
Teaching The Triple Jump

Thanks to Coach Todd for sending in this useful analysis of the triple jump and its phases and the basic drills that will help the beginner get the feel of the event.

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Important to the development of any triple jumper is an understanding of the feel or rhythm of the event. The athlete must clearly understand how the event flows from one segment to the next when done correctly. Because of this need to understand, it becomes crucial that the coach begin instruction with a whole-part-whole teaching philosophy. The novice triple jump athlete must develop the kinesthetic awareness of the whole movement before instruction progresses to the individual parts. Without knowledge of the whole, the individual parts are meaningless.

Hand in hand with developing a feel for the event is the need for the athlete to get accurate feedback from the coach and from his or her own individual feedback system (i.e., his own individual sensory perceptions of his own individual physical movements). This feedback, or knowledge of response, is vital to the learning process. Accurate knowledge of response can cut the learning curve in half.

One of the best drills that has worked for me in teaching the rhythm or feel of the triple jump is described below. I have used this teaching method

with my track team athletes and with numerous physical education classes during Track and Field Activity Units. It is simple but effective. It has worked in one-on-one settings (just one athlete and me), and it has worked with a coed freshman PE class of over 50! The main thing to remember here is that technique is not the goal of this drill but timing, rhythm, and kinesthetic feel.

DRILL ONE

- Line the athletes up on the goal line of the football field. They should have as much room between them as possible. They should all be facing you. The instructor should be standing on the 10-yard line facing the group.
- Tell them that there are two possible legal triple jump combinations. They are: LEFT, LEFT, RIGHT, TOGETHER and RIGHT, RIGHT, LEFT, TOGETHER. The lefts and rights refer to foot strike patterns and the word together refers to the end of the jump when both feet are together and the athlete has landed in the sand. No one combination is

better than the other, but you will have them experiment with both and find out which one they prefer. Once a preference is determined the athlete should stick with that for a while.

- Have everyone stand on the goal line facing you. Tell them to stand on their left foot with their right foot held off the ground.
- Have them hop off of their left foot and land on their left foot. When his left foot hits, the athlete should then jump off that and land on his right foot. After the right foot strikes the ground, the athlete then jumps off that foot and lands with both feet together as if landing in the sand.
- Repeat this process starting with the right foot. Do each a number of times until the athlete can determine which combination feels the best to him.
- Repeat this process, allowing each athlete to use whatever foot combination he prefers. Allow him to use a two-step runup to the line, then a five-yard runup and finally allow a ten-yard runup. The goal or emphasis in each of these drills

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should be the correct foot strike pattern and learning the feel and rhythm of this event. No attention should be paid to arm mechanics, length of phases, posture or any other technique variable.

BOUNDING

A triple jumper must know how to bound. This skill is crucial if the athlete hopes to be successful. There should be some type of bounding work built into practice each day, especially for the beginning athlete. Start with single-arm bounding and progress to double-arm bounding. Initially it is much more important to work on the athlete's timing and help him develop a smooth or relaxed bounding motion. Covering distance or "power" bounding can come later and will come much easier once the athlete has developed the proper timing and sequence of the movement.

Drill Two is designed to teach bounding to a large group of athletes in a relatively short period of time. It keeps everyone busy and allows even the unskilled to look good.

DRILL TWO

- For this drill you need a shopping cart. (For purposes of illustration we will assume that we have twelve athletes we are trying to teach to bound.)
- Place six of your athletes in lane four on the starting line. Place the other six athletes in lane four as well, only put them at the 50-meter mark. Each group should be in a straight line, one behind the other. Both groups should be facing each other.
- Have the first athlete in the "starting line" group put his hands on the cart handles. Start pushing the cart toward the next group. While pushing the cart and moving forward, hop from the right foot to the left foot and then back to the right. As this motion becomes more fluid, begin

to take bigger or larger hops and try to bring the knee of the forward moving leg up to and at least parallel with the shopping cart handle.

- This should be repeated the entire 50 meters with the emphasis on moving from one foot to the other with the knee getting even with the shopping cart handle. Speed is not the issue for this drill but as the athlete becomes more proficient his speed will increase.
- Once the athlete has completed 50 meters, the shopping cart is "passed" to the next athlete and the process is repeated going back down the track in the opposite direction. The athlete just completing the drill moves to the end of the line and recovers before his or her next turn.
- Eventually you can remove the cart and the athletes are now bounding on their own.

This drill can be done with large groups of athletes, and it can be done on a dirt track without any problem and you can easily vary the distance. I believe this is an easy and effective way to teach athletes to bound.

