FEED THE CATS: DATA-DRIVEN SPEED TRAINING

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Follow on Twitter: @pntrack  Team website: pntrack.com

Track & Field Articles (Tony Holler)
Track Football Consortium
Reflexive Performance Reset

Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible.” –Frank Zappa

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Professionally produced, Championship Productions “Best Seller”
Produced in December 2018.
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3x more content than Championship Productions video (4.5 hours).
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Includes 33 pages of speaker notes.
Tony Holler’s Harrisburg High School track teams won three IHSA State Championships and eight IHSA trophies. In a magical 10-year span from 1995 until 2004, Holler’s teams won seven IHSA trophies. Four of Holler’s Harrisburg athletes are now successful head coaches in Illinois. Brian Weiss is the coach at Triad H.S., Chad Lakatos is the coach at Edwardsville H.S. (formerly the head coach at Herrin), Joey Speaks is the head coach at O’Fallon, and Patton Segraves is the coach at Belleville West H.S.

Chad Lakatos, who ran for Tony Holler 1988-1992, has now won four state championships and eight state trophies at two different schools. Chad Lakatos is considered by many to be the best track coach in Illinois. Edwardsville has averaged 42.40 season-best in the 4x1, winning medals in in six of the last nine seasons.

Tony Holler’s son, Alec Holler coached Travis Anderson to a state record in the 110 highs in 2016 (13.59). In 2017, Alec’s hurdlers finished 1st and 3rd in the state.

In 2004, Tony Holler left Harrisburg for a two-year stint at Franklin High School, just south of Nashville, Tennessee. In 2004, Franklin had a track team consisting of only 8 boys. Two years later, Holler’s track team finished the season with 72 participants and finished 12th in the TSSAA State Track Meet. Holler’s two years at Franklin produced five division-one track athletes.

In 2006 Tony Holler became the first head coach at Plainfield North High School where his team won a conference title with North’s first-ever senior class in 2008 (PNHS opened in 2005).

Tony Holler’s track teams are always fast. Holler’s Harrisburg (fewer than 600 students) teams dominated the sprint relays at the IHSA State Meet. Harrisburg’s 4x1 teams won gold medals in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2003. Since making a commitment to speed in 1999, Holler’s teams have recorded an average best time of 42.59 during a 21-year period at three different sized schools from two states. In 2018, Plainfield North set the 3A state record in the 4x1 running 41.29. VIDEO

Tony Holler’s youngest son, Quinn Holler, served as relay coach at Plainfield North from 2014 to 2018. During that five-year period, Plainfield North average season best was 41.79 in the 4x1 and 1:27.61 in the 4x2.

In 2018, Tony Holler coached sophomore (age-15) phenom, Marcellus Moore (10.31 in 100m, 20.88 in 200m). Moore repeated as state champ in the 100 and 200 in 2019.

Tony Holler has spoken at numerous clinics from coast to coast and has written nearly 200 articles. Here is the link: Track & Field Articles (Tony Holler)

PLAINFIELD NORTH TRACK & FIELD MISSION STATEMENT

Plainfield North will have a successful team because the fastest guys walking our hallways will be eager to run track and will remain happy, enthusiastic, and energetic. Our best athletes will speak highly of our program and will recruit fast guys to join them.
ATTRACT CATS TO YOUR PROGRAM

• I was a good “coach” before I became well educated in track & field. Coaching does not win races.
• My website, pntrack.com, receives over 1000 hits per week during the spring. Twitter, @pntrack, is my new promoter. I can’t imagine coaching track without a website and twitter … educate, promote, and motivate. Write the story of your team and define success. If you don’t do it, no one else will.
• Pictures are win-win.
• I give out 2 annual T-Shirts: Varsity, FS, and Freshman records on the back. One shirt for indoor records, the other for outdoor records.

• Great uniforms
• First-class schedule – no bad meets. Trips:
  o Harrisburg travel… Glenbard West, St. Joe-Ogden, Monticello, Springfield, Sterling, Galesburg, Chicago Heights Bloom, EIU, U of I, University of Indiana, and the RCA Dome (Indianapolis)
  o Franklin (TN) travel … Atlanta, Memphis, Knoxville, Collinsville, Paducah and SIU
  o Plainfield North travel … SIU, EIU, Bloomington, Champaign, Edwardsville, Belleville West

• Track teams reflect their coach. Are you excited and having fun or are you frustrated, tired, agitated, and generally overwhelmed?
• Happy athletes are your best recruiters and recruitment is the key to a successful track program.
• Most important class: freshmen. Teach older kids how to treat freshmen … this is essential to a great track program! … “Big Brother”
• Math for track coaches: (no football players)^2 + (no basketball players) = poor track team

SPRINT PHILOSOPHY FOR CATS

• Don’t apply distance principles to sprinters … forget about endurance, volume, mileage, pace, VO2 max, sit-and-kick, threshold runs, Joe Newton, pasta dinners, team retreats, cross training, 5Ks, triathlons, race strategy, EPO, drafting, getting “boxed-in”, blood doping, fartlek runs, intervals, Jack Daniels, junk miles, LSD, negative splits, tempo runs, and Prefontaine. Forget it all. Sprinters are different. Don’t treat your cats like dogs.
• Valeri Borzov (USSR, 1972 Munich Olympics … 100/200 Gold Medal) … Borzov smoked cigarettes. Repeating … world’s fastest man in 1972 was a smoker! Sprinters are not endurance athletes.
• Sprint training … five second reps … not endurance … no laps … no jogging to warm up
• Train the PHOSPHATE SYSTEM (Alactic) … train the lactate system later … ignore the aerobic system. All energy comes from adenosine triphosphate (ATP) in muscles. Oxygen-fueled ATP production is too slow for sprinters. Fast guys can ignore the Krebs Cycle.
• No stretching … warm up with ballistic, high-energy, dynamic exercises … muscles need to be strong rubber bands.
• My newest course of study, “Reflexive Performance Reset” aka RPR. Read “Speed Never Sleeps” and “You Only Know What You Know” at ITCCCA and “3 Reasons Why Activation is a Game Changer” at Freelap USA, and “Don’t Implode, Explode” on ITCCCA. Link to articles: Activation.
• Educate and re-educate sprinters … change the brain … train the nervous system. The biggest guy doesn’t win. The strongest guy doesn’t win. The most physically fit doesn’t win.
• Train neuromuscular system to fire quickly (you don’t get fast by running slow)
• Sprinting is all electrical … not muscular … definitely not cardio
• Train fast-twitch fibers to create bounce & stretch reflex
• Jumping improves sprinting … sprinting improves jumping
• Total focus … total concentration … QUALITY is key … not quantity … energy, excitement, & enthusiasm … your biggest challenge, how do you get sprinters to focus/concentrate?
• Training pays off in “6 weeks to 6 months to 6 years” … what we do today will not change us tomorrow. Ironically speed development is slow-growing (“speed grows like a tree”) … you can’t afford to build endurance foundations and develop speed later … sprint in the off-season, sprint in the pre-
season, and sprint during the season. Build a sprint foundation … sprint, jump, rest, sprint, jump, sprint, jump, rest, … “Sprint as fast as possible as often as possible while staying as fresh as possible”

- Sprinters are cats … cats don’t run Cross Country. Cross Country athletes don’t make good 4x1 teams … they’ve been trained to run slow.
- “The faster your top-end speed, the faster your sub-max speed.” – Latif Thomas
- Run 40s to measure speed but also for sprint training. It makes sense … running at top speed is a good thing. Measure 10-meter fly time with an automated system (Summit Timing System or Freelap or Swift). If you don’t have room … change the distance … find a way to get the job done.
- Make athletes want to come back … get them to like it … leave some gas in their tank … “It’s better to light a fire than to fill a pail.” Happy sprinters run faster than depressed sprinters.
- Football in fall, speed training in the winter, track in the spring, & football in the summer. Then repeat.
- AAU Basketball sucks, 7on7 sucks, specialization sucks, Trump sucks.

