

Build Better Athletes

Implementation Strategy

Module 5 – Coordination and Agility

It is important to know the difference between coordination and agility. Agility typically applies to something specific to a sport. In basketball, agility tends to mean lateral movements, backpedaling, side-shuffling whereas coordination would better be described as the ability to a crossover dribble, dribble between the legs and of course the hand-eye coordination involved with simply shooting the basketball.

There are similar parallels in soccer. Remember that it is coordination that falls into the five bio-motor abilities category, not agility. However, your training of that bio-motor ability will look very similar to agility training.

If you have an athlete and you're trying to teach them to shuffle sideways, some athletes will do it better than others. They will stay lower, move more explosively and cover more ground with each shuffle. However, nearly every athlete can execute a side shuffle without practicing it or needing training.

Coordination work involves the brain a little bit more. Kind of like learning an intricate dance. Think of it as a movement pattern the brain has to master before the body can. The key to coordination training is to prevent that mastery. Here is an example.

When I was training for marathons I would often see the same runners every day at the park. Some of them were carrying 20 or 40 extra pounds of body weight despite a daily run of 3 to 5 miles. Their bodies, over time, had adapted to running that distance and doing so was no longer as difficult as it was the first time. If they continue to run the same distance at the same pace, it will eventually become more and more pleasant and less and less stressful. That is the training effect they desired.

What those runners need is a new stimulus. This same applies to coordination training.

A common modality of coordination work involves agility ladders. Once you have trained athletes how to do them they typically dive in and get better and better at that specific drill. The coach needs to notice that level of mastery and change the drill to keep challenging the athlete's coordination levels.

Let's not get crazy here though. Holding a barbell above their head, while balancing an egg on their nose and walking in high heels would be a lot to coordinate and totally foolish at the same time. If you train athletes for years you should have thrown a lot of different coordination challenges in front of them and the training effect saw them get better at each of them.

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As with most things, the athletes will see their greatest improvements very early in the training process. Once they have attained some level of mastery, they can still be challenged but there is less room for improvement. Kind of like trying to improve a 95% on a math test (which I wouldn't know anything about...). It is possible to do better but there's only room for slight improvement.

Study and be creative while keeping safety paramount as priority number one. The original agility ladders were very handy but frequently had to be reset as athletes kicked and stepped on them. To minimize the amount of money spent on aspirin for the coaches, we created agility ladders out of athletic tape with clear wrestling mat tape on top of that. Doing so allowed us to do agility work without the delays and hassles of having to reset the ladders.

The videos shown in module five are an example of creativity. I realized a chunk of our training before the track season would be indoors because of bad weather so I devised step patterns that could be done quickly on staircases.

It is perfectly fine to do agility work using cones or lines on tennis or basketball courts as well, particularly in sports that need specific agility work. Please study how to teach and train deceleration. Many injuries occur in non-contact change of direction moments in sports. Some of those can be avoided with proper training.

Now let's dive into the strength module, I will see you there.