



## Malcom Arnold on Colin Jackson's development

by Jim Alford

**NSA:** Can you say something about how you first met Colin Jackson and what your first impressions were?

**MA:** I first met Colin when he was approximately 14 years of age. I attended a prize giving at his Regional Schools Athletics day, when I was National Coach in Wales. Even as a young athlete his reputation had gone before him. He was a very good all round athlete and featured prominently in most 'power' events. He did quite well (not outstandingly well) in schools competitions and he competed in numerous events in the National Young Athletes League for Cardiff AAC. I think his strength was that he had already decided that Athletics was for him! He was a very bright, alert young man, who had an obvious attraction to the sport across the spectrum of sprinting, jumping and throwing.

**NSA:** Was there anything you had to emphasize particularly during the early stages of his training? If so, how did you go about it?

**MA:** He worked with a local coach at that time, when I was coaching Nigel Walker (13.51sec). Colin eventually wrote to me, asking if he could join my coaching group. Ultimately he did at the age of 17 years. Initially, he trained around 4 times per week, increasing to some 12-14 sessions per week in 1993-4. The first project was to improve his hurdle clearance technique. He did not have a very good 'natural' posture and tended to walk awkwardly with toes pointed out. This was cured very quickly once Colin became aware of it. It was evident, even at this early stage, that Colin was very perceptive and a very quick learner of physical skills. Good clearance technique came very quickly. He was quite small at this stage and to this day is probably the smallest hurdler on the scene (1.80m/74kg).

**NSA:** What do you consider to be the main attributes that helped Colin to become the world record holder?

*Malcolm Arnold is the current Director of Coaching for the British Athletics Federation. Formerly he was the Chief Coach responsible for sprints and hurdles. In more than 20 years of coaching international class athletes, he has worked with, among others, the 1993 110 metres hurdles World Champion and world record holder Colin Jackson (GBR).*

**MA:** His natural strengths were his perception and understanding of the training process, his ability to work hard, his natural psychological strength and an excellent basic speed. He was very good at jumping, throwing and running events and jumped 7.96m (w) as a junior. There was some discussion when he was a junior about doing the decathlon or becoming a long jumper. However, when he became World Junior Champion in Athens and ran 13.44sec, it was obvious that his future lay in hurdling!

It is during these formative years that I had the greatest and most important input. Colin is very interested in the training process and gives very valuable feedback to me in the coaching situation. As the years have gone by, my input has diminished, because of his excellent understanding. I now tend to operate as a consultant rather than a coach. I think that is not unusual in the coaching process.

**NSA:** What sort of work would he do to develop:

- a) Endurance
- b) Speed
- c) Technique
- d) Flexibility?

**MA:** In the early years, the work was set out in the following fashion:

Endurance took the form of building up a sound general base of aerobic fitness through steady running and general exercise circuits. Aerobic fitness was not his strength and he found very great difficulty in this aspect of his work.

Speed work came as an overlay, after aerobic work and strength endurance activities. Sessions were split between speed endurance and absolute speed development (read the B.A.F. book on hurdling for examples of the activities).

Hurdling technique was first developed over repetitions of 6-12 hurdles and then refined by running at speed over 2-12 hurdles. I am a great believer in developing hurdling technique over a larger number of hurdles (specificity).

Flexibility was developed by the usual traditional methods, concentrating particularly upon the hip joint and hamstring and lower back complex of joints and muscles.

One of the significant reasons for his success is the development of *explosive strength* through lifting heavy weights. Colin has a very high relative strength, which explains his dynamic approach to hurdling.

**NSA:** In what year was Colin first able to enjoy the opportunity for warm weather training and at what times of the athletic year and for how long a period does he now find it most beneficial?

**MA:** Colin first went warm weather training with my group of athletes, when he first joined me. We went to Portugal at the time of the year when the athletes were starting their preparations for the competitive season. This timing meant that the athletes could return to the UK in good form, ready for the important early meetings. Since he has been able to afford to go warm weather training more frequently, he has spent long periods of time in Australia and Florida, but mainly in preparation periods. This has allowed a high quality of work to be undertaken away from the British winters! He will stay away for periods of up to three months at a time.

**NSA:** In view of Colin Jackson's superb performance over the 60 metres hurdles indoor, do you consider his preparation as being one of double periodisation and do you consider indoor competition as an essential part of the elite hurdler's training?

**MA:** There have been two types of approach to Colin's indoor programme over the years. There has been a specific preparation for indoor events. There have also been years when he has merely reduced the volume and frequency of work three to four weeks before indoor competition and spent a little time on speed work and block practice, before competing. The latter process has been the more usual one.

**NSA:** What are your views on the placement of the starting blocks and starting technique for the 110 metres hurdles in general?

**MA:** Starting in sprinting and hurdling is a very specific skill and has to be prepared for and practised. It is both a physical and a mental skill. Concentrating on the communication link between the starter and the athlete is paramount. Starting in hurdling is a little more complex than in sprinting. The sprinter can run as hard as possible. So can the hurdler, but he must fit seven or eight strides very accurately into the gap between the starting line and the first hurdle! The first thing an athlete must learn to do is to react to the sound signals from the starter and to ignore all else. The second thing he must do is ignore all other signals from other athletes and the spectators. Once the athlete has learned that discipline of reacting to the starter, he is on the way to starting success.

The other aspect of starting is the physical one. Colin Jackson has a very high strength weight ratio, developed by weight lifting. This means that he can propel his body very quickly at the first hurdle. His starting is successful because of these factors.

Block placement is to suit the athlete. The seven stride approach to the first hurdle severely compromises the starting position and should be avoided. The eight stride approach is to be commended, together with a 'medium' position in the blocks.

**NSA:** What form does Colin's warm up for competition generally take?

**MA:** Colin's warm up for competition varies in length according to climate. In Britain's inclement weather it can take forever but, in hot and humid conditions, it will be fore-shortened. The content of the warm up is as follows:

- a) Jogging two laps.
- b) Flexibility exercises as specified above for up to 40 minutes.
- c) Striding - say 3x40m, increasing in speed.
- d) Specific hurdles drills.
- e) Starting rehearsal from the blocks.
- f) Compete.

**NSA:** Does Colin pay any special attention to:

- a) Diet, including ergogenic aids, vitamins sports drink etc.,
- b) mental preparation.

**MA:** Colin takes great care with his diet during competition times, especially over weight control. He has no particular mental preparation programme.



