

# ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL PREP TRACK PROGRAM

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*The authors of the following article have all been successful prep coaches in Nebraska for the last decade. They have contributed a detailed description of a successful corn b/nd junior high/high school program similar to their own in Hastings, Nebraska. Rather than quibble about specific workouts, the editor would like to point out the unifying organizational and motivational themes running through the program. Unfortunately, few prep programs possess the continuity required to run this focused a program. For those coaches in such a program, this is a valuable article.*

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A successful track program must contain three elements: 1) preseason organization and planning; 2) motivational aspects; and 3) well-planned workouts, which develop peak performances within twelve weeks. This article will address each of these elements in detail, giving the coach specific organizational schemes, activities and daily workouts for all running events. The ideas and workouts have been developed by the authors over a 10 year period of time, and have produced a successful program. We have borrowed most of our ideas from others and adapted them to a particular athlete or situation. Our criteria for success include enjoyment of the experience, personal growth and improvement by athletes and coaches. With these goals winning and excellent performances will occur. This philosophy has produced many State Meet placers and qualifiers, two gold medal performances, and a second place team finish at the 1988 Class A State Meet in Nebraska. Considering that our school system is usually the second or third smallest of thirty-two Class A schools, this makes our program look even stronger.

## ORGANIZATION

In many larger communities the high school and junior high track programs are completely isolated from each other, commonly leaving the less knowledgeable and less experienced coaches to fend for themselves. As a result the beginning hurdler or long jumper may receive poor or incorrect technique information and distance runners receive workouts that are completely useless or inappropriate for that age group.

The reverse situation also occurs. Many athletes receive excellent coaching at the junior high level, and



Representatives of two successful high school teams (South Lake Cliff High School in Dallas, TX and Hawthorne High School in Hawthorne, CA) clash at the Texas Relays.

then receive poor coaching or contradictory information from a senior high coach. Such situations can lead to frustration and lack of improvement on the part of the athlete. Such negative feelings usually have an obvious result, the young man or woman loses interest and is lost from the program. What is needed is a program with continuity and consistency.

The solution to such problems is simple: take a 7-12 approach to organization. Ideally both junior and senior high athletes should work out at the same track under the direction of the best coach available. Although this involves additional transportation, it can be sold to school administrators, on the basis of cost. Only one track is needed and maintained. The actual number of coaches needed may be slightly less. If two tracks already exist, the second could be used for meets, avoiding conflicts with practice. Or one track could be used for the men's program the other for the women's, or some other workable splitting of personnel or events.

One key to the success of any athletic program is good coaching. Having all levels of athletes at the same site permits the athletes to receive the best coaching. Under this organizational scheme one coach (head event coach) is responsible for writing workouts for all athletes (7-12), for an event group (sprints, weights, distance, etc.). Another coach (assistant event coach) may be responsible for the implementation of the workout. If questions arise the head event coach is available.

This arrangement encourages communication between coaches and learning on the part of the assistant event coaches. In effect the first weeks of practice are a 7-12 clinic, teaching technique and drills to beginners (coaches and athletes) and reviewing it with the experienced coach and athlete. This scheme affords the flexibility of giving a "high school" coach the opportunity to work with beginners and vice versa. For example, while the head event coach is working with young hurdlers or sprinters, the assistant event coach is working with the high school hurdlers or sprinters. In this way all coaches are part of a bigger program and share in its successes. Unfortunately, such an arrangement may initially step on a few egos, but if the advantages are sold to all coaches by the head track coach its benefits should be obvious to all.

In addition to making the best coaching available to the athlete, such utilization of coaching resources gives continuity and consistency to the program. One coach is exclusively responsible for the workouts and technique approaches taken in a given event throughout an athlete's development. No contradictions arise as an athlete passes from one set of coaches to another. The "senior high" coaches have known the athletes for two or three years when they enter the varsity program. The coaches know the personalities, strengths and weak-

nesses of the athletes. The athletes know what will be expected of them.

Even if all athletes (7-12) cannot be at the same track for workouts, the concept of a head event coach is worthwhile within a school system (high school and feeder junior high(s)). It encourages communication between coaches at the two instructional levels, giving a degree of consistency and continuity to the program.

