

The Top 6 Most Effective Workouts for 300/400 Meter Hurdlers

By Steve McGill

200 or 300 Repeats over Hurdles

My favorite workouts for my 300m hurdlers is to have them do repeat 200s over the last five hurdles. In the early part of the year, I'll have them do five to six reps, with about three minutes recovery between each one. By the last week of the season, I'll have them do two reps, or three at the most, with about six minutes recovery between each one. So, in the early part of the season, I emphasize hurdle conditioning, and in the latter part of the season I emphasize speed. Each rep is timed, and the athletes always have someone to run beside. Most of the time, it's another 300 hurdler of the same gender. Sometimes I might have to pair a boy with a girl and give the girl a head start, and sometimes I might have the hurdler run beside a sprinter.

This workout is the one I use to predict what the range of the athletes' race times should be for that week's meet. So, I always do this workout two days before race day. If, for instance, an athlete's average time on the 200 repeats is 27.0, I project that his race time will be in the range of 40.5 (13.5×3), give or take a half-second. Although the athlete obviously won't be able to maintain the early pace in the last 100 of the race, it is also true that the first 200 of the race will be even faster than it is in practice, due to factors such as adrenaline and to the fact that, in a meet, you only have to run it once. I have found this workout to work remarkably well in predicting race times. The only way it doesn't work is if the athletes are taking either too little or too much rest between reps.

So, the coach needs to be sure the athletes are getting on the line and running when it's time to go. An equivalent workout for 400 hurdlers would be to run repeat 300s over the first eight hurdles, with similar recovery periods. Then do the math $\times 4$ to project race times.

So, if the athlete averages 42.0 for his 300s, the projected race time would be in the range of 56.0. I also like repeat 200s as a 400 hurdle workout as well, except with more repeats and less recovery. If you're a 400 hurdler who is able to do eight 200s at a consistent pace with two minutes rest between each one, you will feel the same level of fatigue in the last few reps that you will feel at the end of a race. So, if you can handle those last few reps, you can handle the last part of the race.

Back & Forth 100s

This is an off-season conditioning workout. From a standing start, run 100 meters one way, rest 30 seconds, then run 100 meters the other way. In the early part of the off-season, you might not want to add any hurdles at all. Then, as conditioning increases, put two hurdles at the 50m mark (one hurdle facing one way, the other facing the other). Then move up to four hurdles (two facing one way, two facing the other); in this case, use the intermediate hurdle marks on the final straightaway for hurdle placement. A total of twenty-four 100 meter sprints would be a full conditioning workout. I generally will have my kids do four sets of six reps, with about three minutes rest between each set. This is a good workout to do on days when you're pressed for time because, with only thirty seconds between reps, you'll be getting in a lot of reps in a very short period. The emphasis here is not on speed at all. It's more a matter of getting in the habit of maintaining running form when fatigued, and getting used to stepping over hurdles when fatigued.

Variations:

- As a speed workout, to be done during the season, do only two reps per set, with five minutes rest between sets. Four sets would total eight sprints. Each sprint would be timed, and the goal would be to keep the second rep of each sprint as fast as the first rep. For this workout, having a teammate to push you to fast times is virtually essential.
- Do 110s instead of 100s, having five hurdles going in one direction, and five more going the other way. Place the hurdles on the even-numbered 110 marks. In other words, set up hurdles 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 of the 110 race, but set them at the intermediate height. Recovery between reps and between sets would be the same as for the 100 meter back & forths discussed above. Sixteen reps of this workout (four sets of four reps) would be plenty for the off-season; six reps (three sets of two reps) would be plenty when in season. For hurdlers who want to alternate lead legs, this workout is especially useful, as you'll probably take eight steps between the hurdles. Someone who can't alternate legs will take either seven or nine.

For girls or women, keep the distance at 100 meters, and use the women's 100m hurdle marks for placing the hurdles, not the men's 110 marks. But yes, still have five hurdles facing one way, and five more beside them facing the other way.

400m Runs

This is a workout I'll usually reserve for the latter part of the season – after spring break. The 400 starts at the 300m start. Hurdler clears the first three intermediates, sprints the curve and part of the homestretch, then clears the last two hurdles, crosses the finish line, cuts into lane one, and finishes the 400 at the 300m starting line. I time them at the 300m mark and at the 400. Athlete should hit the 300m mark no more than two seconds slower than projected race time, and then try to finish the last 100 in 16 seconds (for a boy) or 18 seconds (for a girl). So, if the athlete's goal is to run a 40.0 in the next meet, then, in this workout he will want to come across the 300m mark in 42, and finish the 400 in 58. I'll have the athletes do two reps of these with an 8-10 minute rest between each one.