**SCIENTIFIC TRUTH OF SPRINT TRAINING**

Three energy systems:

- **Alactic** (phosphate) (ATP available for use at any time … anaerobic) … ATP is depleted after 5-10 seconds of max effort. *Note – you can run a short race while holding your breath.*
- **Lactate** (glycolysis, the splitting of glucose molecules without oxygen is anaerobic). The acidosis, due to lactic acid becoming lactate, will eventually become unbearable. Well-trained athletes can tolerate high levels of lactate (and the resulting acidosis) for up to 90 seconds. Note – races of less than 100 seconds in duration *can be 100% anaerobic.* Marathon winners have the same lactate levels as people at rest. Marathon running may approach a lactic acid threshold but never crosses the threshold.
- **Aerobic** (Kreb’s Cycle) (the further breakdown of pyruvic acid inside mitochondria is only possible with high oxygen levels, thus aerobic). Note, if your race is more than 100 seconds long, the Krebs Cycle will provide you with lots of ATP as long as you have built up gazillions of mitochondria in your red muscle fibers, gazillions of oxygen-carrying red blood cells, and you have built miles of capillary beds to deliver oxygen to the those muscle fibers. And you must run at a pace where mitochondria can keep up with energy demands. *This is why distance training relies on volume.*

*This is what you need to know about energy systems: aerobic conditioning has no place in sprint training. Slow running ruins mechanics (vertical force) and confuses the nervous system. In addition, cats hate it.*

The energy systems of good sprinters (don’t listen to distance coaches saying otherwise, they are full of shit)

- 100 Meters: 100% Phosphate (alactic)
- 200 Meters: 50% Phosphate, 50% Lactate
- 400 Meters: 30% Phosphate, 70% Lactate

**“SAID” PRINCIPLE … Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demands**

- Don’t train anaerobic athletes aerobically
- You don’t get fast by running slow
- Sprinters should build a sprint base … not an endurance base
- Aerobic work confuses the physiology of sprinters and inhibits the development of the anaerobic systems and lactate tolerance. *“You don’t plant beans and grow corn.” – unknown*
Muscle Physiology

- Two types of muscle fibers, red and white.
  - Red fibers have lots of blood flow (thus red in color) and lots of mitochondria.
  - White fibers are very little blood flow (thus white in color) and very few mitochondria.
- Red fibers are mainly aerobic. White fibers are mainly anaerobic.
- Red fibers function in endurance and slow steady work. White fibers: think jumping and sprinting (cats)
- Distance runners have a high percentage of red fibers. Sprinters have a high percentage of white fibers.
- Up to 40% of muscle fibers (according to Simoneau & Brochard) are transitional and can be influenced towards red or white based on environmental factors, a.k.a. training. “You are what you do.”

This is what you need to know about muscle physiology: Train muscles in explosive ways to become explosive. Slow, high volume lifting has no place in sprint training. Pushing a car up a hill makes you strong but doesn't make you fast. Getting “big” also makes you “slow”.

Sprinting is the most under-rated strength exercise I know.

Sprinting is the best core exercise I know.

Sprinting is the best speed drill ever invented.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Point</strong></th>
<th><strong>Counterpoint</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage (give courage)</td>
<td>Don’t discourage</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Shock and Adapt” in the off-season (x-factor workouts)</td>
<td>What we grow accustomed to no longer changes us … be creative</td>
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<td>Repeat skill &amp; fundamental work</td>
<td>You don’t form habits by talking about them</td>
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<td>Keep your sprinters “bouncy” and mentally positive</td>
<td>No one runs well “broken down” and depressed</td>
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<td>Keep track of PRs for all kids (Personal Records) including speed-training data. Why celebrate personal records at meets only?</td>
<td>Practice is short … <em>don’t be lazy in record keeping</em> … 90% of my coaching is done on the pntrack.com and @pntrack</td>
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<td>Promote successful endings to workouts</td>
<td>Don’t allow failure … leave some gas in their tank</td>
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<td>Be patient … improvements come slow: 6 weeks, 6 months, 6 years</td>
<td>Practice is over-rated (important but over-rated)</td>
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<td>Keep sprinters happy and healthy</td>
<td>Don’t cause misery and injury</td>
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<td>Develop young track athletes … schedule fresh-soph meets … great programs make fresh-soph a priority</td>
<td>Don’t be obsessed with varsity success</td>
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<td>Record results … rank, publish, post, promote</td>
<td>Otherwise, your kids are just running in circles</td>
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<td>Sprinters are cats</td>
<td>Don’t treat them like dogs</td>
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<td>Sprint &amp; jump to get fast</td>
<td>Can’t get fast by running slow</td>
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<td>Adjust to weather conditions and team climate … Coaching is mostly art, not science.</td>
<td>Don’t have a rigid practice plan</td>
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<td>Light a fire (motivate)</td>
<td>Don’t fill a pail (workouts are over-rated)</td>
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<td>Focus on the phosphate system, then add lactate training (remember <em>hormesis</em> … sprint training is good in small doses, poison in large doses)</td>
<td>Train aerobically if you want to run slow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fast guys win</td>
<td>Slow guys lose</td>
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DATA DRIVEN SPEED TRAINING
RECORD, RANK, & PUBLISH
MEASURE SPEED AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE
THE BEST SPEED DRILL = MAX-SPEED SPRINTING IN SPIKES
QUALITY – QUALITY - QUALITY

- 40-yard dash … standing or down start … hand-held
- 30-meter starts from blocks (FAT)
- 10-meter fly (FAT)
- Workouts
- Anything else you want to time, keep it fast, measurable, and the same for all runners

**PRATICE PHILOSOPHY FOR SPRINTERS**
- Sprints should be the central focus of track & field … 78% of high school track events are directly related to sprinting … (aren’t the best field event athletes fast, quick, bouncy, and explosive?). Distance events make up only 22% of our events (only if you consider the 800 a distance event). Great distance runners dominate two events, great sprinters dominate four events. And, don’t forget, sprinters and jumpers have an advantage at a two-day state meet due to lower volume.
- Train with focus and quality … do not over-train
- SPRINTERs ARE CATS … train them like cats … cats do not jog
- Most track teams regress due to ill-advised workouts, attrition, negativity, and injury
- Formal practice from 2:30 PM – 3:15 PM on school days
- If school is not in session:
  - No official practice on non-school days (weekends, spring break, etc.)
  - On days when school is not in session, practice is unofficial and non-mandatory … we may have throwers, vaulters, and hurdlers practicing but we don’t take role … they are present because they want to be there.
  - Sprinters rest (remember … sprinters are cats)
- Day after weekday meet = sprint holiday … no practice for sprinters
- Flexibility is a good thing but do NOT stretch before practice … RPR is my new thing.
  - No pre-practice stretching … a stretched rubber band does not shoot far!
  - Stretching does NOT prevent injury
  - Stretching does NOT relieve muscle soreness … NEVER STRETCH HAMSTRING INJURIES
- Two lactate workouts per week (and meets are considered lactate workouts). No aerobic workouts.
  (Off-season, we do no lactate workouts, speed only.)

**SAMPLE WORKOUT PLAN**

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<td>Nov-Jan</td>
<td>Speed Drills</td>
<td>X-Factor Weights</td>
<td>Speed Drills</td>
<td>X-Factor Weights</td>
<td>Sprint Holiday</td>
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<td>Feb-Mar</td>
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<td>Sprint Holiday</td>
<td>Speed Drills</td>
<td>Sprint Holiday</td>
<td>Meet</td>
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<td>23 Sec Drill</td>
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<td>10M Flys</td>
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<td>Meet</td>
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<td>40m Flys</td>
<td>Handoffs</td>
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<td>Speed Drills</td>
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<td>Lactate Workout</td>
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**(Off-season, we do no lactate workouts, speed only.)**
**WINTER PROGRAM (PRE-SEASON)**

- November 25 through February 10
- January 21 through February 10 is considered “Track Tryouts” but the program remains unchanged.
- Average attendance 80-120
- Schedule (note: 100% alactic … no endurance, no lactate workouts!)
  - Monday - speed and strength
  - Tuesday - X-factor and strength
  - Wednesday - speed and strength
  - Thursday - X-factor and strength
  - Friday - enjoy 3-day weekend
- I do the Mon-Wed sessions. The head football coach helps me with Tues-Thurs X-factor sessions
- Our football staff mans the weight room every day *(my deal with the devil; I let them handle it)*
- We get out of school at 2:10 ... workouts start at 2:30 ... finished by 4:20
- Each day we run two speed sessions and two strength sessions, 55 minutes each.
- Monday and Wednesday speed sessions consist of 20 minutes of drill work and 35 minutes of timed sprints. I can time and record over 150 40s in 30 minutes.
- I time up to 10,000 40s in a given year.
- Times are published by 8:00 pm on pntrack.com and usually linked on Twitter ... RECORD, RANK, PUBLISH
- Highlights of workouts are posted on Twitter
- See pntrack.com for published times
- **X-factor workouts** have no timed sprints. We break up into stations and do things that are unique.
- No sport-specific activities. No footballs, hurdles, high jumping, pole vaulting, etc.

**SUMMER**

- Speed Camp ... two weeks ... Mon-Wed-Fri ... 75-minute sessions ... coed, all ages ... 50-60 kids.
- Freshmen Football - I am (was) the head freshmen football coach. Every summer football session is broken in thirds, 1/3 speed, 1/3 strength, 1/3 football.