A logical extension of this organizational scheme is to include grade school P.E. instructors, by providing them with basic technique and conditioning information. A visit to the elementary schools when a track and field unit is being taught can be a great opportunity to sell your program and stimulate future interest.

### **Motivation**

Track and field is hard work, and all athletes who participate need some form of motivation. Rewards can be a form of motivation. Rewards can take many forms and be both tangible and intangible; carry positive or negative information. For example, one athlete may be motivated to participate because of the medals he will receive, another by simply being a part of a team, regardless of the outcome of the competition. As coaches we realize the awkward young sophomore needs some form of motivation, because he could be the mature senior sprinter we will need two years later to put together an outstanding 4x100m relay team. A successful approach to motivation must encourage participation and continued participation.

To the outstanding athlete or the early maturer rewards are readily received in the form of medals and recognition by peers, parents and press. However, medals are not a form of motivation to a person with little natural ability or a developing adolescent who has grown six inches in the last year and is struggling to walk, let alone hurdle with this new body. Not winning, not receiving recognition, sends a negative message to most young athletes: you are a failure. Most people quit an activity when this message is repeatedly received.

But winning cannot be equated with success, and not winning equated with failure, when improvement is used as a standard of success. For all athletes improvement and growth can be motivating, if its benefits are pointed out. Improvement compares the individual to their previous performances, and eliminates the question of winning or losing or attempting to size up the competition in an effort to judge the meaning of the outcome of a race. The only person you must compete against is yourself. To remain outstanding a gifted sophomore must improve or he will become mediocre as others improve. To become successful the non-winner need only improve, which is usually possible, and

will be especially evident if they are still physically maturing.

Improvement is motivating, but the question of how much improvement still remains. To consciously involve the athlete, realistic short and long range goals must be made by each athlete. Short term goals are made on a meet-to-meet basis and long range goals are year end goals. Part of the Tiger Track Booklet, given to each athlete at the beginning of the season, is a chart for setting goals.

Also listed in this booklet are Top 10 Charts, showing the top ten performances in each event by grade (7-12) as well as last year's best performance (both by individual and event). School, district, state, and national high school records within the booklet all serve as short and long range goals. The athletes are encouraged to set realistic goals based on their last year's best performances. The chart gives the athletes a place to make goals and record actual performances throughout the season. The athletes are encouraged to tape the sheet in their locker, or some other place where they will see it and use it. As a part of goal setting some coaches use mental visualization, believing athletes move in the direction of their most dominant thought. What the mind dwells upon, a goal, the body will manifest. So why not see success instead of failure?

In another section of the booklet, "Outlook for 19??", the coaches attempt to make realistic team goals based upon available talent, for that year and years to come. Throughout the year every effort is made to emphasize improvement, and discuss goals with individuals and relay teams. Verbalized expectations, always in terms of time or distance, not winning or losing, are great motivators. People tend to perform up to (or down to) a level of expectation.

These long range predictions also may help sophomores bridge the gap between being successful as a freshman, and just being mediocre as a sophomore, when they must compete against juniors and seniors. The prospect of being part of an outstanding team two years down the road makes the workouts easier to take, and success worth waiting for. Also the Top 10 Charts by class vividly show the progress of many successful senior athletes. Underclassmen can see on these charts that the outstanding senior was running similar times to their own when they were underclassmen, giving hope to the "slow" sophomore.

As an additional motivator the progress of each athlete is charted throughout the season for each event. These graphs are displayed in a classroom window for all to see, and are of interest not only to the track and field squad members, but also to other students, some of which may be lured into the program. Lines are placed across each graph to show the various goals possible, such as last year's best performance and the

school record. The graphs are constructed so that better performances create upward sloping graphs. Not only are these graphs great motivators, they show the coaches and athletes the effects of recent workouts. The coach can vividly see if workouts are having the desired effect.

Naturally it is impossible for every athlete to improve every meet. Weather conditions, recent intense workouts, or taxing performances, may make improvement impossible. If improvement is going to be the measure of success, then we must be ready to explain lack of it. At certain times throughout the season, when workouts are very intense, immediate improvement might be an adverse sign, signaling workouts were not intense enough. Athletes must be made aware of these facts to keep their desire for improvement in perspective.

