



LINEAR SPEED TRAINING FOR FOOTBALL

speed (n.) – the distance covered by an athlete in a given amount of time

How often have you heard the phrase, “football is a game of speed”? In today’s game, players of all levels are bigger, stronger, and faster. When evaluating an athlete, the first thing that college and professional coaches notice is his speed. The importance of an athlete’s speed has driven football to the point of utilizing the 40 yard sprint test as the most crucial evaluation tool.

Many times athletes overlook the opportunity they have to improve their speed. Through a well-developed strength program, an athlete’s speed can be enhanced as his strength increases. Plyometric training and ground-based movements, such as the back squat, need to be an essential part of the athlete’s training program. In order to maximize results during the off season, a significant amount of time must be dedicated to linear speed training.

One of the biggest misconceptions in training athletes is that speed cannot be taught. Improving an athlete’s speed is possible if the right training program is implemented. Although the athlete may not have the genetic make-up of a Michael Vick, significant increases in speed can still be attained.

The two basic components that affect an athlete’s speed on the field are **stride length** and **stride frequency**. Stride length is described as the distance covered in a single step, whereas stride frequency is known as the number of steps taken in a given amount of time. Stride length and stride frequency can both be improved by increasing the force produced by the arms and legs. Stride frequency can also be increased by moving the arms and legs at a faster rate. There are many different sprint technique drills that can be utilized to develop both of these areas. These drills, geared toward linear speed, in combination with multi-directional speed, will help to improve an athlete’s overall sports performance.

Clif Marshal is Performance Director at Ignition and a strength and conditioning specialist with the Cincinnati Bengals. For drills to implement into your program that will develop linear and multi-directional speed, contact Clif Marshall at 513-247-9501.