Variations:

- Set up the hurdles differently. I set them up this way because it mimics, as close as I can, the 110m zone drill workout. If the athlete is having trouble with curve hurdling, then leave out the first two hurdles, and have the athlete clear hurdles 3-5 and 7-8. If the athlete is running out of gas at the end of races, leave out the first three hurdles, and have the athlete clear the last five. If the athlete needs to improve the early part of the race, then set up the first five. Really, as long as there are five hurdles set up, the challenge to the athlete will be more or less the same. For me, I like having the last two hurdles set up no matter what, because I want the athletes to get used to coming off that last hurdle and driving through the finish line.
- For a 400m hurdler, these would be 500s, starting at the regular starting line, and finishing at the 1500 meter start. When I did this workout in college, our coach had us run over the first three and the last three hurdles. I remember dreading this workout, but I also remember that it led me to dread races a lot less.

Shuffle the Deck

This is a workout I got from **Coach Lee Pantas** of Asheville-Reynolds High School in Asheville, NC. Also, Andrea Mosher, a 400m hurdler at Illinois State University, mentioned that it's a workout she does fairly regularly. The workout is designed to improve the ability to use either lead leg with equal efficiency, and to develop a full confidence in both legs. In the workout, the athlete does a series of reps covering anywhere from 100 to 400 meters, setting up four to seven hurdles at race height, and staggering the distance between them anywhere from ten to thirty meters apart.

In the profile I did on **Coach Pantas**, he said that the key to the workout is that the athlete is going to have to attack each hurdle with whichever leg comes up. It puts the athlete in a situation where he or she is forced to react. After each rep, the coach "reshuffles the deck," to use **Coach Pantas'** words, meaning, the coach randomly changes the distance apart between each hurdle, so that the athlete doesn't get used to the stride pattern during the course of the workout, and therefore continues to need to adjust and use whichever lead leg comes up.

Steeplechase Workout

This isn't a workout that a steeplechaser would do, necessarily, but is a pre-season conditioning workout for intermediate hurdlers that mimics the set-up of a steeplechase race. In this workout, the hurdler runs 2-3 miles (timed or un-timed, depending on his or her conditioning level), clearing six hurdles per lap. The hurdles should be set at the same height as they would be for the 300/400m hurdle race (30" for females, 36" for males). The hurdles should be evenly spaced, with two on each straight-away, and one at the crown of each curve. This workout is good for working on hurdling technique, but is specifically designed to help build the athlete's cardiovascular strength. Also, because there are hurdles in the way, the workout is not as monotonous as a usual "distance" workout would be.

Finally, since sloppy technique causes a higher level of fatigue, this workout forces you to be efficient in negotiating the hurdle, and it also forces you to get low, to transition into an attack mentality in those last few steps before the hurdle, and to drive at each hurdle with aggression.

Variation:

To work on curve hurdling, set up two hurdles on each curve (one at the top of the curve, one at the bottom of the curve), and only one on each straight-away. As most curve-hurdling problems do not occur on the crown of the curve, setting the hurdles up at the top and the bottom of the curve will force you to deal with the balance issues you would have to deal with in a race.

Ins and Outs

This workout is as old as Track & Field, I suppose, and that's because it works. It's another one that's good for conditioning, and putting hurdles in the way is always a good method to make it specifically useful for hurdlers. In this workout, you sprint the straight-aways and jog the curves, running a total of anywhere between two to four miles, sprinting and jogging combined. The sprints should be run at about 75% - 85% of full speed. The jog between should be more of a bounce/shuffle, not a distance runner's fast-paced jog. The focus of this workout is on maintaining efficient sprinting mechanics, staying relaxed in the upper body, and developing cardiovascular strength.

Hurdle-specific variation: add a hurdle on each straight-away, on or about the 50-meter mark, so that every sprint includes the need for hurdle clearance. When you get in even better shape, add two hurdles on each straight-away, about 30-40 meters apart from each other. The hurdles can be at any height; raised as high as you like for the sake of the challenge. Generally, however, I would say set them at 30" (females) or 36" (males). I think it's important for hurdlers to always have the option of doing hurdle-specific variations of sprinter/quarter-miler workouts. It's a mindset thing more than a physical thing. Since the basic difference between a hurdler and a sprinter is that a hurdler has to negotiate barriers while sprinting, having hurdles in the way during workouts always keeps you tuned in to that fact.