As mentioned earlier getting ink in the local press is a great form of recognition and motivation. However, the press usually wants to dwell upon the outstanding athletes on the team. As coaches we must re-educate the press (maybe ourselves), so that the PR (personal record) of the developing athlete is recognized just as is the school record set by an outstanding individual (another form of PR). If the improvement-goal concept is going to really make sense, every team member must receive public recognition as improvement is made. Hopefully the press will cooperate, but the coaches must always be there with good words when improvement is made. If you are fortunate enough to have a successful year, don't let the excitement blind you to the basis for success: improvement and recognition of all team members, not just the outstanding athletes.

Finally, enthusiasm by all members of the coaching staff is a great motivator. Enthusiasm doesn't need to be loud, it can be spoken more loudly by showing genuine interest in individual members of the team, and striving for improvement in your coaching abilities. Your love of competition and improvement will be transferred to your athletes and reflect in their attitudes and performances. All coaches must take an interest in as many events as possible during meets. Hopefully as a result the athletes will do the same, shot putters will be there cheering on the distance runners and vice versa, whenever possible.

## WORKOUTS

Well-planned, yet flexible workouts are a must for a successful track program. These workouts must be written in advance of practice, and have some overall season plan. From 100m through 3200m the same general approach can be used, an emphasis on general conditioning early in the season, with longer runs be-

ing the rule, then a gradual shortening of distance and emphasis on speed and specific training for each event. Flexibility is a must throughout the season.

Each daily workout generally follows the same pattern: a general warmup and stretching helps maintain team unity and allows the head coach time to talk with the entire team for a few minutes.

The workouts that follow are flexible and must be adjusted for the ability, physical development and previous training of your runners. The important thing to notice is the general plan and organization. The sprint workouts are intended for 100m-400m and the distance workouts for 800m-3200m, although some individuals do cross over in the 400m and 800m events later in the season. The sprint workouts shown are adequate for mature freshman and sophomores, who have been a part of the program. A repetition can be added for juniors and two for seniors, and one or two subtracted for younger (junior high) athletes. The times should be adjusted (slower) for younger runners and beginners, faster for outstanding athletes. Participation, variety, general conditioning, development of basic skills and fun, not intensity, should be emphasized for the beginner, 7th grade and below.

Variety is definitely an important consideration. Doing the same workouts and drills day after day can be boring. The athletes themselves are usually full of ideas for varying drills. A little creativity can turn a drill into many different drills with the same effect. It is important to listen to and "read" the athletes. Sometimes they know what they need better than the workout chart. Having a part in planning workouts, even be it small, gives the runner the message their opinion is valuable. Many times workouts must be adjusted on the spot, when conditions warrant.

### **Sprint Workouts**

Each workout starts with a 1200m warmup and team stretching in pairs. This is usually followed by either form running on the grass or plyometric drills over/on boxes, bounding, hopping on one leg or two, or other dynamic stretching activities. Before the main workout, two or three laps of jogging the corners and striding (building up) the straights is done. All workouts end with at least an 800m jog and individual stretching for 10 minutes.

During the first three weeks of practice on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday a weight circuit is done with 15 to 20 stations to aid general overall fitness after the running workout. Groups of two are formed and each athlete does each station for 20 seconds, twice. The partner watches, stretches or spots, during off time. Emphasis is on doing as many repetitions as possible in the 20 seconds.

When it is absolutely impossible to go outside,

sprints are done in the shallow end of the swimming pool. The pool is made available for relaxation and fun after tough workouts, or workouts in very cold weather.

Except for the first three weeks, when weight training is done, workouts can always be completed in an hour or less, and the athletes appreciate this. Activities are planned, done, and everybody heads home as soon as possible. Those in field events usually must put in additional time. However, on certain days the emphasis is on field events. Conditioning on the track is viewed as a prerequisite for efficient work in field events, particularly the long jump and triple jump, which require sprint speed.

Most invitational meets are on Saturdays, and sprinters are encouraged to do 3-4 miles LSD and stretching on Sunday afternoon. During the early part of the season this same workout can be done on Saturday or Sunday or both. "Stress" is written after dual meets, because they must be exactly that, a stressful workout. Athletes should be expected to run at least three races, one of which should be 400m. All sprinters must be ready to run an open 400m or a leg on the 4x400m relay. If necessary, two or more 400m relay teams are entered. Duals should allow unlimited entries in all events and ideally be scheduled throughout the season to give everyone opportunities for competition.