**WORKOUTS**

- We do speed drills almost every day. Boring as hell but critical to the cause. Remember, everyone does speed drills, *but my team does them better* … more focused, more intense, and better quality.
- **24-Second Drill** ... indoor season, once per week in February & March ... two 24 second sprints ... measure the distance traveled (23-Second Drill if outdoors) ... runners run solo ... goal is 200 meters ... 8-minute break ... 2nd run tries to get within 5 meters of first ... RECORD, RANK, PUBLISH
- Sets: 200-100 with 40 seconds rest ... 8-minute break ... 150-150 with 40 seconds rest ... only done in May. The “sets” can be of any distance, but I like the 300. The 200-200 sets are perfect if you hope to build a 4x4 champ. Wear spikes. Pace is goal-400 pace. 48-second 400 guy runs 200 in 24, 100 in 12, 150 in 18. We run into start and drop a hand at the start line for timing purposes (or use Freelap).
- 5x100-Fly: Freelap-timed (or watch) running in pairs with the wind. Walk back for recovery. I average the five times and rank & publish online.
- **4x4 Predictor**: 3x200-Fly, times added together, multiply by .667, then add 2.0 seconds. Rank & publish. Rest is about 3 minutes … diagonal walk across grass.
On bitter cold days outside ... NO drills ... 20 x 100 ... end zone to end zone ... run one every minute ... 20 x 100 in exactly 20 minutes. Each one should be at a cruise pace ... like the first lap of a good 800 ... shoot for 13-15 seconds per 100 yards ... gives 45-47 seconds rest. Entire team runs at same time ... spread across goal line. 20-minute practice and go home! (I NO LONGER DO THIS, TOO SUB-MAX)

Chasers ... fun sprint drill ... three guys line up ... middle guy takes off and the guy on left and right try to chase him down ... 40 yards. I don’t call out the winner, I call out the loser. The loser takes the middle on the next chaser. If the middle guy loses, he is in the middle with a one-step head start. If he still loses, he’s a total loser and does not belong in that group. Wear spikes. Kids will sprint all-out and finish their race with a smile.

Starts ... 3x30 out of the blocks ... FAT timed (set Freelap cone at 30.8m) ... RECORD, RANK, PUBLISH

Sprint Holiday ... no practice ... might be our most important day. If we have a weekday meet ... sprinters don’t practice the next day. They go home and take naps. Sprinters are cats. (BTW, it’s so cool to go home after school on Fridays!)

Toughest workouts = meets. We run hard in meets. We run one meet per week indoors, two meets per week in April, and one meet per week in May.


FOUR STAGES OF LEARNING
1. Unconscious incompetence
2. Conscious incompetence
3. Conscious competence
4. Unconscious competence

JOHN WOODEN’S EIGHT LAWS OF LEARNING
1. Explanation
2. Demonstration
3. Imitation
4. Repetition
5. Repetition
6. Repetition
7. Repetition
8. Repetition
I am not a scientist testing sprint-training methodology.  
*I collect data because kids run faster when they are timed.*
Since the goal of speed training is to run fast, I teach to the test and test often.

**SPEED ROUTINE**  
**THE ESSENTIAL SPEED-BUILDING DAILY DRILLS**

- Skips
- High Knees
- Butt Kicks
- Cycles (run in place, cycle forward)
- 5-Box Jumps (2 foot, left, right)
- Bounding … *twice*
- Lunges (one of four: rocket, long, pop-ups, retro)
- Butt Kick & Reach (retro sprints) … *twice*
- Prime Times (straight-legged bounding sprints) … *twice*
- Starts (one of three: 3-point, falling, 4-point hop & go)

**X-FACTOR**

- Squat bounces (bounce in squat position for 20 seconds)
- Russian lunges (bounce in lunge position x3, then explode into air landing in new lunge position)
- “Triple Broad Jump” from standing position, two-footed or single leg, measured of course (record-rank-publish)
- Cat jumps (dropping off high places and landing firmly … “stick the landing” … in squat position … progress to 180s and 360s *(whatever force you can absorb, you can generate)*
- Wall swings (fast with max ROM, grabbing some track on the back swing)
- Hurdles over and under (first step over, second step under), over-over, and others
- Short hurdles at high speed & high knees (“wickets” … hurdles 1.9 meters (6’3”) apart … hands above head or with up to 10-pound bar … I use “firing strips” now for my hurdles (cheap, easy, safe) … Cues “knees high and speed high” … “big in the front, short in the back” … it’s all about front-side mechanics!
- Miscellaneous … anything done at high intensity for 5 or 6 seconds followed by a full recovery would fit into our X-factor workouts. Football agility work fits here. I tell our football coach … anything that is not “grinding” is fine. Many football coaches are enamored with “agility” drills. This is fine as long as quality is maintained. No grinding! BTW, our fastest guys are also the most agile … straight-line speed is the best indicator for all explosive movement.
- All of this is well-explained on my [DVD](#).

**SPRINT CUES**

- “Run tall” … great runners run with perfect posture (shoulders back, abs tight, hips forward) … this is my #1 verbal cue … knee lift and glute recruitment requires tall posture. *5’10” sprinters run at 6’0”*
- “Foot in front” … the lead foot must get high and *in front of the hips to create vertical force.*
- “Fast and loose” … great sprinters make it look easy … practice making sprinting look effortless.
- “Cross the hips” … *open palms cross the hips.* (I say this constantly!)
- “Heel up, knee up, toe up” … dorsi-flexed foot is imperative (like a loaded spring) – short lever, calf activation, minimizes ground contact

Link to x-factor video on YouTube.

You really need to buy the video!
The Recipe for Vertical Force
Knee up - foot under knee,
dorsi-flexed toe,
and hammer back crossing hips.
# 2019 Practice Plan

S = Sprint Workout, X = X-Factor, L = Lactate Workout, M = Meet  
Yellow = Alactic, Red = Lactate, Green = Off Day

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<td>18 - Outdoor; May 13</td>
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Alactic (Sprint & X-Factor) 33%, Lactate 24%, Off-Days 42%
• Non-verbal exchange
• 21 step is generic distance ... box at 19/23
• Outgoing runner starts with back foot on acceleration mark ... feet facing forward, weight on front foot
• Outgoing runner leaves in drive phase ... SEE THE TRACK ... LONG AND STRONG ... DON’T SPIN YOUR WHEELS ... comes out of drive when he sees triangle
• After getting tall, outgoing runner pumps once or twice, throws the elbow back
• We always speak of “Lane Ownership” 1 and 3 inside ... 2 and 4 outside ... curve runners always inside
• Incoming runner must maintain big stroke (arm motion) ... don’t get short in the arms
• Incoming runner is encouraged to “PRESS” ... don’t lean back when entering zone, “press” forward
• Expect handoff in first third of zone... 7 to 8 meters into zone ... push the stick into hand.
• Baton should be upright on exchange (“candle stick”), receiver’s hand is flat (“stop sign”)
• “BANG STEP” – When incoming runner hits mark (bang), outgoing runner gets first step down (bang). This is the most important discovery of my coaching career! VIDEO
• When we practice handoffs, I simply say, “Let’s get one perfect handoff and go home.”
• Philosophy of sprinter placement:
  o #2 and #3 ... best sprinters ... veterans ... trustworthy ... smooth ... smart
  o #2 and #4 ... big guys
  o #1 and #3 ... little guys
  o #1 ... best starter between your two most untrustworthy guys
  o #4 ... don’t leave early, (we would love to win the race in the first three legs)

We never experiment with the 4x1 unless we are seriously under-performing. We would like to settle on our four guys and the order as soon as possible and run them in that order in EVERY MEET. We try to do the same thing with our FS 4x1 team (44.51 average best in 12-year history at PN). By spending lots of time working with FS 4x1, my varsity 4x1 seems to be in mid-season form when we start outdoor every year.
• If you are the fastest team ... win the race after three legs.
• If you are not a fast team ... stay with the leaders as long as you can.
• If you have Marcellus Moore, run him anchor! (9.4 split at state meet)
4x2

not a 4x1 exchange, not a 4x4 exchange

- Outgoing does NOT start on dot … starts at half-way point of acceleration zone … the zone is 10m (33 feet) … he starts 16.5 feet from dot.
- The dot will be the go mark … no tennis balls, no chalk, no tape.
- Outgoing runner is long and “under control” … “fast and smooth”
- We never practice 4x2 handoffs in practice until championship week (Sectional/State).
- We want to keep positions the same as 4x1 as much as possible.
- We never switch hands … R-L-R-L
- Our 4x2 team is much more flexible than the 4x1 … due to rotating guys into and out of the 400 meter dash.
- Indoors we do a visual exchange in the 4x2 … just like the 4x4.

