% effort for a given distance.

Falling Starts: The athlete stands tall with arms at 90 degrees. They fall forward and sprint. They are essentially trying to fall into the wall drill position, although it is unlikely they will get to 45 degrees with their body before they feel the need to sprint. Do not let them break at the hips as they fall.

Cat and Mouse: One athlete (mouse) lies down on their stomach. The other athlete (cat) lies on the ground next to the mouse but is slightly behind them with their hands equal to the mouse’s hips. Once both athletes are set, the mouse sprints at 100% effort for a given distance. The cat reacts to the mouse’s movement and sprints at 100% effort and tries to pass the mouse. It’s a fun and competitive drill. If the drill is really favoring the cat or mouse, you can control the competitiveness by altering the starting position of the cat.

Agility

1st Technique: Deceleration / Landing Position

1st Mechanical Drill: Athletic Stance

Focal Points: One of the first things I do with my athletes is teach them to get in a good athletic stance: head up, chest up, hips back, elbows back, knees wide, feet flat. I make them hold the stance and I literally walk around and push them to ensure they are in a strong position.

2nd Mechanical Drill: Landings

Focal Points: I will have my athletes jump and focus on landing in a strong athletic stance. I will have them do vertical, lateral, and rotational jumps and I expect the landings to all look the same.
3rd Mechanical Drill: Deceleration

Focal Points: I always make my athletes finish a drill in a controlled manner. They must finish every drill in either a strong athletic stance or split stance deceleration position (think walking lunge position).

2nd Technique: Change of Direction Mechanics

1st Mechanical Drill: Stationary Speed Skaters

Focal Points: I have the athletes stand in a good athletic position with one foot on a line. I have them lean towards the line so their foot, shin, thigh, center of chest, and head are all directly over the line (think lateral lunge position). The leg that is not on the line is out at a 45-degree angle and the knee is slightly bent and NOT locked out. On my command the athletes switch feet but their head and chest stay directly over the line.

Full Speed Drills

There are an endless amount of drills. Here are a few of my favorites:

Shuttles: I mark off a short distance, usually about 10 yards. If there are no lines on the ground (field or court), then I set up cones. The athletes start in a good athletic stance on one line and are facing the other line. On my command they sprint to the line and hold a stationary speed skater facing a predetermined direction. I hold them in this position to reinforce the mechanics and how things should feel when changing direction. On my command they sprint back to the original line and hold another stationary speed skater while facing a predetermined direction. On my command they sprint back to the other line and hold a stationary speed skater. Lastly on my command they sprint back to the starting line and finish the drill in a good athletic stance or deceleration position. After a few rounds of this format of holding the stationary speed skater on the lines, I progress to having them go full speed throughout the drill. This means my only command is the starting “Go” and the rest of the drill is full speed with no holding on the lines. They want to get in and out of their change of direction as fast as possible while also maintaining the proper mechanics that we already worked on.

Mirror Drill: I mark off a short distance, usually about 10 yards. I have the athletes partner up. One athlete is the leader and is shuffling laterally within the 10 yard area. They are allowed to fake and change direction as many times as they want to within that 10 yard
area while not standing up and also maintaining good change of direction mechanics (stationary speed skaters). The other athlete is trying to follow and “mirror” their movements while maintaining good change of direction mechanics (stationary speed skaters).

Summary

Keeping things simple works best for my current situation. I believe strength has a major influence on speed and agility development. I have been fortunate enough to work with some great coaches. I have stolen “stuff” from all of them and put my own twist on it to fit my given situation. Feel free to contact me. I always welcome feedback and enjoy talking shop.

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