

The Long Sticks

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The 300/400 sticks represent a sprint discipline that places the sprinter right in the midst of several areas where they can contribute to their teams. The long sticker can:

- a. Run both stick races
- b. Run on both relays
- c. High/long/triple jump

This can be either a Godsend or a curse for the coach and the sticker, depending on how you look at it. The tighter rhythm of the 100/110 sticks can make getting the long sticks downpat a futile exercise at best. But in high school you can win in both the stick races as long as your sticker has either great speed or technique, or is just better than everyone else. Now you may think either of those scenarios is okay by you, but not if you are a stick coach and want your sticker to reach the "top of the mountain."

There are several areas of development the long stick coach must attend to in order to see to it that their athlete is ready to go. One area of concern is the rhythm between the sticks. Running the sticks at practice with regular, irregular and increasing stick spacings is the best way to teach the ability to deal with whatever step problem might arise. The following is a method you can use at practice to get varied stick spacings to work for you (run 4-5 sticks in this drill).

Exercise	# Steps	Stick Spacing	Approach
17 step pattern	7	16.00 m	15 m
16 step pattern	7	17.00 m	15 m
17 step pattern	8	17.95 m	30 m
16 step pattern	8	19.00 m	30 m
17 step pattern	9	19.80 m	30 m
16 step pattern	9	21.00 m	30 m
17 step pattern	10	21.65 m	30 m
16 step pattern	10	23.00 m	30 m
17 step pattern	11	23.50 m	30 m
16 step pattern	11	25.00 m	30 m

You can set up 5 different lanes of sticks with irregular spacings to give them lots of experience having to deal with a different leg coming up on the sticks. You can set up a flight of sticks set for 7-9-11 and 13 steps to force them to deal with the "feel" of the rhythm. This way the sticker can be prepared to handle windy days, slow tracks, rainy days, days when you're just trying to qualify in a slow heat and you are prepared to deal with less than top end race pace.

Pattern the race so that you have created the best possible method to run over the long sticks. This is for the 50-second kid as well as the 36-second one. If you can get the slow one to go fast, just think of what you can do with a fast one (scary). Do repeats over sections of the race to give your sticker the "feel" of a good and a bad race.

Remember to run your stick race at times and distances that compliment their skills and abilities. Do not

run them over 3 x 500, or 600-400-200-400-600 after they have already run over the sticks. Distance runs are not going to help them get faster, so don't run them long and slow thinking it will make them stronger to run fast. They will be stronger to run slow (they'll be an enduring motor scooter--but at a slow tempo).

Using young women as an example, a 300 girl who can run 47 seconds and has a goal of 45.0 needs to run her workouts over and under the time frame for success. Workouts for the hurdles and the flat should be geared to go up to 60 seconds and down to all out top end (2-5 seconds). You may think that's not enough work, but if you run at the level for success, the intensity will speak for itself.

EX: 2x starts over the 1st 4 sticks

1x over 2-3-4-5

1x over 3-4-5-6

1x over 4-5-6-7

2x over 5-6-7-8-finish

walk back to 1st stick

walk back to 2nd stick

walk back to 3rd stick

walk back to 4th stick

done (this is a lot of work!)

EX: Run the turn sticks (3-4-5) and jog across back to the start

Hit the splits for the race and keep doing the runs until the desired splits drop off. Start 15 m before the 1st stick and sprint 15 m after the last stick.

They must hit the splits and the fatigue that will develop will mimic the increasing tiredness that they will feel in the race. Change the spacing during this workout to make them think on their feet and "feel" the race as it unfolds.

Do not overlook their speed development as you go through the season. Remember, speed development runs are not just runs less than race distance. Speed means 20-30-40s, hill sprints, short jumps and power jumps, fly in runs at the same distances. Coordinate and organize your technique, power/strength (critical for the sticker), speed development, speed "work", and speed endurance. And of course, REST is a four-letter word that even your pastor can use without getting his mouth washed out with soap.

The last point I would like to hit on is that the long stick rhythm needs a less aggressive takeoff and touchdown than the sprint sticks. The snap down of the lead/trail action in the sprint sticks must be lessened so that the flight over the sticks lasts a bit longer. Then, just before touchdown the lead/trail action kicks in and an "active" landing takes place. This also eats up a little of the running distance between the sticks (having 32.5 meters to run to each stick rather than 33.5 which can be huge as the race nears the 7th and 8th sticks and they start to look like they are 42" high).

The importance of rhythm in the stick races cannot be expressed strongly enough. It is the rhythm that gives you the "feeling" of the approach and takeoff when negotiating the sticks. Stick sprinters acquire a certain sense of where the sticks are in relation to whatever position they're in during the event. In the same way that a long jumper senses that they will be over, on or behind the board, a stick sprinter develops that "feeling" through repeated runs over the sticks set at different heights and spacings. This rhythm work covers the short sticks (in the form of low and close over 3-6 sticks) as well as the long sticks (in the form of low and close over as many as 15 sticks or sticks set 12.5 m apart around the track out to 200 meters).

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