Note: We do open 4x4-like exchanges in the 4x2 indoors, never blind.
4x4

- Outgoing runner ... high hand.
- Face the inside of the track.
- GET OUT ... must take baton 8-10 meters into the zone. Don’t be caught standing still.
- If you are the fastest teams ... go with strong leadoff and strong anchor.
- If you are the chasers ... make sure your two best guys are running legs 1 and 2. Everyone runs best in the lead ... especially slow guys or young guys.

Like this!
HURDLES

- Find your hurdlers
- Mandate 3-step before competition
- Wear spikes for hurdle work.
- Quality always … Quantity never.
- Discount hurdle height for all hurdlers (especially rookies)
- Discount hurdle distance for all hurdlers (especially rookies)
- 90% of all work should be done over hurdle #1 & hurdle #2
- Never hurdle when tired … ever.
- 8-step to first hurdle … therefore left lead-leg hurdlers must have right foot forward in blocks and vice versa. Always demand block starts … always. If you can’t get there in eight steps, the problem is the start.
- Get stretch reflex from trail leg.
- Trail leg: knee higher than foot.
- Take-off is most important aspect of hurdling … must attack hurdle … lead with knee … hips must be past take-off foot … aggressive hip position.
- Holy Grail of Hurdling: “Cut Step” (plant step must be reduced to get foot quickly under body). The opposite of a good “cut step” is a reach. No cut step = no aggressive hip position.
- Wall drills and rhythm drills almost every day. Flexibility and technique work with zero pounding is crucial to development.
- Video hurdlers even if you are not an expert. Hurdlers will see what doesn’t look right. You must show video evidence of cut-step (reduced take-off step) (aggressive hip position).
- Respect every rep and use those reps at full speed over discounted hurdles with spikes on.
- Basketball players make good hurdlers. AAU sucks.
- Your goal is to develop one or two 3-stepping freshman hurdlers every year.
- Hurdles are not just for slow sprinters and tall guys.
  o Fast sprinters can become hurdle champions
  o I’ve seen 5’7” hurdlers win state championships in the 110 HH

THE DON’TS OF HURDLE COACHING

- Don’t become a drill whore. Unnecessary drill volume may help coordination but does not teach hurdling. You are what you do.
- Never make your hurdlers run more than 3 hurdles at a time. Every rep is habit forming. Tired hurdlers learn bad habits. Fast hurdlers with good habits will complete races just fine.
- Do not focus on how low the athlete skims a hurdle. Hurdlers who try to skim hurdles will get the nickname of “Crash”. Hurdlers should hurdle like the hurdles are not even there.
- Do not practice hurdles more than twice per week. Pre-season and indoor work should focus on the 110 Highs. As outdoor approaches, transition to one day 110 Highs, one day 300 Intermediates. If you have two meets in one week, one day of hurdle practice is fine.
- Don’t over-do. Don’t get your hurdlers “in shape”. Fast and confident is the goal.
- Don’t fill hurdler’s heads with minutia. Keep instruction simple. Like all skill-building, focus on one thing at a time. Build the confidence of your hurdler. “Head-cases” are not good hurdlers.
- Best low-impact hurdle drill video compliments of Alec Holler: VIDEO
BLOCK STARTS & ACCELERATION CUES

- See the track
- Big and strong
- Split and rip
- Push, push, push
- Don’t spin your wheels
- Fewest steps wins
- Project the hips
- Push back, drive knee forward
- Wait for speed (be patient)

Accelerate often. We do 2-point starts (like relays), three point starts, and four point starts every day in our speed drills. We time the 40-yard dash all winter. The cues listed above are taught every day. Once these cues become habits, the blocks are simplified.

SIMPLISTIC BLOCK INSTRUCTIONS

- 30-meter start times and natural selection should determine which foot is front and back in blocks.
- In the 110 highs, your lead hurdle leg must be back in the blocks (8 steps to first hurdle)
- Pedals at 2 feet and 3 feet … and adjust slightly
- In set position, hips are above the shoulders
- Eyes down
- Arms straight and relaxed, shoulders above hands

In addition to doing acceleration every day, block starts should be a part of weekly practice for all sprinters. I strongly believe that these block starts should be done at full speed in spikes. We time three 30-meter block starts once per week during the season. Recently we’ve gotten away from the Freelap touchpad (takes too long). Now we do 15-yard starts into a 10-yard fly or 25-yard starts into a 10-yard fly. We simply put the Freelap cones at boy’s hurdle marks (15y to first hurdle, 10y between hurdles). Very efficient!
The following is my contribution to a book called *Sprinter’s Compendium* by Ryan Banta.

**Speed Compendium**

1. Over your career what is the best concept, idea, training, you have adopted to use in training sprinters? Over your career what is the worst concept, idea, training, etc. you no longer use to training sprinters?

**Best Concept = Max Speed**


Nothing in the weight room translates to speed. The strongest athletes are not the fastest athletes.

I’ve had kids who could run 12 x 200, each in 27 seconds or better, who were not fast. Ability to run multiple intervals at sub-max speed does not translate to sprinting.

Kids who can run long distances are almost always poor sprinters.

Eighteen years ago I wanted to create a track program that would attract talented kids. Not only did I want to attract those kids, I wanted them to love their experience. I ran track in middle school, high school, and college but never looked forward to practice or meets. I wanted to create something different.

I attended a Medalist Track & Field Clinic in 1998. Paul Souza of Wheaton College (MA) was a dynamic speaker. Souza told the small audience that his 400 runners never ran more than 200 meters in practice. Four of them ran sub-48. Epiphany!

Speed development became the centerpiece of my program for the next 18 years. Along with high intensity speed drills, my kids were timed three times in the 40-yard dash at every winter workout. From the beginning, I would record, rank, and publish those times. In the early days, I would do my work on a spreadsheet and post the rankings on a bulletin board in the main hallway of our high school.

As technology changed, so did I. Starting in 2005, my rankings were posted on my track website. Soon those rankings migrated to Google Docs and now those links are posted on Twitter.

Record, rank, and publish evolved but so did other things.

In 2008, I heard Chris Korfist speak at a Chicago track clinic. Chris and I, at least training-wise, were like twins separated at birth. His max speed measurement was done with an optical system sold by Summit Timing. I had never heard of anyone timing the “10-Meter Fly”, but it made perfect sense. I bought the system a month later for $2000 and started timing 10-meter flies.

For the past nine years, I have been measuring 40-yard times and 10-meter times (simultaneously) three times per athlete, two or three times a week in the off-season. My 40’s are still hand-timed so I can compare my sprinters from the past 18 years. The 10-meter times are automated, of course, and I use Freelap now. I have the Freelap Pro Coach system with 21 FxChips.

The 40-yard dash forces athletes to accelerate (drive) and then get tall and sprint (max speed). The timing of the final 10 meters of that 40-yard dash forces athletes to reach max speed and finish by running *through* the finish line.

Improving max speed improves a sprinter. How can this be disputed?

Max speed *always* correlates to sprinting. Despite this undeniable truth, coaches still hammer their sprinters in the weight room, demand arbitrary numbers of sub-max intervals, and sometimes prescribe long slow aerobic work.
**Worst Concept = Sub-Max Speed**

The opposite of the *best* concept is the *worst* concept. Poetic huh?

I am 18 years removed from 30-minute runs, timed miles, “Indian Runs”, and all other types of aerobic training for sprinters.

My sprinters never run “ladders” or “tempo runs”.

My sprinters do approximately 25 “lactate workouts” during our competitive season. *February, March, April, and May are the only months where we do lactate workouts.* Meets are lactate workouts. With 18 scheduled meets, we are left with approximately seven lactate workouts done in practice.

The total sprint distance in a lactate workout is between 400 and 800 meters, usually the former. The longest we ever sprint in practice is 200 meters at a given time.

*Lactate workouts are the only time we run sub-max.* And when I say sub-max, we sure do appear to be sprinting. The slowest we ever run is goal-400 pace. If we have a 50-second 400-runner, that guy is never running 25-second 200s in practice. Never.

I probably should add, we never run against the wind, we never push or pull a sled, and we damn sure never run with a parachute on our back.

Speed is neurological. Getting strong, fit, or in-shape has little to do with speed. In matter of fact, getting strong, fit, or in-shape can be counterproductive to getting faster.

“In speed development, the nervous system only understands quality.” – Boo Schexnayder

2. **What periodization model do you feel best fits your method of planning an athlete or group’s training and why?**
   Do you use different models at certain points in the season? To subscribe to a long to short, short to long or concurrent method?

I am a high school coach and believe in the multisport concept. What does that mean in today’s world? Well, that means football and track should merge off-season training programs. Forget about the specialists of the world. Track coaches seldom, if ever, get a kid who plays soccer, lacrosse, or basketball. Baseball players never run track. The only kids I get are football players and kids that can’t shoot and can’t hit.

