Relay Races Essay, Research Paper

Relays

Relay racing has two main components – sprinting and baton passing. Each is vital in helping a team win. The main idea is to run around the track, passing the baton from one runner to the next.

The relay is primarily the only team event in all of track and field. Each team member must work together to achieve one common goal. Many Olympic teams are made up of many good sprinters that do not win because they do not work together as efficiently as possible. In the Olympics, there is a 4×100m relay and a 4×400m relay for both men and women.

The passing of the baton is the determining factor in almost all high level relay competitions. A good hand-off can easily make up for a lack of speed. A bad hand-off can cost a team all it’s speed.

The basic idea of the baton pass is to get the lead runner the baton while both runners are at top speed. This maximizes the effort of the team over the entire race.

There are two fundamental types of passes in the relay. The upsweep consists of the back runner sweeping their arm upward to the receiver’s hand. The downsweep consists of the runner moving their arm downward into the outstretched palm of the receiver.

The elementary outside change is one of the basic forms of baton passing. The initial runner carries the baton in the left hand and runs the outside half of the lane. In an upsweep motion, they pass the baton to the ‘V’ created by the receiver’s thumb and forefinger. The receiver stands on the inside half of the lane and is turned looking back over their right shoulder. The receiver has their left foot forward and is a modified crouch stance. Immediately after the baton exchange, the baton is switched from the right hand to the left hand.

This technique is easy to learn and promotes a good initial sprinting stance for all runners. Most runners have the same preferred hand and foot to start with, and the elementary outside change compliments that. This does force the runners to all start running from a stand still and more of the track is run than necessary.

The elementary inside change is very similar to the elementary outside change. The differences start with the initial runner carrying the baton in their right hand. This means the receiver will accept the baton in their left and immediately change over to the right. They will also look back over their left shoulder and have their right foot forward. The initial runner will run to the inside and the receiver will be on the outside. The baton should still be passed using the upsweep and land in the ‘V’ of the next runner’s hand.

This technique is also very easy to learn and promotes a good initial sprinting stance. Each runner must start on their less favoured foot and receive in their less favoured hand. The elementary inside change allows runners to cover a shorter distance than the outside change because each runner cuts a bit off each corner.

You still must be a good sprinter to run the relays as the bulk of the race time is spent sprinting. To be a good sprinter you must have good arm action. Keeping your arms moving forward and backward rather than across your body helps allow all your body parts to keep you moving in one plane. Good sprinters keep their toes facing straight forward. Any movement away from your running plane is non-productive. Smoothness and relaxation throughout your body allows you to use all your energy for running only. Normal breathing patterns are vital while sprinting. Holding your breath at any time will limit your oxygen and energy supply. A forward lean helps the initial acceleration, which is important for sprinting and in the hand-off.

To be a competitive sprinter/relay racer you would have to make a great commitment. Most teams would follow a basic schedule. Teams would on average practice 5 times per week with one day of rest and one day with a track meet/competition. Along with practices teams would also weight train early in the week on their own time. For coaching a team to win some important points in training your sprinters would be:

1. Don’t over-work your sprinters

2. Don’t over-race sprinters. Run only one meet per week and no more than 3 races in one day

3. Use a slow warm up and cool down

4. Stress static stretching

5. Run all races hard and relaxed for a consistency of intensity

6. React with good form under pressure. Don’t strain or tie up

7. Ease off hard training at the end of the week

8. Work on all sprinting skills each week

9. Maintain strength through weight training and quickness through starts

10. Encourage friendly competition in practice when working on block starts. This is the only time sprinters run all out in practice.

In conclusion, the most important factor in a relay race is the passing of the baton not necessarily the speed. Efficient passing will win you the race whether you use the upsweep, downsweep, inside, or outside exchange. Good luck and have fun!

References

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Rosen, Mel (1980). Practical Coaching Techniques for the Sprints and Relay. Ames, Iowa. Championship Books.