

Learning How to Alternate Lead Legs in the 300/400 Hurdles

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The top 25 hurdlers in the world know how to alternate their lead legs when needed. Top athletes may not *want* to switch legs during a race but are able to do so in an emergency situation. They have done the work necessary to be prepared to meet this challenge when the wrong leg inevitably comes up prior to a hurdle. Every athlete favors using a certain leg when hurdling but having the ability and confidence to use the opposite leg enables the athlete to run a great race when any one of the following occurs:

1. They start out too fast
2. They are running into strong headwind
3. They hit the previous hurdle

As a coach who had the opportunity to coach the 1991 World Champion for the 400 meter hurdles and both the Olympic Silver and Bronze Medalists in the 400 meter hurdles at the 1996 Olympic Games, I am a firm believer that the 300/400 meter hurdler will never become a GREAT intermediate hurdler unless he/she can master using both legs.

The following is a very simple drill to help athletes become great in the 300/400 hurdles:

Men: Set hurdles up on the women's 100 meter hurdles marks (8.5 Meters apart). The athlete may wear either their spikes or training flats. The athlete will now use four strides between each hurdle. This means they will use their right leg on one hurdle and their left leg on their next hurdle. The goal is to do this 10 times x 10 hurdles. The height of the hurdle should start at 30 inches and may go higher and higher as the hurdler masters the drill. Do this drill either at the beginning of the workout or at end of the workout. Do this drill 2-3 times a week and watch the hurdler master both legs in only a few weeks.

Women: Do the same drill as above, but place the hurdles at either 7.0 or 7.5 meters apart. This will allow the women hurdlers to alternate right/left leg on every other hurdle. Be sure to set these hurdles at 30 inches in height, to start with and raise the hurdles as they improve.

I taught Calvin Davis (a non-hurdler) to do this drill and in a period of only 8 months, in only his 15th race of his life, he won the Olympic Bronze Medal at the 1996 Olympic Games. If the 300/400 hurdler can learn to use both legs automatically without thinking, they never have to worry about having a bad race as they will be able to adjust to the obstacles that often can occur in this grueling race. Best of luck!