

Hurdles: The only OBSTACLE is your own thoughts/mental images

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“Our life is what our thoughts make it” –Marcus Aurelius

To a great extent we are what we think. Our thoughts do not only have an emotional impact on us but it also has a profound effect on our physical-biological make-up. In the book, switching on your brain, Dr Caroline leaf explains how thoughts can control the brain’s sensory processing, rewiring of the brain, neurotransmitters, genetic expression and cellular activity in either a positive or negative direction. For something that has such an enormous impact on our lives and bodies, I would say we pay far too little attention to our thoughts. If we put as much effort into mental training as we do physical training, athletes could surely improve enormously.

Now, for the how’s.

First and foremost, we need to start by focussing our attention on the ruminating thoughts going around in our minds. We need to recognize our negative thoughts, take them captive and replace them with positive thoughts.

Focused attention is a powerful ability and is attained through conditioning and disciplining the mind, gently taking thoughts captive, adjusting the thoughts on the task at hand and bringing it back from wandering. You are in fact directing you attention away from the negative, towards the positive and you are physically rewiring healthy new circuits in your brain. This leads to impressive improvement in cognitive

functioning and emotional balance.

The next step is to replace these thoughts with new ones and conditioning the mind so that it becomes the norm. Patterns of habit are formed in your subconscious mind by repeating a thought or act over and over again, with a relaxed mind, until it takes root in the subconscious mind and therefore become 'automatic', meaning that it does not require much thinking or concentrating, because it becomes 'instinct' or 'natural', just like driving a car or a bicycle becomes second nature. This is exactly the way in which we should train our brains for a race.

Visualisation is the way in which we accomplish this conditioning of the brain. Whatever mental picture, backed by faith, and thought, that you hold and repeatedly feed on, your subconscious mind will bring to pass, for it recognizes it as important enough to hold onto and execute. In Power of the subconscious mind, Dr. Joseph Murphy says: that every thought is a cause and every condition an effect. Visualisation should be done on a regular basis. When visualising, there are a few key pointers to keep in mind. One should be completely relaxed and in a comfortable private setting for it to be effective. One should try and keep thoughts from wandering and focus completely on the task at hand. It is very important to visualize attaining your goal, every step of the way, from start to finish, the more detail you include in this mental video, the better. Remember to keep every step positive, fluent, yet realistic. The more emotion that is put into the exercise, the better it will be remembered, try to make the visualisation feel as real as possible, focus on the emotional as well as the physical experiences and feelings. Also remember that as you train, you will race. Mental toughness during training sessions is just as important as in the race itself.

Therefore a hurdle athlete must be coached to do visualisation at least two times a week and definitely the day before a

race. The athlete needs to visualise on the start and how they drive out of the blocks, the approach toward the hurdle, how they clear the hurdle (the drive, leading and third leg action) and their focus after clearing the hurdle towards the next hurdle. They need to visualise on their running technique, keeping their hips up high throughout the start till the finish.

Now, for the race itself. Just as focused attention on thoughts were important for training, focused attention is important on race day and especially during the race. But this comprises a different type of focus, not a focus on thoughts, but rather a focus on NOT thinking, clearing the conscious mind in order for the subconscious to take over, trusting the brain and body to now execute what it was trained and conditioned to do. What we say and do is based on what we have already built 'into our minds'. We evaluate the information around us and we then make our choices based on the vast amount of information locked away in our subconscious brought forward to our conscious.

In the book, Zen and Japanese culture, about the mindset of Japanese sword fighters, who in those times fought until death, Daisetz T Suzuki wrote the following about focussing attention and staying in the zone:

“ A mind unconscious of itself is a mind that is not at all disturbed by effects of any kind. It is a state of not-thinking, emptiness, no-mindedness, mind of no mind’ “

“To clear the mind from all useless rubbish and to turn the consciousness into automation in the hands of the unconsciousness”

“The feeling of separating my body from my conscious mind and letting my body do what comes naturally”

“if you take notice of the enemy's personality you cease to be master of yourself and are sure to fall victim to the enemy's

sword”

“Childlikeness has to be restored with long years of training in the art of self-forgetfulness. When this is attained, man does his great works. He thinks, yet he does not think”

Now I would like to direct your thoughts to hurdle athletes, in particular.

Running hurdles comprises of a whole lot of different emotions and fears than say for instance running long distances or a flat out sprint, because perfect technique is such a big added element to this race. This includes emotions of fear of falling, fear of getting disqualified, fear of getting hurt, fear of being too tired to even get over the hurdle, fears of not getting your steps in and the fear of losing balance. In my opinion visualisation is thus even more important for hurdle athletes, not only visualising mental toughness, but visualising flawless technique and rhythm. In this article I have mentioned a lot about how important conditioning of the brain is in order for activities to become instinct or second nature and that is exactly what we need when running hurdles. We need to condition the mind by training perfect technique and rhythm over and over again, as well as visualising it, in order to imprint a mental image that can be recalled during a race. During the race itself however we don't want thoughts or thinking to be a distraction, but rather keep a focus of empty-mindedness in order for the subconscious to take control and execute what it was conditioned for, because it knows best.

