

The Value and Purpose of a Running Assessment



A running assessment can provide valuable information about an athlete's current fitness level. Very often I get requests by parents to improve their son or daughter's speed. Speed is an extremely valuable skill to have in the competitive environment but understand that it is very difficult to see vast improvements in speed with the lack of a long-term development plan.

The Running Assessment allows us to develop this long-term development plan because it provides us information about the athlete's skill and ability. So why do we perform a running assessment? Let's take a deeper look.

1. Purpose #1 - Identify Areas of Improper Movement Technique

a. Why is this important? If you're an athlete improving movement technique will improve speed, change of direction and strength ability. Improper movement technique increases risk of injury with more chances to put your body in positions where it can get hurt. So what do we look at when we do a running assessment?

- Head movement
- Arms crossing
- Shoulders rotating
- Lateral Whipping
- Head and Pelvic tilt
- Low Knee Drive and Low Recovery

2. Purpose #2 - Identify Areas of Strength Deficiencies

a. Why is this important? Understanding where the athlete is weak provides us a game plan to develop foundational strength that will encourage proper movement ability. Most often times an athlete's strength deficiency causes bad movement behavior leading to increased risk of injury.

The running assessment provides us a tool for improving movement technique which will in turn improve speed. Keep in mind that speed doesn't develop overnight and neither does it improve if strength doesn't improve.

Let's understand one thing here. If you want to improve speed but only willing to work on it for 2 months don't expect to get what you want. You can't sustain developed speed without a consistent strength and movement program. So if you think all you need is 2 months of training and then you're set

think again. It doesn't work that way. There are challenges that need to be overcome in order to see speed improvement. Let's take a look at what some of these challenges are.

- **Movement is Habitual** – when we put athletes through a running assessment there are almost always technical flaws we need to fix. The reason is because these “movement behaviors are habit. If athletes don't learn proper running technique they will continue to perform with improper technique. The real challenge is making proper movement behavior habitual. Often times when the athlete doesn't commit to a movement program long enough or isn't involved frequently enough bad behaviors are reinforced more often than the good behaviors that are taught during the session. How do we fix this?
 - Long-term application of a movement program
 - More frequent practice with proper movement technique
 - Focus on eliminating bad habits
- **Strength to Weight Ratio** – As mentioned above strength deficiencies are always noticeable in a running assessment. With that being said a movement program has to be accompanied by a strength program in order to eliminate strength deficiencies. How do we do this?
 - This is easily accomplished when we improve relative strength.
 - Relative strength refers to how well we can lift our own body weight
 - Athletes that are relatively strong for their body weight have increased speed potential (measurable by pushups, pull ups and sprinting)
- **Year Round Training Approach** – Training for speed is not a seasonal plan. Speed needs to be trained all year round but in various capacities. You can't expect to get faster in a 2 month span right before the season and then sustain that speed all season long without a movement program to accompany it. If you want to reach true speed potential you'll think about committing to a strength and conditioning program year round.

These are all factors that we address in our strength and conditioning programs. If these are not a focus of the strength and conditioning program don't expect to see much speed improvement. Lastly, if you're determined to be the best athlete you can be you need to be focused on year round athletic development.

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