

# Fun With Running...

## A Crucial Skill for So Many Sports...

By Karen M. Goeller

Since so many sports, including basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, gymnastics, and of course track and field, require good running technique, coaches must concentrate on teaching proper running technique.

Most people and often even athletes and coaches take for granted that if they can run, they are performing efficiently, but this is often not the case. Even with professional ball players, corrections can be made with running technique and/or speed. Running should be analyzed, broken down into smaller parts, and then taught correctly.

Foot alignment, knee lift, heel lift, arm swing, and even where the athlete is focusing should be trained individually, corrected, and practiced frequently. Perhaps during training, each portion of the run or the drills\techniques should be used as a warm up for training or for a more enjoyable experience, as relay races.

For a relay race each portion\movement of the run can be performed by a different teammate. Another idea is to have every participant in the race perform a certain portion or movement of the running technique.

A great contest idea for athletes is to use the arm swing for the run; once the correct elbow bend\angle and swing (alternate motion of forward and back) is learned, the number of arm swings per 30 seconds can be timed. Coaches must watch that the athletes keep their arms bent throughout the swing rather than bending and straightening with each swing. The "karate chop" motion is popular and may be a natural movement for some, but it is incorrect. The participant with the most correct arm swings can be the winner.

With the knee lift motion; once it is learned correctly without impact (marching in place and marching forward) and then with impact (running in place lifting knees and running forward lifting knees) the participants can race toward the finish using the knee lift motion. Of course, if the knees have not been lifted to at least hip height or even belly button height the knee lift was not performed correctly and that participant can not be the winner, especially since the race was specifically designed in order to practice using the knee lift motion for correct running technique.

The same race can be performed using the heel lift or actually the heel to buttocks (kick butt) motion. This motion should be learned separately from the knee lift motion. Once learned correctly using a march\walk and then a running in place and running forward motion, have your participant's race while using the kick buttocks motion. Remember, if the heels do not touch the buttocks each time, that participant cannot be the winner, especially since the participants were actually learning and practicing the heel lift for proper running technique.

Once both the knee lift and the heel lift have been learned and practiced, they can be combined. It



takes a great deal of coordination to combine both! It is easiest explained by stating that the participant must lift one knee (right leg) and then kick the buttocks with the other foot (left). It is lift knee, kick butt. And it takes even more coordination to continue toward a finish line alternating the two techniques! It feels awkward and does take practice.

After the leg motions and arm swing are learned separately, they can be combined. Perhaps try to combine the knee lift with the arm swing or the heel lift with the arm swing. Once each leg motion can be combined with the arm swing, the participant is ready to attempt a sprint toward a finish line using all of the proper techniques. The coach must constantly observe and make useful suggestions to the athletes such as lift the knees, opposite arms, and keep the elbows bent while performing the arm swing.

You see, there is a great deal of learning and careful practice that goes into the proper running technique and eventually an efficient sprint. Just think of how many baseball players would be on base safely and how many more football players would score touchdowns if they ran just a bit faster! And how many more gymnasts would vault more successfully if every one of them would practice running technique on a regular basis.

Besides good technique, many athletes need more speed. This is not something that is improved or learned like proper technique. It usually is not improved over night. One sports coach stated that anyone looking to increase running speed should run down hill. This will force the athlete to run faster because gravity is at work. The muscles will be forced to react quicker, thanks to gravity, and eventually the athlete will be able to react quickly on his/her own. Quicker reaction\movement equals a quicker run\sprint. The coach must keep the angle of the hill in mind, because if it is too steep there could be risk of injury.

Good luck with teaching your athletes to perform better by learning the correct running techniques.

Karen M. Goeller [www.gymcoach.sport.new.net](http://www.gymcoach.sport.new.net) has written a book entitled, Over 100 Drills and Conditioning Exercises. It is a training manual that was written for gymnastics coaches, but is useful to physical education teachers, dance teachers, and any coach in need of running drills.