### **Distance Workouts**

On the track workouts are preceded with "5 and 5", 5 laps of alternate jogging the curves and striding the straights, followed by team stretching. On other days 3 or 4 easy laps and team stretching are done before roadwork. Weeks 1 through 3 (Emphasis on distance-aerobic base)

The first three weeks are primarily LSD (10-12 miles, about 1:30 slower per mile than expected race pace) with occasional days of fartleks (varied pace) thrown in for variety. Because the first meet is about three and one-half weeks into the season, 800m, 1600m, and 3200m time trials are also thrown in throughout these three weeks.

### **Weeks 4 through 6 (Emphasis on distance and pace)**

Similar to the first three weeks, although the total miles run decreases (5-7 miles) and the speed is increased. Week 7 (Transition to interval work)

Similar to week 6, with days of distance (7-8 miles) at moderate pace, Fartlek, or 3x1 mile intervals, with 5 minutes rest in between, at 80-85% current maximum.

### **Week 8 (Intervals, slow and fast-anaerobic training)**

Monday: 10x400 (3 slower than race pace, 4 faster



**A unified and focused prep track program will produce winners like these relay teams at the Texas Relays.**

than race pace, 3 at race pace), 2 minutes rest between each.

Tuesday: Dual Meet

Wednesday: 6-7 miles moderate.

Thursday: 4x400 faster than race pace, 1 minute rest between.

Friday: Invite

**Week 9 (Intervals, slow and fast.)**

Monday: 1x1200/3:30-3:35, R-1 5 minutes; 1x800/under 2:20, R-15 minutes; 4x400/:65, R-3 minutes.

Tuesday: 5 miles moderate pace.

Wednesday: 8x200/:28-30, R-2:30, 1:00, :30, :30, :30, 1:00, 1:30.

Thursday: 5 miles easy pace.

Friday: Warm-up and stretching. Invite Saturday.

**Week 10 (Fast intervals-speed development and anaerobic training)**

Monday: **800m runners—3x** (8x200)/:30, R-:30, walk a 400 between sets (or 4x (6x200)/:30, R - walk 200, 5 minutes between sets 1, 2, and 3; 15 minutes between sets 3 and 4.

**1600m, 3200m-2x (4x 200/:32, 1x800/2:20), 4200,** R-100 jog after each 200, 400 walk after 800.

Tuesday: Real Easy 5 miles.

Wednesday: 4x600/1:40, R-:20 (2:00 cycle); 15 minute rest; 4x200/:25 (for speed), R-jog/walk 200; 5 minute rest; 4x200/:30 (for endurance), R-:30.

Thursday: 5 miles easy pace.

Friday: Warm-up and stretching.

**Week 11 (Emphasis on rest and recovery, maintain speed)**

Monday: Warm-up and stretching; jog 1 mile.

Tuesday: 4x200 (50 easy increasing speed, 100 hard, 50 easy decreasing speed.) R-full.

Wednesday: Warm-up and stretching.

Thursday: District Meet.

Friday: Easy 5 miles.

Saturday: 2 mile jog; 6x200 buildups (50 easy, 100 moderate, 50 moderate plus); 2 mile jog. Rest Sunday.

**Week 12 (Continued rest)**

Monday: Repeat Week ii Saturday workout.

Tuesday: Easy 4 miles.  
Wednesday: Warm-up and stretch; 1 mile jog.  
Thursday: Repeat yesterday's workout.  
Friday/Saturday: State Meet.

### EXPLANATION OF ABBREVIATIONS AND OTHER TERMINOLOGY

**LSD** Long Slow Distance, around 7 minute mile pace.

**R:** Recovery distance or time. If more than one is given the first is for the interval, the second is for between sets.

**J/W:** Jog-Walk.

**Bunge:** This is our term for towing one runner by another, while connected by 25 feet of three-eighths inch surgical tubing, stretched to three times its original length. These always involve alternating towing and being towed positions. This workout is done on the grass and without shoes if possible. These devices can be made by you much more cheaply than those advertised. Buy the surgical tubing from a medical supply house (around \$20 for 50 feet). Tie and tape the tubing to a swivel clip (available at a hardware store) at each end, then attach the clips to football pant belts tied around the waist of the runners. To reverse towing positions, all the runners must do is slide the clip around the belt, from front to back or vice versa. The athletes really like these workouts. Running faster than

you can run unaided is a wild sensation. The emphasis should be on stride frequency improvement, not stride length. Running six very fast 100s plus towing another runner six times with a time restraint makes a tough workout.