The visualisation phase must consist of the following:

- The acceleration from the start to the first hurdle,
- The focus of getting a three phase rhythm between hurdles,
- The correct approach towards the hurdle,
- A high hip position of running,

- The bended leading leg,
- A comfortable running position over the hurdle,
- Having a fast and aggressive landing,
- The significant pose between the leading and driving leg,
- Having your drive leg as high as possible when it comes through.

Make visualisation part of your athletes training in order for the subconscious to take control and execute what it was conditioned for, because it knows best.

“Our life is what our thoughts make it.”

Hurdles: Introduction for Beginners

There's a reason that the hurdles are considered running events, rather than jumping events. Reduced to simple terms, the ideal hurdler will basically run the 100 to 400 meters, while taking what amounts to a long, gliding stride over each hurdle. The competitors will spend as little time in the air as possible. They'll get their feet back on the ground quickly after clearing each hurdle, then will continue running with consistent strides so they can clear the next obstacle just as smoothly as the last. As some coaches like to say, a hurdler event is a sprint race with a few small barriers along the way.



At the youth level, however, it's a bit different. The beginning hurdler is going to run up to the hurdle, slow down, jump over the hurdle, then start running again. It almost doesn't matter how small you make the barriers in practice. Anything reasonably close to the size of an actual hurdle is going to elicit the run-jump-run reaction

Therefore, patience on the coaches' part is just as important as skill development on the competitors' part when teaching the sport to new hurdles.

Safety and Comfort

As with any running event, a good stretching routine is a must. Even young, active, flexible runners will benefit from a good warm-up.

The next step is getting the runners comfortable with clearing hurdles, and beginning to teach them to avoid the run-jump-run instinct, which can only be accomplished through repetition. While the youngsters are learning, they'll need some barriers to clear. Youth events, depending on the

competitors' ages, generally begin with 30-inch hurdles, so beginners should start with lower barriers. Additionally, the barriers must be light and safe, so the kids won't be injured when striking a hurdle. Options include adjustable power hurdles, which can generally be set from 6 to 42 inches high. These devices are lightweight and collapse easily when struck. Another good choice is the banana step. These training hurdles are made from lightweight plastic, colored yellow or light green – hence the “banana” in the name – and generally come in heights of 6 to 24 inches.



Technique

Among the teaching points for beginning hurdlers, the start will be the easiest. At higher levels, of course, races can be won or lost out of the blocks. But there's plenty of time to work on starting technique. Novices must focus on selecting a lead hurdling leg (usually the left for right-handers), then develop a consistent stride pattern, because the stride pattern determines which leg is placed in the back of the starting blocks. If the hurdler takes an even number of steps to the first hurdle, the lead leg goes in the back block, and vice-versa for an odd number of steps.



Next, nothing beats repetition when you're teaching hurdle clearance. But a little visualization never hurts. Have your prospective hurdles walk up to a youth-sized hurdle. For those who are leading with their left leg, have them walk to the right of the hurdle, lift their lead leg and stretch it out, to demonstrate that their leg can rise above the hurdle. Repeat the drill on the other side of the hurdle, but have them lift their rear leg up in proper position off to the side, with the knee as high as possible, to show that the trail leg can also pass above the hurdle without a jump. Yes, they'll still jump the first few times, but as their comfort increases, the visualization will remain in their mind and help them progress.





Start the novices out clearing just one practice barrier, but make sure they sprint to a finish line after clearing it, to get used to the rhythm of a hurdles race. Many races, after all, are won between the final hurdle and the tape. Next, add the second hurdle, so the competitors can begin developing a stride pattern between hurdles. Again, repetition is the best teacher. As the athlete's progress, gradually increase the height of the practice barriers, and increase their number. At some levels, youth hurdlers will face eight barriers, moving up to a maximum of 10.

Conclusion

Don't worry about the fine points at the beginning. Just get the hurdlers comfortable clearing the barriers without jumping, while developing a reasonably consistent stride pattern. As they improve, begin to emphasize proper clearance techniques, with the lead leg snapping up, the upper body leaning forward, and the trail leg rising up and to the side, with the knee higher than the foot.

By Mike Rosenbaum

Source: trackandfield.about.com

Hurdle Development

Hurdle Development

by Tony Veney

With **hurdle training**, before you decide how fast you want your hurdler to run in 2014, you need to determine what is necessary in order to drop from 15.50 to 14.65, or 17.00 to 15.70. Look at your annual track schedule and decide how many races you expect your hurdler to run for the year. Let's say he/she is going to compete in 15 meets ranging from the first meet in March and ending with your May/June state meet. Fifteen meets could result in 35 to 65 races (who plan on racing their kid 65 times?).