PHASE OF THE JUMP

Each phase is a distinct, separate action and must be learned and practiced as such. However each of these phases must be blended together into one continuous, flowing movement when performed. This brings us back to and reinforces the whole-part-whole teaching philosophy mentioned earlier. This whole action cannot be understood and performed without an understanding and proficiency of the individual parts.

Since by now your athletes should have a good feeling or awareness of the overall movement, I believe the best course of action for the vast majority of jumpers is to then work at and drill the individual parts. Once each part is learned the task then becomes one of blending these parts back together and learning the transitions. Coaching the transitions from runway to hop, from

hop to step and step to jump is where the real work is found. Smooth transitions and active landings take time to fully master. Thankfully, however, much progress and improvement can be made by improving the individual phases.

In the various phase discussions that follow I will be describing a left-left-right-together pattern. All cues and description are the same for either pattern.

HOP PHASE

The hop phase is a cyclic motion. It corresponds to the athlete's "left-left" sequence pattern that was learned in the first drill. The athlete runs down the runway, takes off or leaves the ground from his left foot, cycles this leg through and now lands on the left foot.

There are several important things to focus on in this phase. The first is being that of maintaining as much horizontal velocity as possible. To do this, the athlete's foot must strike the runway directly below the hips or center of mass.

The foot must strike the runway in a "pawing" motion. The motion is similar to that of a person trying to propel himself forward on a skateboard.

The posture of the athlete is important during this first phase as well. The body should be erect and upright at takeoff, during flight and upon landing. Any forward lean or bending at the waist can cause excessive forward rotation or inhibit necessary movement into the next phase.

It is also important that the athlete send both arms forward at takeoff in this hop phase. A double-arm takeoff is not difficult to learn and has the added advantage of getting both arms out in front at the beginning of the jump. A strong double-arm pump can increase the amount of force the athlete can apply and improve overall jump distance.

DRILL THREE

The athlete should spend time

performing the hop motion. However these hops do not have to be from a full approach nor do they have to come down on the runway. One of the best ways to perform a number of practice drills is to hop into the sand. Each setup can be a little different and varied according to ability level and emphasis for that particular day.

- Line your athletes up on the runway approximately 10 meters from the sand.
- Ignoring the takeoff board, have them run to the sand and execute the left-left takeoff. Where the athlete actually jumps from is irrelevant. What is relevant is that the takeoff is more horizontal than vertical, the posture is good, the athlete has a focal point out beyond the back of the pit (he is not looking down), he lands on the same foot he took off with, and that the foot strikes the sand beneath the hips and not out in front of the hips.
- Since the takeoff foot for the hop phase must move in a cyclic manner, we use the following cue. “Heel to butt, thigh high, paw.” These three phrases remind our athletes that after takeoff the heel cycles up to the butt; this shortens the lever length and allows the leg to move forward quickly. Thigh high helps our athlete focus on a full range of motion for this leg and helps put the athlete in a good position to “paw” or strike the ground on landing. The final cue—“paw”—reminds the athlete that he is not simply landing but that he is involved in an active, aggressive, forward propelling movement.
- All of this can be done without a great deal of speed and can be done with a large group of people at once. Begin with a small run-up and little speed, eventually building up to longer and longer runups and increased speeds as the skill level improves.
- Other ways to teach the hop action.
 1. Single leg hop in place.
 2. Hop up stairs.

3. Hop across the field with a partner following along behind and holding your non-hopping foot. (Do not allow the athlete performing the drill to wear spikes.)
4. Hop over cones or other low obstacles. (The obstacles should break away or fall down when struck.)

STEP PHASE

The step phase is a crucial phase to the overall jump but in many ways a successful step phase is a result of a good hop phase. Knowing how to bound and performing a strong, technically sound hop will insure a good step phase. However the step phase must still be mastered and practiced. There are a number of drills that can help your athletes get the most from this part of the jump.

DRILL FOUR

- After bounding is mastered, perform a hop and then follow the hop with a split landing in the sand. (Right leg in front, left leg trailing behind.) The athlete should start back about ten meters from a takeoff area and at takeoff perform a hop. (Remember the pattern for this is left, left, right.) This time the hop must land on the runway. After the hop landing the athlete now must propel off the left foot and into a big bounding action. The right leg is in front, the thigh of the right leg is parallel to the ground, the athlete’s torso is upright and he or she carries this good position into the sand, landing in this split position. Holding this position teaches the athlete to hold or ride this step position as long as possible and get as much distance out of this phase as possible.
- From this drill, the athlete can move to a hop and then step with an active landing rather than the split landing in the sand. Begin on the grass and look for the same kind of foot strike

and positioning that you looked for in the hop landing. The athlete must be pawing the landing foot. The landing leg must be moving back down the runway (away from the sand), if your athlete hopes to move forward toward the sand.

