

# How to Become a Better Sprinter

Some winning tips from Carl Lewis and coach Tom Tellez

## Words of Advice from Carl Lewis...

There are no shortcuts to running faster. You can't cut corners. You can't cheat. You have to stay focused on your goals. And you have to do all your drills.

Following are some winning tips from Carl Lewis and coach Tom Tellez to help make you a better sprinter. And you don't have to be a top-notch athlete to benefit from their knowledge. Their advice is useful for beginners and experts alike. As Lewis says, "Anybody interested in running should benefit from at least parts of our program. And remember, you don't have to be an Olympic champion to improve your speed."

## GETTING LOOSE

Before training or competing, you must take the body from a resting state to a working state. Jog at least two laps, then stretch. Lewis does only a few standing stretches. "That's just personal preference," he says. "Do as much or as little as you need to feel comfortable." No matter how much stretching you do, it is important that you hold your stretches. Don't bounce.

Finally, do some striding, first in your flats, then in your spikes. Start slowly, accelerating over varying distances. Your entire warm-up should last about half an hour.

## TRAINING

At one point or another you have probably heard the saying, "No pain, no gain." In other words, your training must make you hurt to make you better. "Ridiculous," Lewis says. "Your training should be sensible. In many cases it is more important to rest than it is to drive yourself to the point of pain." Your workout schedule should include hard, medium and easy days. Never plan two hard days in a row. You must allow for recovery between your hard workouts. Tellez recommends the following six-day cycle: hard, medium, hard, easy, hard, and medium. Take off the final day of the week.

Another reason to vary your workouts is to avoid boredom. If you don't feel

good one day, alter your workout or skip it. The same applies if the weather is bad. Don't force yourself to train when conditions aren't right. One missed workout now and then will not affect your performance.

Weight training depends on the individual, though Tellez considers it an important part of the Houston sprint program. He says, "If everything else is equal among sprinters, the strongest sprinter will be the winner." But Lewis has never done much weight training. In fact, his worst performances came the year he did the most lifting. "For some athletes, getting bigger and stronger might be the way to go," Lewis says. "But I've also seen people as big as houses who are as slow as molasses."

### **GETTING OUT OF THE BLOCKS**

Be consistent in the way you set the blocks. Put your stronger leg in front. Your starting position should be comfortable, balanced. Physically, you've done all you can to prepare for this moment. "As I step into the blocks," Lewis says, "my mind is focused on listening for the gun. I've convinced myself that nobody can react better than I can, and I'm going to go out with power." Tellez adds, "At the sound of the gun, you will think of one thing and one thing only-driving off the front block."

### **RUNNING THE RIGHT WAY**

Lewis and Tellez emphasize that you should be as relaxed as possible while running. Keep your mouth open slightly. Relax your jaw and your entire face, even your eyes. "Don't grit your teeth," Tellez says. "If you do, that tension will run all the way down your neck and trunk to your legs."

Lewis runs with open hands and finds that it helps him stay relaxed. "But open hands are not a must," he says. "Only do that if it's comfortable for you." You want to make the best use of your energy by eliminating any extra, wasteful motions.

Proper running form helps you run efficiently and positions you to move as quickly and powerfully as you can. The angle of your body to the ground should be slightly forward, so you are pushing off the ground while running. This doesn't mean you should bend at the waist. Your body should be straight but leaning slightly forward.

As you run, the ball of your foot should be first to hit the ground. Your heel should then quickly touch the ground as your body passes over your foot. Make sure you don't kick out too far. This will disrupt your balance and slow you down at the end of each stride. "Think about your strides getting

quicker, not longer," says Lewis.

And don't lift your knees too high. You want to be on the ground, moving forward, not in the air, moving upward.

Finally, proper arm movement is important to running your best. All movement should come from your shoulders. You want a smooth swinging action, with your arms moving straight forward and back, not side to side. Your arms should never swing across your body. All your energy should be used to go forward.

## **RUNNING YOUR OWN RACE**

Don't be concerned about anything in the lanes around you. The race will be won or lost in your lane. Run your own race, the way you have prepared. Before and even during his biggest races, Lewis constantly reminds himself of the basics-stay relaxed, run your own race. As he is racing down the track, he will sometimes tell himself, "This is the best race you've ever run." And he'll repeat that over and over again. It helps him relax.

About two-thirds of the race is acceleration. Then you enter the stage where you try to maintain your speed. Many races will be won and lost in the last 10 to 15 meters. You can't increase your speed at this point, but it is still possible to gain on opponents who are slowing down.

"A lot of times I've been credited with being a fast finisher," Lewis says. "But it's almost an optical illusion. I'm not gaining speed. I'm just slowing down less than everyone else. That's the key. And I work hard at being able to do that."

## **STAYING FOCUSED**

There are no shortcuts to running faster. You can't cut corners. You can't cheat. You have to stay focused on your goals. And you have to do all your drills. Small drills early in the season make a big difference when it's time for the big race-whether it's a high school dual meet or the Olympic final. You're going to make some technical mistakes early in the season. But don't get upset about them. Learn from your errors, and use them as a positive influence for the rest of the season.

Work hard, and have a good time. That's what Lewis and Tellez have done. And look what it's done for them.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### Learning from the Legends



Tom Tellez

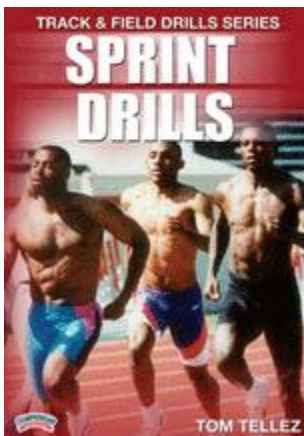


Dan Pfaff

#### >> [Learning from the Legends](#)

In these videos, Tom Tellez presents the Sprints, Hurdles and Shot Put. Dan Pfaff presents Sprints, Hurdles and Jumps.

There is an hour long roundtable Q&A period at the end with both coaches, followed by a detailed "Field Event Technique Fixes" by Dan Pfaff. Total length of the lectures: 7.5 hours. [Click here for more information.](#)



#### >> [Tom Tellez Sprint Drills](#)

Tellez discusses and his athletes demonstrate the factors necessary to be a good sprinter (stride frequency x stride length = sprint speed); conditioning drills and dozens of specific drills.

Produced in 1992. 30 minutes.

Available from Amazon.com. [Click here for more information.](#)



#### >> [Block Starts and Acceleration Mechanics with Tom Tellez](#)

This DVD presents an overview of the starting and acceleration mechanics. It details the factors that sprint coaches should look for in setting up the starting blocks, the optimal "set" position for an athlete, and what an athlete should do during the acceleration phase of the sprint to maximize performance. Among the topics covered: coming out of the blocks, ideal leg angles in the blocks, acceleration, power vs. speed, and arm stroke. 57 minutes. Available from OnLineSports.com. [Click here for more information.](#)