My periodization is pretty simple:

a) Summer – Football Workouts
b) Fall – Football
c) Winter – Max Speed
d) Spring – Track Season

Here is another way to look at my periodization:

a) Summer – Max Speed
b) Fall – Max Speed
c) Winter – Max Speed
d) Spring – Track Meets, Lactate Workouts, and lots of Rest & Recovery
I’m obviously a short to long guy. Can’t get much shorter than 10-meter flys and 40-yard dashes.

We get fast all year and then we train to hold our speed for up to 400 meters. The opposite approach sounds ridiculous to me. The idea that all philosophies are equally correct is hogwash.

We build a sprint base in off-season.

I’ve used these quotes when doing presentations; I believe I am the originator of all four.

a) 6-6-6 … Training pays off in six weeks, six months, or six years. What we do today does not change us tomorrow.

b) Run fast to get fast, you don’t plant beans to grow corn.

c) Speed grows like a tree and speed only grows when you sprint.

d) Sprint as fast as possible as often as possible staying as fresh as possible.

e) When you record, rank, and publish, sprinters never forget their spikes.

3. Please give us a sample micro-cycle (7-14 days) of training from the beginning of the season, the middle of the season, and during your championship meets.

**Sprint Specific Micro-Cycles**

**February (Pre-Season, Indoor Season)**
Monday – speed drills and timed sprints of less than 5 seconds (flys, block starts, etc)
Tuesday – speed drills and x-factor (non-sprinting strength, explosion, and neurological training)
Wednesday – speed drills and timed sprints of less than 5 seconds
Thursday – speed drills and lactate workout (something like full speed 200, 8 min recovery, full speed 200)
Friday – no practice
Saturday – no practice
Sunday – no practice
Monday – speed drills and lactate workout
Tuesday – speed drills and x-factor
Wednesday – speed drills and timed sprints
Thursday – speed drills and fundamental work (hand-offs, block starts)
Friday – no practice
Saturday – indoor meet
Sunday – no practice

**April (Competition Season)**
Monday – full-team triangular meet (counts as lactate workout)
Tuesday – sprinter holiday, no practice
Wednesday – speed drills, x-factor
Thursday – speed drills, timed sprints
Friday – speed drills and fundamental work (hand-offs, block starts)
Saturday – Invitational
Sunday – no practice
Monday – full-team triangular meet
Tuesday – sprinter holiday, no practice
Wednesday – speed drills, x-factor
Thursday – speed drills, fundamental work
Friday – Invitational
Saturday – no practice
Sunday – no practice
May (Championship Season)
Monday – speed drills, lactate workout
Tuesday – speed drills, x-factor
Wednesday – speed drills, fundamental work
Thursday – Conference Meet
Friday – no practice
Saturday – no practice
Sunday – no practice
Monday – lactate workout
Tuesday – speed drills, x-factor
Wednesday – speed drills, fundamental work
Thursday – Sectional Meet
Friday – no practice
Saturday – no practice
Sunday – no practice

Notes:
   a) We never do lactate work more than once or twice a week
   b) In every cycle there is a minimum of four days off per 14-day cycle. In the Championship Season, we take six days off per 14-day cycle.
   c) Health always trumps a workout.
   d) The holy trinity of sprinting: rest, recovery, and growth

4. What tapering strategies do you use to bring your speed athletes to a peak cycle?

We take three days off every week during our Championship Season. I’m not talking “easy days” here, I’m talking “go home after school and take a nap”.

Our volume is very low in December and January; everything is alactic (maximum intensity for 5-10 seconds). Volume is increased in February, again in March, and peaking in April. May resembles February.

5. How has your strength training evolved over your coaching career? What have you adopted when it comes to your strength training over the years and what have you removed? Why did you make these changes?

When I first started in the weight room, I used an adaptation of Bigger, Faster, Stronger. I liked the record, rank, publish part of BFS. To this day, BFS is probably better than most high school weight programs.

Indifferent and Confused sums up my present opinion of the weight room strength training.

I believe lifting weights to improve speed is analogous to America’s foreign policy, perpetual war to promote peace, love, and understanding. How did the weight room ever become a centerpiece for sprint training?

Sprinting is the best strength builder in the world. My football-playing sprinters spend lots of time in the weight room. My non-football-playing sprinters seldom lift. All my sprinters look like wide receivers and running backs. Sprinting, in and by itself, improves strength.
Weight lifting increases the size and strength of slow-twitch red muscle fibers. Sprinting and jumping are the result of fast-twitch white muscle fibers. The strongest guy in the weight room is seldom, if ever, the fastest guy in the 10-meter fly. Weight rooms seem to be populated by slow guys who want to get big.

Not only is weight lifting generally a poor predictor of speed, there is no specific lift in the weight room that is specific to sprint excellence. Everyone seems to agree that power cleans improve speed. Once again, I disagree. Power clean all stars are seldom sprinters. Sprinters are good at sprinting and jumping.

This guy is good at power cleans. No way does this guy make my 4x1 team.

This guy is good at speed bounds. When I see this, I see speed.
Strength is good. How can anyone argue? However, until someone shows me something in the weight room that has a direct correlation to speed, I will see the weight room as a mixed bag of mostly bad ideas perpetuated by speed-challenged body builders.

Triphasic Training promoted by Cal Dietz is a data-driven strength program that improves sprinting and jumping. However, most weight rooms around the country resemble the Arnold Schwarzenegger Model rather the Cal Dietz Model.

Body building in the absence of speed training will always result in slower speed times.

These are the only three things guaranteed to improve sprinting:
   a) sprint mechanics
   b) sprinting (and if you ain’t wearing spikes, you ain’t sprinting)
   c) jumping

6. How do you handle recovery in your daily, weekly, and annual planning? How do you manage recovery in between intervals?

I run a data-driven sprint program. How much rest does a sprinter need? Simple. The sprinter needs enough rest to run max-speed. We never sprint injured, beaten-down, or too-tired-to-run-fast.

We never sprint the day after a lactate workout or a competition.

If I have a sprinter who runs a fast 1.00 in the 10-meter fly on an average day, I don’t allow sprinting at 1.08. Sub-max sprinting reinforces sub-max sprint mechanics. Taking the day off is always better than running a slow, sloppy, half-assed sprint workout.

Every year, my sprinters take a spring break vacation. Our spring break separates our indoor and outdoor season. I go to Fort Lauderdale for five days (sprint coaches need rest, just like their sprinters). One thing I can guarantee, the first meet after spring break, we will be faster than lightning in the 100, 200, 400, and the sprint relays. Rebooting the nervous system and allowing the body to rest, recover, and grow provides magical results.

By the way, the 4x400 is a sprint relay. Anyone who tells you otherwise is probably a distance coach and doesn’t understand sprinting.

7. How do you handle the volume in your personal workouts (Day to Day, Week to Week, and types of workouts)? How do you ensure that proper rest is given in a particular workout to obtain the level of rest you are attempting to achieve? Is it based on time alone or do you use heart rate monitors or other devices to help provide data to produce the maximum effect?

Speed data provides the feedback I need. I also communicate with my sprinters. Every sprinter in my program understands my philosophy. We improve by running fast but if we can’t run fast, taking the day off is the next best option.

Who needs heart rate monitors when you have access to direct measurements like the 10-meter fly?

We never talk about how many minutes of rest kids need between timed sprints. They know.
8. What do you think is unique about your program you do to build culture?

Let’s start with happy and healthy. When my kids look forward to practice, practice is good. When my kids look forward to meets, they compete well. This is a total departure from my experience as a track athlete from 1972 through 1980. I once said, “The only thing good about track practice is when it’s over.” I had panic attacks thinking about upcoming meets. I grew up in a militaristic “let’s get tough” track culture. At Plainfield North, our culture is all about speed and winning races.

My sprinters own their team. I work together with my sprinters to make our sprint program the best it can be. I trust my athletes and they trust me.

In addition to the happy and healthy mantra, my track team wears cool uniforms and we have the best schedule in Illinois. We travel, have two over-night trips, and generally run in the best meets possible.

Plainfield North is promoted more through Twitter (@pntrack) and photography than any team I know. Our pntrack.com website is extensive.

9. How do you evaluate an athlete when they first enter your program? How do you evaluate during long prep cycles? What type of testing do you do in the preseason, mid-season, or championship phase? I.E. Workout Load/Event Group

I time 10,000 sprints every year. Max speed is the key to track speed. No other predictor comes close. I teach to the test by running fast. Speed grows like a tree and I want my kids to grow every day.

We run fast to get fast, but I’m also able to evaluate my sprinters each and every workout. This year, my fastest four 10-meter fly guys in winter workouts (over 130 on the roster) ended up running on my 4x1 team. Each guy averaged 1.02 in the 10-meter fly. They ran 41.72 in the 4x1, ranked #4 IL.