- After these drills are working well, you can mix the routine up a little. Have the athlete perform not only the hop-step drill but some hop-hop-step drills as well. It is also helpful to now have the athlete drill both sides or jump patterns. In other words, he could do hop drills on both the right and left side. This is good for strength development and by overloading the motor system with drills on both sides we can expect to see an even greater adaptation.

ARM ACTION DURING PHASES

The arm action of the triple jumper is crucial. Good arm action can significantly add to the triple jump distance and must be worked on or practiced. However, sometimes too much is made of the positioning and location of the arms at each phase, causing the athlete to forget the main reason for the arm action in the first place.

The arms are used to deliver a blow to the runway. They are used to increase the amount of force the athlete can apply to the runway, thereby increasing the amount of force returned, which translates into increased distance.

A simple arm action cue the athlete can remember is the following: “Leg back, arms forward.” In other words, every time a leg is coming down toward the runway, the arms are moving forward. Each time a leg is moving back toward the runway the arms should be moving forward forcibly.

DRILL FIVE

I call this the BOOM, BANG, POW drill. Have your athlete walk with a double-arm swing and an exaggerated leg lift. Each time the athlete’s

leg “paws” the ground, his or her arms should be moving forward. Arms should be driven to shoulder height and then cycled back.

- This drill will help the athlete time or “sync” the very necessary arm movement with the leg action.
- Once the rhythms of the drill are learned, speed can be added and then more and more force put into the repetitions.

JUMP PHASE

This is the final phase of the triple jump action and is identical to the long jump flight into the pit. What makes this phase so difficult is the lack of horizontal velocity at this point in the jump. Another factor that can contribute to a poor jump phase is the athlete’s body position after “landing” from the previous step phase.

Success here is dependent on what has happened before. Much time should be spent on this phase. It is possible to drill this phase off the grass into the sand, or off the grass and onto a landing pit. The important thing to remember is to drill this aspect off a bounding action with only as much speed as would be found in the actual triple jump movement itself.

It is important to spend time on this phase. Your athlete must experience the feeling of working against the forces that are attempting to negate a successful final movement. They will begin to understand the importance of effective arm action and knee drive the more they spend time trying to jump off a previous bounding movement.

DRILL SIX

- One-step jump: Use the right foot if the right foot is the one your athlete lands on from the step. Have your athlete stand with both feet together, facing the sand. Take one big step onto the takeoff foot and then perform a jump landing. Use only the speed the athlete can generate with one step. He should start close to the pit to ensure a safe sand landing.
- Bound-Bound-Bound-Jump: The athlete performs three bounds and then a jump movement into the sand. Make sure that the last foot to hit the ground before the sand is the same foot that the athlete will jump off when he performs the actual triple jump.
- Bound-Bound-Bound to low box-jump: The same movement as described previously but the last jump is performed off a low plyo box. This drill requires two things to work successfully. The first is a plyo box that has a large enough surface area to provide a good target and the second is a confident athlete. Do not try to force this drill on to a new triple jumper. Bring this drill in as your athletes become more rhythmic and coordinated and are ready for a new motor challenge. Going off the box really “loads” the takeoff leg and forces the athlete to work both arm swing and free leg drive to get any kind of distance off the jump.

Remember that most of the jump phase is covered during long jump practice. You need to work on the

transition to the jump phase. Coming off of the step phase, body position is your primary concern. Correct body position prior to the jump takeoff will benefit your athlete by allowing him to apply arm drive and free leg swing (i.e., forces) in the right direction and at the right time.

FINAL

As each phase is learned you must help your athlete combine them into each other. Eventually you will make your way toward short-approach full jumps and finally full-approach full jumps. Remember to coach each phase first. Once a certain proficiency is achieved move to the transition from one phase to the next.

Focus on maintaining horizontal velocity and jump for body position between phases and NOT distance. Too much emphasis is placed on phase percentages (of the total distance), and judgements are made of an athlete’s ability based upon how well their jumps fit into these “ideal” models. Distance between phases will come with strength, maturation and improved mechanics. Each jumper is different.

It is our job as coaches, to exploit what the athlete does right, to help him use these strengths to his best advantage and minimize or eliminate any weakness. The triple jump is an intricate event and takes time to master. Give your athletes time to learn and feel comfortable with the various phases and component movements. Patience will yield a consistent crop of triple jumpers for your program over the years.