

Understanding Baseball Speed Training: Part I

By Shawn Moody

I remember the spring days very well. My friends and I would be outside at the first sign of warm weather. We would grab our ball gloves and stomp through the damp muddy ground to play some catch or perhaps engage in an intense game of run-down. Whatever the activity may be, we all knew that our baseball season was fast approaching.

Like any young athlete we were always looking for ways to improve our game and gain a step on our competition. And like any young athlete we always looked to our superiors for advice. At times they would offer suggestions and teach us a thing or two, but more often than none we usually picked up ideas from observing them.

The one memory that is very vivid in my mind was a training technique that we used called "jogging". We would band together like a small platoon and jog around the local football field. I can't remember how far we would jog or for how long? But I can tell you that we jogged and took it quite serious. Sometimes we would jog twice a day; once in the morning and again in the evening.

Now my question is: What the hell does jogging have to do with baseball? Let me think for a minute.....oh that's right, NOTHING!

The purpose of this article is not to give you a speed program or template to follow, but rather outline some ideas that you can implement right away to get on the right track to help increase your speed for your game. So let's get to it.

First and foremost you are not an Olympic sprinter. You are a ball player. I say this because when I was working with a young player; his father had made the observation that his son's running mechanics did not resemble Maurice Greene or Tim Montgomery? I almost fell over. The boy was only 12 years old and just looking for support. He was nowhere near his physical limit. He's 12 dad! Greene and Montgomery work on sprinting (straight ahead) every single day. They are Olympic athletes with Olympic trainers! We need to be cautious of our mechanics but we are ball players.

Next, aerobic training is pretty much a waste of time. That's right all of that jogging I did; not going to help me in baseball. There is nothing in baseball that is done aerobically. When was the last time you witnessed a pitcher jogging back-and-forth from the pitcher's mound to home plate over and over again? Hopefully never! Baseball requires hand and eye coordination and explosive acceleration to get from point A to point B. The last time I checked, it's only 90 feet between the bases. Ok, depending on what level of baseball you are playing! But you get my point. So, why train slowly, if our sport needs us to be fast?

So what exactly do we need? Most multi-directional sports such as baseball, football, basketball, soccer and tennis require us to have that first-step quickness, acceleration and agility. Have you ever noticed how quickly a major-league infielder reacts to a ground ball? They can take one or two steps perhaps dive and field that ball and turn and make a play. This doesn't happen from jogging!

Here are some drills that can help you get started. I always prescribe a dynamic warm-up before jumping into any type of agility or sprint training to elevate the body temperature and warm the connective tissue in the joint areas.

- Set up two cones or bases (just so you have a starting and finishing point) approximately 30 yards from each other. Have a partner hit the baseball or softball into the ground and you take-off when you hear the sound and sprint to the designated spot or cone. Remember that when you are playing sports you rely on several of your senses and this drill will help increase your auditory response.
- Have one of your parents throw the ball from behind you and you run in the direction of the ball based on the visual cue. Now you are relying on your visual sense to help develop that speed you need for your game.
- Play a mock game of game of baseball by yourself or with friends. But play it backwards, pretend to hit the ball from home plate swinging opposite of your normal swing and run to third base. Then get a lead off and steal second and so forth. This will seem quite confusing to your body because we've become so adapted to playing our sport in one direction.
- Simply a good game of tag with friends will help to increase your agility and first step quickness. Sounds fun...well it should be.
- The centipede: If you have ever observed a centipede walking on the ground you will notice that his tail end always follows along in different directions that the head is moving. This drill will require a few of your friends. Simply form a straight line with roughly 3 yards between each one of you. The person at the front of the line begins the drill by starting with a slow jog and each person will follow accordingly. The leader can then change the tempo and direction of the run as he or she chooses and those following need to mirror that movement. Thus simulating the tail of the centipede.

Remember this is just a starting point. These simple drills will deliver the change of direction and acceleration skills needed for the game of baseball or softball. In part II of this series I will outline a basic template for a speed program so that you can see how to put some of the pieces together.