I had a coach ask me, “Can you tell who will run on your 4x1 based on 10-meter fly times?” The answer is so obvious; I would consider the question rhetorical. Never will a 1.08 sprinter outperform a 0.98 sprinter if both are healthy. Usain Bolt ran the fastest 10-meter segment in human history, 0.81. Enough said.

10. What strategies do you employ when planning an athlete’s training in multiple (sometimes very different) events and still get the necessary speed training? What environmental, cultural, and schedule issues affect your planning? How do you handle planning for and/or around those events?

We hurdle train in spikes twice a week, never going over more than two hurdles in the highs or two hurdles in the intermediates. This includes meets. If we have two meets, we have no hurdle practice that week. If we have only one meet, we have one hurdles workout. We do non-impact hurdles drills daily.

Like our hurdlers, our jumpers jump twice per week, including meets. If we have only one meet, long jumpers will practice once, triple jumpers once, and high jumpers once.

Throwers and vaulters practice their specialty every day.

Our distance group practices separately. Distance training is very different than sprint training.

Weather influences my practice plan in a big way. I want good weather for our most important workouts (lactate workouts). Technical work like handoffs, block starts, and hurdles are practiced in good weather.

If an athlete has a conflict and can’t attend practice, they are expected to communicate that absence to their coach. Our official season in Illinois is 20 weeks in length (January 18 to May 28). Coaches need to be both demanding and flexible. If the correct culture exists, attendance never becomes a problem.
The Origin and Philosophical Basis of “Feed the Cats”

By Tony Holler, published December 26, 2017

I coined “Feed the Cats” 20 years ago. It began with the realization that jumpers and sprinters were fast-twitch athletes, like cats. When Chicago Leo beat one of my best-ever Harrisburg teams in 1998, they beat us with cats. My 400 and 800 runners were terrific athletes, but they weren’t cats. My entire coaching philosophy changed because my should-have-been state championship team left the 1998 state meet with our tails between our legs and tears in our eyes.

“Failure is the opportunity to begin again, only this time more wisely.” – Henry Ford

If speed was essential in 14 of the 18 events of track & field, speed would be my focus. If cats win championships, my program would attract cats. Once I had attracted cats, I would “feed the cats”.
Another factor in my conversion involved my oldest son, Alec. Alec, age 12 at the time, wanted to play baseball. I thought to myself, if Alec plays baseball instead of running track, what kind of program am I running? Pretty sad when one of the most powerful small-school track programs in the state can’t attract the coach’s own kid.

My plan was simple. I would create a training system attractive to our school’s best athletes and by doing so, we would dominate the sprints and jumps. I theorized that a program of low-dose sprinting and prioritized rest would attract fast-twitch athletes. I vowed to train my athletes like cats. Cats don’t jog. Cats sprint and sleep. I would turn tradition upside down. Every fast kid in the school would join the track team in the spring.

My strategy was to load my team with great athletes and then under-train them. Everything went through the filter of making it fun for kids. If not fun, practice would, at the very least, be short in duration and high-spirited. I wanted to create a family-like culture where kids would eventually say, “Track is my favorite sport”.

My teams would be under-trained, but we would win because of our superior talent and our love of the sport. People are really good at things they like. People become obsessed with things they love. Maybe staying healthy would outweigh our lack of conditioning. Staying happy and healthy became my dominant thought. Even if my experiment failed, at least kids wouldn’t hate track like I did in middle school, high school, and college. Like all scientists on the verge of discovery, I had a hunch that I might be onto something.

Football was another piece to the puzzle. I decided my workouts would closely resemble the workouts of football players preparing for the NFL Combine. I visited a respected professional trainer at D1 Sports Training in Nashville. I remember one thing he said verbatim, “If you are doing something for more than five seconds, you are not working on speed.” The 40-yard dash became the centerpiece to my training program. At the time, I had not yet realized the 40-yard dash was perfect for sprinters. Three-quarters of the 40 is acceleration, the last quarter is max speed. And, the dose is less than five seconds.
1998 coincided with the dawn of affordable desk-top computers. I learned how to use spreadsheets. Record, Rank, and Publish was born. Rankings were “published” on a bulletin board in the main hallway of Harrisburg High School. My reason for beginning RRP (not to be confused with RPR!) was probably my own geeky interest in numbers and stats. However, I quickly learned that RRP was an amazing way to “Feed the Cats”. Cats may appear lazy to slow white guys, but I’ve learned that cats are freaky competitive. Sprinters are much more competitive than the typical distance runner. Some distance runners just run. Cats race.

After ten years of unusual success, I met my kindred spirit, Chris Korfist. Chris may have done things in radically different ways, but our theories of dosage and approach were identical. I heard Chris speak at a clinic and couldn’t control my excitement. I was not alone! It was as if Charles Darwin had found a scientist from another continent who had written “On the Origin of Species” in different language but the conclusions were identical.

By 2008, I understood low-dosage max-speed sprinting with prioritized rest did, in fact, attract cats. I also knew my low-dose methodology improved speed. I had ten years of data to prove it. Chris Korfist CONFIRMED my conclusions. My poorly-trained, poorly-conditioned sprinters were doing exactly what they should be doing. Grueling high-volume workouts were wrong and had always been wrong. Speed is a skill that must be practiced fast in low dosage with lots of rest. I now tell people “Sprint as fast as you can, as often as you can, while staying as fresh as you can.” I’m 100% certain of this.

Since I met Chris ten years ago, I’ve been sent things written by Charlie Francis and Vince Anderson that echo many of the things I found on my own. I guess no one has a truly original thought. I’ve also witnessed dozens of track programs who bought into “Feed the Cats” and experienced amazing success. Edwardsville H.S. is one of them. Edwardsville, coached by Chad Lakatos (Harrisburg, 1993), won state championships in 2015 and 2017. They finished 2nd in 2012, 2014, and 2016.

My transition to “Feed the Cats” in 1998 paid immediate dividends. In the next five years my Harrisburg team won the Illinois state championship in the 4×1 an amazing four times. Between Harrisburg and Plainfield North, both of my Franklin 4×1 teams (’05 and ’06)
medaled at the Tennessee state meet. In my 11 years at Plainfield North, our average best time in the 4×1 is 42.33. Last year, we broke our school record, running 41.67. We will break it again next year. *(We did, running 41.29, state champs, state record!)*

![Image of athletes]

**The Ten Commandments of “Feed the Cats”**

♦ Do high quality work with maximum focus over the least amount of time possible

♦ Prioritize rest, recovery, and growth; never underestimate the power of being happy and healthy

♦ Never forget – people naturally are good at what they like and are OBSESSED with what they love

♦ Promote your program with unrestrained enthusiasm

♦ “Record, Rank, and Publish” to feed the competitive nature of your fast-twitch athletes
Never force-feed

Never grind

Never crush the physical or emotional soul of your athletes

Never inflict physical punishment – punish only by taking away the opportunity to do the work

Never forget, “Light a fire, don’t fill a pail.”

Can other sports “Feed the Cats”?

Modern football is a game of speed. Spreading the field has resulted in the extinction of slow players. For all players, except for kickers and Peyton Manning style quarterbacks, the number one metric to get into NCAA football or the NFL is speed. The 40-yard dash will make or break you. If modern football is a game of speed, then football coaches could learn a thing or two from “Feed the Cats.

I recently wrote a trilogy of articles detailing how to transition from an old-school football program to a speed-based program. There may have been more, but I know of two Illinois high school programs who transitioned to prioritize speed. Those two teams went 22-2. I had the opportunity to “Feed the Cats” as the freshman football coach at Plainfield North (2010-2015) where we went 49-4 averaging over 44 points per game.

New Ideas for Old School Football Coaches
Football Dosage and Approach ⇒ FAQ
Football: Differentiating Sprint Practice and Non-Sprint Practice

Basketball is more aerobic than football but arguably just as much fast-twitch. Basketball may appear to be constant movement, but speed and quickness are the keys to success. If given
the choice of playing with race horses or plow horses, I would choose the former. Do fast-twitch cats make good basketball players? Hell yes.

I recently published my ideas on basketball.

♦ Basketball Advice from a Sprint Coach

How about lacrosse, soccer, volleyball, etc.? I think every non-endurance sport should prioritize fast-twitch muscle fibers. Every non-endurance sport should strive to improve acceleration, max-speed sprinting, and explosion. Constant consideration should be given to rest, recovery, and growth. Cats sleep 20 hours a day.

I believe every non-endurance sport should strive to prioritize happy and healthy athletes. Sports in America blossomed after WWII. Sports were a way to turn boys in to men. Women didn’t fight Nazis so they didn’t play sports. Soldier-based training was prevalent in all sports 75 years ago. In many high schools, misguided coaches still conduct practice like boot camp. Military posters are found in too many locker rooms. “Feed the Cats” will never be confused with boot camp, and that’s a damn good thing.
Chemistry teachers can “Feed the Cats” too!

