Training Tips

The role of SPEED and AGILITY in cricket.

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For many years avid cricket followers watched in awe as Jonty Rhodes flung himself around the field taking amazing catches, swooping in the field like a bird of prey closing in on it's target causing chaos in the batters minds and stealing countless runs that were seemingly never there. At some stage all of you who were watching his brilliance were left wondering, "How does he do that?" and quite simply Jonty, like all the other top fielders in the world, possessed a unique balance of speed, agility and anticipation. So lets delve a little deeper into these components and the role they play in performance on the field.

Firstly let me point out that of the speed, agility and anticipation components, the X-factor would most certainly be anticipation and to coach this most would agree is extremely difficult. So let us then focus on what we can improve through technique and training, that being speed and agility.

By definition Speed is described as the "rate of motion or progress" or the time taken to cover a certain distance and is usually related to linear (straight line) movement whereas agility is defined as "the power to move quickly and easily, nimbleness" and is describes the ability to change direction quickly and effectively.

When considering speed more often than not we consider maximal speed and acceleration and ultimately the goal of speed training is to get an individual to achieve maximum speed in as short a time as possible. This is obviously achieved through optimizing acceleration and is usually reached after a sprint acceleration phase of approximately 30 – 50m. Bearing that in mind it is likely that you may only get the opportunity to reach maximum speed a couple of times in an entire cricket match when chasing a ball to the boundary, our training interventions from a speed point of view need to target acceleration because cricket involves many bursts of explosive acceleration and linear distances in cricket are carried out over mostly 5 – 20m distances. The first and most important step in improving speed is to improve efficiency and we do this by improving running technique. This can be achieved through a basic understanding of technique and then the implementation of various technical drills involving apparatus such as hurdles, speed resistors and speed parachutes.

SPEED

Finally and for me most importantly we need to implement interventions focused on improving agility. This is achieved through drills that target foot movement and body position because these 2 factors will decide how quickly we change direction. If we can improve the speed at which our feet move we can improve the time it takes to move towards the ball or between the wickets. As part of my training sessions I will use ladders, hurdles and slalom poles to improve quickness and body position. The final step in the progression will see the introduction of fielding stimuli such as catching or ground fielding to ensure that the movements are relative to those that take place on the field of play and encourage reaction time and eye, foot and hand co-ordination.

A part of all of us wants to be the one who takes that brilliant catch, stops that vital run or steals the winning single to win the game. Through an understanding of the basic principles of speed and agility and the implementation of various basic training drills we can all improve how quickly we move and ultimately have a large role to play in both our personal success and the teams success as a whole.

AGILITY

SPEED & AGILITY