**Breakthrough:** Unaided running faster than originally capable, after completing bunge runs. In effect breaking down the wall that seems to exist as a person tries to run faster. This may be more psychological than physical, although recent research indicates it does happen in athletes familiar with the technique, but the effects last a very limited amount of time. This would indicate a couple of bunge runs would be an effective part of a precompetition warmup. What a great way to psych out your opponents.

**Form:** Form running with emphasis on good technique and relaxation.

**HK, 2/5, WF, NA, DOGS:** high knees, two strides per five yards on football field, waterfall, and no arms (arms held at side), respectively. HK, 2/5, and WF are included in warmup, about every other day, right after i/S and before the main workout. **Waterfall:** line up on the goal line, and give the runner to your right a stride headstart, try to catch him. Try not to be caught. A variation is "Here Come the **Dogs**", named after one athlete's affection for dog racing. One runner, the rabbit, is given a flying start, the other runners, the dogs, try to catch him after he flies by.

Week	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	4 miles LSD 6x200/:35 R-walk 200	12 mm. run for distance	4 miles LSD 9x60 (3 HK, 3 2/5, 3 WF)	12 mm. Fartlek 2x500/:34 200 pace R full	Timed 100, 200, and 400
2	2 miles LSD 8x200/:33 R-walk 200	Field Events 12 mm. run for distance	2x200/:34 1x300/:51 1 x400/:68 1x600/1:42 R-J/W dist. run	12 mm Fartlek 6x100 or Field Events	2x (4x200/:35) R-:25/1:25 between sets
3	2 miles LSD 2 miles jog 200/pickup 200	1x100/:13 1x200/:28 1x300/:42 1x400/:60 1x500/:78 R-walk 100	3x(100,150,250) on curve; Gun R-walk back to starting line	4x40 Form 4x60 Gun Field Events	5x300/:48 R-2:12
4	3 miles: jog 200/pickup 200	8x200/:31 R-1:00	4x (150, 200) at 95% R-J/W dist. run	Same as week 3 Thursday	Same as week 3 Tuesday, bit faster
5	4x (50, 150) on curve, gun 150:mid 50 form:HK or NA Field Events	Dual Meet (stress)	4 miles LSD 3x300 progress (:19/:17/:15 100 splits) R-J/W 300	300, 3x200 6x100 at 85-90% R-J/W dist run; full	4x40 Form 4x60 Gun or Relay exc Field Events
6	U200/32 R-walk 200 Field Events	Dual Meet (stress)	Same as week 5, progress (:18/:16/:14	8x200 buildup R-walk 200 Field Events 100 splits)	Same as week 5 Friday
7	Same as week 5 Monday	Dual Meet (stress)	Same as week 5, progress (:17/:15/:13)	Same as week 5 Thursday	Easter Break
8	4x100 Bunge 2x (50, 100, 150) curve, gun	Dual Meet (stress)	Same as week 7 Wednesday	2x200 race simulation Relay team: 200, and exchanges	Invite Meet
9	2x200/:29 2x300/:40 1x400/:58 R-J/W dist. run	8x200/:32 R-:28 1 mile LSD	12x100 Bunge: 6 pull, 6 tow on 2 mm. cycle 1 mile LSD	600/1:45 400/:65 2x300/:41 R-J/W dist. run 100 after 300	Same as week 5 Monday
10	Same as week 7 Wednesday	10x200/:30 R-30 1 mile LSD	Same as week 9 Wednesday	4x (to top speed) 4x50 Bunge 4xBreakthru Field Events	For 400m: 2x 200/:24 Others: 2x150 with gun; exc
11	600/1:30/Full 2x300/:40/100 6x100/:11/100	2000 prog 6x100 Bunge	8x60 DOGS Gun starts Relay exc	Same as week 10 Friday	District Meet
12	200/:25 300/:39 400/:54 R- Full	12x100 Bunge 1:30 cycle 1 mile LSD	Same as week 11 Wednesday	Gun Starts Relay exc	State Meet