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” – William Butler Yeats

The quote above sits on my desk at school. Yeats is my daily reminder that curriculum doesn’t matter.

Just as sprinters run faster when they are happy and healthy, students learn best when they enjoy what they do.

Just as sprinters respond to low-dose training, students respond to a less-is-more, quality over quantity approach.

Just as athletes who love their sport become obsessed with training, students are insatiable when they fall in love with their studies.

Everything I do in teaching Honors Chemistry goes through the filter of “Feed the Cats”. Is this typical in schools? What do you think?

Schools force-feed curriculum to students every single day. The political “war on education” has forced schools into an all-consuming quest for higher ACT and SAT scores, disregarding the toll it takes on students.

When I was a kid, maybe five years-old, my mom made me eat a brussel sprout. I threw up and mom got mad. Strange memory, huh? Well that is what we do to high school students. We make students eat brussel sprouts and they throw up. They rebel. They cheat. Love of learning isn’t nurtured, it’s extinguished.

Should we allow students to eat candy instead? No, of course not. I believe you must creatively cook the brussel sprouts, then sell those brussel sprouts to kids with creativity and enthusiasm.

I read “A Tale of Two Cities” when I was 13 and I loved it. I loved it mainly due to the enthusiasm of my teacher, Mrs. Kasbeer. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it
was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.” When teachers are allowed to teach with freedom, their enthusiasm is always contagious.

What do we do if students still won’t eat their brussel sprouts? Then you force-feed, right? Nope. You find alternative things to eat. There are hundreds of vegetables from which to choose. Who has the authority to mandate one vegetable over another? One book over another? One course over another?

I work at an excellent school. My principal asked every teacher what our school did well. My answer, “The trains run on time.” This was not the answer my principal expected. I would give my school an A+ for organization and discipline. It’s the education that bothers me.

Recently I was forced to change my classroom management. I was told I gave too many teacher-generated tests and had too many labs, creating a point total that overwhelmed our mandated district-standardized tests. Even worse, I was not lock-step with others who taught the same course. I tried to explain that our standardized tests are flawed and unfair (our first year of giving them). To make a long story short, I got out-voted by a couple of younger teachers. The tests I write are now limited in number and my point totals are capped. The number of lab reports produced in my class are now limited to match the other teachers of the same course. If everyone doesn’t “Feed the Cats”, no one will.

I emailed my department chair. “My fear is that education will continue towards standardization. Someday teachers will read from a daily script and use standardized PowerPoints. Teachers will hand out standardized worksheets and provide standardized study guides preparing kids for standardized tests. Schools will proudly publish the data in the spirit of accountability. Students will, of course, hate school and cheat at every opportunity. The good news: every kid will have the same experience. Education will be reduced to the lowest common denominator.”
My best teachers were artists, they didn’t paint by number.

At a Christmas Eve breakfast, Chris Korfist said to me, “We are planting cut flowers.” Wow, what a metaphor! Instead of preparing the soil, planting seeds, and watering daily, we are sticking cut flowers into the dirt. The cut flowers have no roots and they die.

Looks like we have a choice. Do we force-feed brussel sprouts, plant cut flowers, or “Feed the Cats”? In other words, do we force it, fake it, or light a fire?

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Track & Field Articles (Tony Holler)

Track Football Consortium
Purchase Videos from previous TFCs: VIDEOS

Reflexive Performance Reset
I ran track in middle school, high school, and college. I hated most of it.

High-volume workouts battered my body and crushed my spirit. We never spiked up in practice and never sprinted at top speed.

In high school I ran on school record 4x1 and 4x4 teams. I anchored both the 4x1 and 4x4 for my college track team. Looking back, I wonder how good I could have been. What if I would have sprinted as fast as possible, as often as possible, staying as fresh as possible? What if I would have loved my training and loved the sport of track and field?

During my first two decades as a track coach, practices were brutal affairs. They were long, they were frequent, and they hurt like hell. Now, over 40% of my track athletes' seasons are off days. Our sprinters never run longer than a 200m in practice. We don't run laps. We never jog. Love has replaced grit. Speed has replaced endurance. Our times have never been faster.

**Track Sucks (1972-1981)**

My high school coach, Roger Wilcox, believed in hard work and the development of fierce competitors. Like many coaches of that era, Coach Wilcox wanted to turn boys into men (Why don't we hear anyone talk about turning girls into women?). Track was a test of your manhood. He would smile playfully as he told us, "I'm going to call you dragons,
because I'm going to run you until your ass is dragging." He would often remind us of the "Seven Ps", "Proper Prior Preparation Prevents Piss Poor Performance". Roger Wilcox celebrated that fact that I threw up after workouts and races, calling me the best competitor he had ever coached. I would run through a brick wall for the guy, but I didn't like track.

Roger Wilcox coached the way he had been coached. Roger had played college football under Coach Lou Saban, a World War II veteran who later became head coach of the Buffalo Bills. Those World War II guys believed in toughness. Toughness was a core value of Coach Wilcox.

My high school training mirrored the program of Clyde Hart, the legendary former track coach for Baylor. Clyde recruited the fastest kids in the country, exposed them to high volume training, then transitioned to speed late in the season. In my opinion, the key to Clyde Hart's success was recruitment.

I practiced in my basketball shoes (Adidas Pro-Model high tops). We did nothing less than a 150m in practice. Our program was built around 400m runners and relays. We ran intervals of 150, 200, 300, 400, and 500 meters. We were given a time we had to achieve, and if we didn't make it, we had to run more. On the day before a meet, we would jog until we worked up a sweat. It all must have worked because we won our conference meet in 1976 and 1977. Success validates training, right?

I went to a small college where the head football coach was also, by default, the track coach. An alarming number of track coaches have their jobs simply because no one else wants it. My college coach read a book on training. I literally became his de facto assistant coach, which in effect, created a continuation of my high school program. We did speed endurance, tempo runs, and aerobic work. We did tons of running but no sprinting. We worked very hard. I liked my coach but going to track practice was like going to the dentist.


We learn to parent from our parents. We learn to coach from our coaches.

I was hired to teach five science classes at Harrisburg High School in Southern Illinois in 1981. Harrisburg was a poor coal mining town where people showed up for football games on Friday nights and went hunting or fishing on Saturday and Sunday. I was also hired to coach the offense for the freshman football team and served as sophomore basketball coach. As an afterthought, I agreed to coach track, too. Due to the incompetence of Harrisburg's head track coach, I had carte blanche with the sprinters and middle-distance runners.

I became head basketball coach the following year (1982) and got fired as head basketball coach eight years later (1990). In a bizarre twist of fate, the school board hired me as head track coach the month before they fired me as basketball coach. Harrisburg High School couldn't find anyone who wanted the head track job. I've been a head track coach ever since.

Becoming the head track coach at Harrisburg, in the absence of basketball, was a paradigm shift for me. Track is typically treated as a step-child in high school sports. Football, basketball, and baseball are top-tier sports, everything else is secondary. For me, as an athlete and a coach, track had always been my lowest priority. As assistant track coach from 1981-1990, I went to basketball clinics during the spring. I devoured books about Rick Pitino, Bob Knight, and Jim Valvano. Track rarely crossed my mind, even at track practice. From 1981-1990, I had not been much of a track coach. I was a basketball zealot.

As the new head track coach, my typical practice involved an arbitrary number of runs of a random distance at a sub-max speed. Sometimes we ran at slow speeds (getting into shape) and sometimes faster speeds. We never wore spikes.
Sometimes we would get creative and run 10x200, each one faster than the previous. Learning to run fast when tired seemed like a brilliant idea.

I basically coached the whole team by myself with the assistance of a part-time throws coach. True story: I literally convinced my former assistant basketball coach to be my throws coach by telling him he could skip practice and go bass-fishing on pretty days.

It made sense to me to create a team of quarter-milers and half-milers. Quarter-milers could move down to the sprints if they were fast enough. Everyone knew that speed was a genetic trait back then, you either had speed or you didn't). Half-milers could move up to the mile and two-mile. One coach, one training plan. Running is running. Distance guys ran 10x400. Sprinters ran 10x200. It wasn't rocket science. I had become my high school coach and had reproduced his program.

I blame inertia.

Objects continue to go in the same direction unless acted upon by an outside force. I had no outside forces acting on me, so I continued in the same direction. The cycle of abuse continued 17 years because I didn't care enough to seek an outside force. I was not looking to evolve. Like most people, I had it all figured out.

