

THE PLACEMENT OF HURDLES: AN OBSTACLE FOR THE YOUNG

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The provision of the best possible progression of hurdle heights and distances for the development of young hurdlers appears to be a universal problem. In the following short article, translated from Legkaya Atletika (Moscow), No.4, April 1989, the author discusses some of these problems in the systems employed in the USSR and the GDR. Some of the points made by the author should be of particular interest to school coaches, as the present situation for young athletes in Canada is by no means perfect. Re-printed with permission from Modern Athlete and Coach.

The development of hurdling technique depends largely on the correct choice of the placement of hurdles, in which the distance from the start to the first hurdle and the distances between the hurdles are the decisive parameters. The aim in short hurdles distances is to allow the athlete to reach the first obstacle in seven or eight strides and cover the distance between the hurdles in three strides.

Unfortunately the placement of hurdles according to our (USSR) present official rules fails to take into consideration the performance capabilities of young athletes. The distance from the start to the first hurdle, for example, corresponds to the distance applied to men and women (13.72 and 13.00m) already for 11-year-old boys and girls.

There is no need to be a hurdles specialist to understand further inconsistencies facing young athletes. The height of the hurdles for 11-year-old boys is 76.2cm, for girls in the same age group only 55cm. The distances between the hurdles 8.00m for boys, 7.50m for girls. Such rules are completely out of place and fail to take into consideration the fact that many girls in this age range have anthropometric measurements and physical performance capacities indicators well above those of the boys.

Without going into further details, it appears appropriate to draw attention to the hurdles distances and height of the hurdles at present used progressively for the different age groups in the German Democratic Republic. (See Table 1).

Some remarks appear to be in order when the German Democratic Republic's progressive system of hurdle heights and distances are considered for adoption in the Soviet Union.

TABLE 1: The heights and placements of hurdles in the German Democratic Republic.

| Age (years), Sex | Distance (m) | No. of Hurdles | Height | Distance | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------|----------|--------|
| | | | | Start | Finish |
| <i>Outdoors</i> | | | | | |
| 10 yrs boys and girls | 60 | 6 | 76.2 | 11.50 | 7.00 |
| 11 yrs boys and girls | 60 | 6 | 76.2 | 11.50 | 7.50 |
| 12 yrs girls | 60 | 6 | 76.2 | 11.50 | 7.50 |
| 12 yrs boys | 60 | 6 | 76.2 | 11.50 | 8.00 |
| 13 yrs girls | 80 | 8 | 76.2 | 12.00 | 8.00 |
| 13 yrs boys | 100 | 10 | 84.0 | 13.00 | 8.50 |
| 14-15 yrs girls | 100 | 10 | 76.2 | 13.00 | 8.70 |
| 14 yrs boys | 110 | 10 | 91.4 | 13.72 | 8.90 |
| 15 yrs boys | 110 | 10 | 91.4 | 13.72 | 8.90 |
| 16-17 yrs girls | 110 | 10 | 84.0 | 13.00 | 8.50 |
| 16-17 yrs boys | 110 | 10 | 106.7 | 13.72 | 9.14 |

- Norms are required in the USSR for the present 80m distance for 12-year-old boys. The alternative is a change to 60m hurdles with GDR's qualification standards. The remaining question is in the choice of stepping up to 100m hurdles for 13-year-old boys. Should it follow the 80 to 60m distance for 12-year-olds?
- According to our present rules 14-and 15-year-old boys are combined into one age group, using 100cm high hurdles, placed 8.80m apart. This appears acceptable only for the older boys and a lowering of the hurdle height to 91.4 cm for the 14-year-olds has to be seriously considered.
- The GDR system includes hurdles events for boys and girls in the 8 to 9 years age group. They compete over a 30m distance, which includes four hurdles placed 6.00m apart. The distance to the first hurdle is 6.00m and the height of the hurdles is 40cm. This, according to our present studies, appears to be unwise.

Our studies have shown that very low hurdles have a negative influence on the development of specific motor capacities in hurdling. The minimal height of hurdles in all age groups should correspond to the leg length of the young athletes. This can be simply measured by standing in a straddling position over a hurdle. In case of the 8 to 9 yrs. age group it would therefore appear to be more sensible to use 55 to 60cm high hurdles placed 4.80m apart. The distance from the start to the first hurdle would in this situation be 8.00m.

In general, the principle of increasing gradually the distances between the hurdles; as the technique of the young athletes improves, appears acceptable. However, it also should be taken into consideration that both boys and girls in the 8 to 9 yrs. age range differ considerably, not only in the dynamics of physical development, but also in their realization of motor movement. They should therefore not be combined in the same age group.

Further, it is questionable to set official standards for distances and hurdle heights for the very young. This is the age for all-round physical development and an introduction to skills that leads to more specific training later. Even 10 to 13 yrs. age range should have plenty of flexibility as far as hurdle heights and distances between the hurdles are concerned. Adjustments should be allowable according to individual demands and qualification standards are unnecessary.

A close look at the placement of the hurdles in the GDR reveals further that the distances between the hurdles are rather difficult for the average young athlete. They appear to be acceptable only for the talented and already well developed hurdlers, who have begun regular training at the age of 8 yrs. It should also be noted that the age grouping in the GDR is not based on the calendar year but on the actual age of the youngsters. An analysis of the ranking lists shows clearly the advantage of the older children over their younger counterparts in this classification, something to be considered in the placement of hurdles.

Finally, the author has in this article attempted to present some ideas for consideration. No attempt has been made to come to strict conclusions, nor to criticize the existing system employed for young athletes in the German Democratic Republic. All the author hopes is that this short discussion will give some thoughts to the authorities responsible for the placement and height of the hurdles in the young age range. After all, we can only hope to reach a rational conclusion to the rather difficult problem to provide the best possible progression of hurdle heights and distances for the development of young hurdlers.