
What's That on Your Nose?

By Lee Taft

Have you ever had someone say to you, “What is that bump on your nose?” Now it could be any part of your body, but when someone makes you aware of something that may or may not be there it makes you self-conscious. All of a sudden you are checking to see what it is and you're wondering if anyone else noticed it. Yet had it not been mentioned at all you would have gone on as if nothing ever happened.

Unfortunately, this is what happens in the sports performance world. Athletes are being micromanaged. Every little movement is being observed and corrected. The problem is there are too many changes being made when no changes are needed.

If Michael Johnson, the Olympic gold medalist in the 200 and 400 meter run, hadn't found the perfect coach that realized his running style fit him, he may not have been as prolific of a runner. Every coach he met previously tried to change his style to fit the “normal running style.”

I see the same types of things happening all over the industry when it comes to multi-directional speed training. It is almost like coaches don't feel like they are coaching if they are not saying or changing something. The odd thing is, they are making changes sometimes even before the athletes have moved.

Part of being a good coach is knowing what has to be accomplished and realizing there is more than one way to do so. Not all athletes move alike. Not all athletes have the same strength levels to move in a way that might require certain strength. A good coach will let the athlete move first and then say nothing if nothing needs to be said or maybe say “good job” and move on. But if the athlete displays some faults that can easily be corrected then address those faults and those faults only. It is like saying to someone,

“What's that on your nose?” It will make them conscious of something that may or may not be there.

When I was a young coach I made the mistake of wanting to coach everything- be a regular fix all. All I did was cause unnecessary confusion in the minds of my athletes. I had to say something so I did. Sometimes saying nothing is the best coaching move you can make.

Over the past several years, I have created many DVDs that demonstrate the techniques that I use for speed training. In many cases, others view what I show in my programs as what I expect to be taught all the time. The reality is that the movement skills that I show are pretty much natural, but for more than 30 years coaches were incorrectly teaching speed skills, so I wanted to show natural reactive movement patterns that don't need to be taught per se. They just need to be modified if done incorrectly. Let's take the Plyo Step for example; it is as natural of an occurrence as there can be. If an athlete is in an athletic stance and they quickly react to something in front of them, they will use the plyo step without any conscious effort at all. But yet for years and years coaches have tried to take this natural movement away. And I can guarantee that when the first coach tried to correct it he or she had no reasonable reason to do so. They just figured they needed to coach something.

Recently, I have seen many coaches talk about how they break down the technique of speed training, especially multi-directional speed training. They break each movement down so that it changes the actual real movement. Most coaches don't realize that when you slow a speed skill down and don't find another way to mimic the actual speed or momentum that makes the skill what it is, the skill becomes different. The body positions change, the force required to move comes from a different angle, and the balance of the athlete changes. If a speed skill is going to be worked on, it has to be done close to

“game speed” to see the skill as it actually occurs.

When I am teaching or introducing a multi-directional speed skill I will show it so the athletes see what I want and then I let them go. If they do it well, enough said; I will prescribe sets and reps and let them do it. But if they show me an incorrect pattern I don't panic and I bring out every solution possible. I simply use a technique I have used for most of my coaching career - Guided Discovery. I will tell them something little and easy to understand and then allow them to try it. Chances are they will figure it out with only a little guidance. When an athlete figures it out on their own, it is self-satisfying to them plus it will be engrained much more effectively than if I had broken the skill down into several parts and changed the speeds of the movement in doing so.

Only do as much as you have to when trying to impact an athlete- guide them, coach them, set them up for success, but don't over coach them and cause them to be self-conscious of if they are doing it correctly. You don't want them looking in the mirror at an invisible bump on their nose.