Like my own high school coach, I had enough success to justify everything I did as a track coach. In 1983, I coached Mark Bittle to the state championship in the 800m. In 1991, my team placed 3rd in the state with Brandon Shelton high jumping 6'10" and breaking the state record in the 300 hurdles. In 1995, my team won the state championship behind 7'2" high jumper Damon Lampley, who also excelled the sprints. We dominated teams in our area. From 1990-1998, my teams had won state medals in 15 relays and 16 individual events. No one worked harder. We had terrific team culture. We competed like there was no tomorrow.

But something wasn't right.

I had trouble convincing football and basketball players that track was fun. Many of my best track athletes were perpetually banged-up. Some dreaded practice. One of my best all-time athletes, Chad Lakatos (1989-1992) wore a permanent look of misery, even though he won the 100, 200, 400, and Long Jump at our conference meet and ran a 48.2 split in the 4x4 at the state meet. Chad probably had double stress fractures of his shins during both his junior and senior years. Like me, Chad didn't love track.

Looking back, something that happened in 1995 planted a seed that didn't truly germinate until three years later. My 7'2" high jumper, Damon Lampley, had a unique track experience. Damon missed 20-some practices his senior year to play centerfield for our baseball team. Damon competed in meets and maybe one practice per week. He was exempt from our traditional workouts. Despite his generic look (5'10", 150 pounds), Damon cleared 7'0" or better 13 times and ran 10.64 in the 100m. Hmmm.

I reached my tipping point in 1998. My incredible group of 400/800 runners underperformed at the state meet and we lost the state championship to Chicago Leo's group of sprinters and jumpers. Later that summer, my son Alec (age 12) told me he wanted to play baseball in high school. One more important thing happened that year, I attended a track clinic.

At the Medalist Track & Field Clinic in St. Louis, Paul Souza, coach at D-3 Wheaton College (MA), spoke of specificity in jump and sprint training. Souza made me question my high-volume approach. He spoke of sprinters being "different", like cats. He spoke of training dosage that made me wish my own experience as a track athlete would have been different. He used the word "epiphany" in his presentation. My epiphany came on that day 20 years ago.

Twenty years ago, I deviated from the norm. I began a new journey. My teams would sprint to get fast. I would learn how to make practices the best part of a kid's day. To hell with a focus on the 400-800. We would focus on the 40. We would get fast and compete like champions. Love would replace grit. Speed would replace endurance.
Feed the Cats (1999-2019)

In the 105-year history of IHSA Track & Field, Harrisburg high school had placed in the 4x1 only three times. Then everything changed. Harrisburg won the 4x1 state championship in 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003. Our 2001 team set a state record. We placed 4th in 2002 and 2004.

I went to Franklin, Tennessee, in 2004 for two years. I inherited only eight boys from Franklin's 2004 team. We placed 5th in the 4x1 in 2005, 7th in 2006.

I went to Plainfield North in 2006. Plainfield North was a new school. We qualified for state in the 4x1 my first year, even though our school had no seniors and only three boys under 4.60 in the 40 (last year we had 28 under 4.60). In my 12 years at Plainfield North, we have achieved an average best 4x1 time of 42.30. In the past five years, we have averaged 41.79, best in Illinois. Last year, we set a state record running 41.29.

These 4x1 times may not impress people in California, Florida, Texas, or Georgia but I assure you, these times are Illinois-fast. Sprinters in the sunshine states have higher dopamine levels. The sunshine advantage is, in my opinion, greater than the competitive edge of distance runners training at altitude. My team would have run 40-low in a sunshine state.

I'm not the only guy feeding the cats. One of the first coaches to implement my philosophy was a guy named Chad Lakatos who I mentioned earlier in this article. He was the guy with the look of misery on his face every day back in 1991 and 1992. In the last 12 years, Chad's teams have won four state championships. Chad's average best 4x1 time during those 12 years? 42.40
Coaches who *Feed the Cats* are now too numerous to count. However, the coaches who cling to their tempo runs, speed endurance, aerobic fitness, and the pursuit of manhood still vastly outnumber us. Old habits are tough to break.

My most asked question? What about your 400m runners? *All my sprinters train the same. All my sprinters run the 400.* My sprint-trained 4x4 teams have been All-State in ten of the last twenty years. I’ve had 22 sprinters go sub-50 in 4x4 splits. Next year we could win the state 4x4 if we choose to run our best four guys. (However, Marcellus Moore plans to run the 100, 200, 400, and 4x1.)

My second-most asked question? What about your hurdlers? My son, Alec, is the best hurdle coach I know. He coached state record-holder Travis Anderson (13.59). Alec explains his program in A Hurdle System for Cats.

Let’s summarize *Feed the Cats*

- Sprint as fast as possible, as often as possible, while staying as fresh as possible
- Never let today ruin tomorrow. Accept small gains. Make *Happy and Healthy* your priority
- *Record-Rank-Publish* to feed the competitive nature of your cats
- Always train in spikes
- If you’re too tired to sprint your fastest, you’re not getting faster
- Do strategic low-dose lactate workouts in-season to become more efficient at longer sprint distances. But always remember, lactate training is like a poison. *Small doses stimulate, moderate doses inhibit, large doses kill*
- Promote-Promote-Promote. Share your athlete’s successes with the world. Make track look fun
- Remember, kids are good at what they like, and incredible at what they love. *Grit is work in the absence of love.* "The Grind" has somehow become motivation for people who don't like their work
When you commit to speed, you get faster. Too many coaches try to go in too many directions.

**Installing *Feed the Cats***

*Feed the Cats* is a set of ideas, not a recipe. People who *Feed the Cats* do not copy my program, they just think like me.

I have a video being sold by Championship Productions is the most comprehensive presentation of my program. It includes 135 minutes of content; 90 minutes of presentation and 45 minutes of live demonstrations. If you are interested, go to my twitter feed, @pntrack, and the link is pinned to the top.

Here is my 19-week plan for my track team this year. If I had only 12 weeks, I would simply install the final 12-weeks of my 19-week plan (Illinois has a 19-week track season).

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Alactic (Sprint & X-Factor) 33%, Lactate 24%, Off-Days 42%
We have three different types of workouts: Speed, X-Factor, and Lactate.

An example of a Speed Day: ten intense speed drills followed by the timing of three 10m flys. Total time, 40 minutes. Our biggest speed day last year was 3x35m flys on the curve. Minimum effective dose.

An example of an X-Factor Day: Cat Jumps, Depth Jumps, Lunges Series, Toe Pops, Booms, and Assisted Plyos. Total time, 40-50 minutes (All of these are explained in the Championship Productions video.)

An example of a Lactate Day: 23 Second Drill or 4x4 Predictor.

The yellow days in the grid above are low-dose, high-intensity days which will never detract from the next day. The days in red will cause a 48-hour hangover. Every day in red is followed by an off day (green). My off-days are OFF-DAYS. Cats sleep 20 hours a day. 42% of the grid above is color-coded green. The green days are most important days of the season. Without rest, it's impossible to have effective practices and elite performances.

I have ten lactate workouts scheduled for this season. Only three are scheduled during our outdoor season. Last year we did only seven lactate workouts in 19 weeks. The entire practice grid is an approximation. Weather, meet cancellations, and the overall health of my team become a part of the calculus.

Our distance crew is under the direction of Coach Andy Derks. Coach Derks has averaged twenty sub-5:00 milers in the past four years. We have approximately 40 distance runners every year. Coach Derks recently wrote an article detailing how a distance coach coexists in a sprint program.

Our throwers report to their throws coach. We keep approximately 12.

We only keep 30-35 sprinters, total, and that includes hurdlers and jumpers. Just like basketball coaches can't keep 50 kids, sprint coaches can't keep 50 kids. If you do, you will spread yourself so thin, you will drown in shallow water.

Our jumpers don't jump much. In matter of fact, Coach Brian Damhoff believes in jumping as little as possible.

We don't stretch, warm-up, or cool-down (at least not in the traditional sense).

My football players lift after track practice, my other guys usually don't. Marcellus Moore plays football (multiple college offers) but does not lift. I don't see speed differences between our lifters and non-lifters.

We never run a lap. We never jog. Our longest run in practice is 200m.

Track practice is the best part of my kids' school day. My kids leave practice feeling better than they felt all day. Lactate days are the only exception (but we always take the next day off).

Sprinters who love their sport have a huge advantage over tough kids who rely on grit. Grinders are not high-performance athletes. How can you quantify the value of *Happy and Healthy*?

**Born Again**

I've had people tell me that I speak about *Feed the Cats* like an evangelical preacher. Guilty as charged. Sometimes my clinic presentations resemble a tent revival. After 38 years of teaching chemistry and coaching track, I'm certain that kids are relentless when they love what they do. I'm also certain that prioritizing rest along with the pursuit of infinite speed will produce results that might blow your mind.

*If you enjoyed this piece, you can follow Tony on Twitter at @pntrack*