In 37 years of coaching and conversations with men and women who have served as my mentors, I have learned there are 6 categories of **hurdle training** that I believe are critical to hurdle development.

Categories of Speed Development:

1. Speed development versus speed work. When you are trying to make your hurdler faster, you must stay within the rules of the seven second limit. From initial acceleration (for a 15.00 hurdler) to the 5th hurdle, you're training your hurdler to get as fast as they can. When you develop something, you stay close to what is specific to the task you're trying to develop. With that in mind, don't have your hurdler complete 5 starts over 5 hurdles runs, and because you don't think 5 starts over 50 meters was enough you decide to top off the day with a 350 at 90%. You will have ruined the training effect your hurdler gained from running fast over 5

hurdles. Anything you run past the seven second rule is not compatible with speed development and should be avoided if trying to make your hurdler faster is the goal.

2. Speed development training should be done **all year**. This statement is the one I make that is met with the most resistance because I am misunderstood about how this is accomplished. I am not asking you to do nothing but run seven seconds or less every day. But some form of speed “development” must be done in order to get and stay faster than you were in 2013. Starts, sled pulls, hills, running in sand, running stairs, multi-throw, multi-jump, and plyometric exercises are all forms of speed development.
3. Speed development must be set up before you begin any type of endurance training. Speed is 25 times more difficult than endurance to develop. With that knowledge, you should set your training based on developing the hardest portion of your race first (being fast). There is nothing about running slow that positively impacts running fast (even though speed has a positive impact on endurance). However, the faster you are, the more likely you will be able to endure at a percentage of that speed.

Categories of [Speed Endurance](#):1

1. The major question you have to ask yourself about endurance training is how much does my sprint-hurdler need (does my hurdler have to train like a distance runner to get better?)? You only have so many days to train, so you must decide how can I get my hurdler fast enough and strong enough to run the goal time?
2. General endurance is used to increase the size and O₂ saturation of the muscle’s capillary beds. General endurance is used to assist in recovery from hard workouts. Finally, general endurance is also helpful is

allowing the hurdler to recover from hard races while running qualifying rounds.

3. Specific Endurance is tied to performance and speed support. Speed endurance and lactate training combined will give you the ability to run at the desired speed rhythm over and over again (at the race speeds needed to succeed)

Categories of Strength and Power:

1. "To weight room or not to weight room. " For the young hurdler, body weight exercises can serve just as important a training protocol as anything in the weight room. Hopping, jumping, skipping and gravity (depth jumps) routines can mimic the take-off and touchdown mechanics of hurdle run. Light bars, dumbbells and med-ball exercises can not only improve strength and power but can improve core and postural needs.
2. Olympic lifts such as cleans, snatch, bench press, etc. are critical to being able to run really faster. The development of sprint-hurdling strength also helps avoid high velocity injuries that come from trying to run faster but lacking coordination and postural integrity.

Categories of Mechanics:

1. Running drills that do more than just raise your heart rate are critical to the hurdler's improvement. Drills are a "teachable moment" (Boo Schexnayder) and should not be performed unsupervised.
2. Running mechanics are also helpful in teaching how to run under stressful conditions while still being able to stay relaxed (one of the most violated principles in our sport).
3. There is a technique to every part of the hurdle race and being skilled enough to run each zone correctly comes from mechanical expertise.

Categories of "Athleticism":

1. Anyone can run and jump over things, but only the most skilled can hurdle. If all you do with your hurdler is hurdle, then you are keeping them from fulfilling their genetic potential.
2. Some of the best hurdlers have come from other sports, or have continued to remain multi-sport athletes. If they are not multi-sport then making sure they are more athletic by incorporating other sport activities into your training. It can keep your hurdlers fresh by introducing some fun activities that break up the training boredom (soccer, baseball, basketball, gymnastics, swimming, etc.).

Categories of Rest and Recovery:

1. Rest is a component of **hurdle training** and should not be a response to illness or injury, but should be programmed in to avoid illness and injury related to training.
2. Rest and recovery helps mightily in preparation to peak for the state meet since it's more difficult to run at your best while you're going through a stressful training cycle.
3. Good health and proper nutrition is so often ignored by coaches who never notice poor nutrition as long as their kids are running well. And the athletes never worry about it as long as they are running fast and their coach is happy.
4. Identify the stress markers since they exist as bee stings rather than falling off a cliff. But if you are stung by a bee over a long period of time, it will **Kill** you. More than anything else try not to be the source of your hurdler's greatest stress. Does what you say and do at practice and on meet day make them crazy?

Making sure you try injecting these categories of **[hurdle development](#)** into your daily **hurdle training** can ensure hurdle success. Good Hunting!

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