

Starting.

In all sprints the start is of utmost importance. Many races are practically settled during the first second after the pistol shot.

Two things are necessary for a good start; first, to respond as quickly as possible to the report of the pistol, and second, to get under full speed as soon after starting as possible.

A man might be able to make a movement with exceptional quickness after hearing the pistol and still be quite unable to get into his stride rapidly, and he might be beaten in the start by a slower man who understood the art of getting up speed quickly.

The first element that was mentioned, that is, to respond quickly to a stimulus, has references to certain processes that go on inside a man, and which are partly mental and partly physical. A man hears a pistol shot, in other words the vibrations of air strike on the drum of his ear. They set up a nervous current which at once travels to the brain. Currents are at once dispatched to the muscles, which contract soon after receiving the stimulus. This takes time, currents travelling rather slowly over nerve fibres, and not nearly so fast as electrical currents. These nervous operations are performed quicker in some people than others, so that some people are naturally quicker than others. But practice will quickly lessen the time required to respond to the pistol shot. It must, however, be practice of a certain definite character. Do your best every time. This is imperative. Give your whole attention to it, clinch your hands, set your teeth, think of nothing else but the action you are about to make. Do not think of the pistol shot, think of the movement to be made. There are good reasons for this both practical and theoretical.

There is another matter where effort and practice will accomplish much, that is, in regard to the actual contraction of the muscles themselves. There is a small fraction of a second after a muscle gets its stimulus to contract before it actually does so. This is called the "latent period." A large stimulus to a muscle will make it contract not merely harder, but quicker than a weak one. That is, this latent period is shortened, so the start is quicker. Then, too, practice will shorten this period.

Never practice long consecutively, it does more harm than good. A half dozen starts are enough. A great fault with amateurs is that they practice too long, so that their nerves get tired and they consequently get into bad habits and do careless work. Never practice when you are tired or stale, it is injurious and will only make you slow.

To sum up what is under this head, practice! practice!! practice!!! Do your best every time. Do not practice when you are too tired to do your best work. Think only of the movement you are going to make. Make it with tremendous effort.

We now come to the second part, getting up speed. Under this head we must consider the different styles of the starts.

JUMP START.



No. 1.

Cut No. 1 represents the position taken both for the ordinary "Jump" start and for the so-called "Yale" start. The objection to the position is that it is very difficult to hold, the base being very small. A runner is so liable to lose his balance while waiting for the pistol, and thus not be prepared to go when the right time comes, or step over the line and be put back a yard. If one could stand flat-footed, it would enlarge the base, but this cannot be done. This position is especially risky for a



No. 1 a.

nervous man. Cut No. 1a. represents the first stride of the jump start. Note the difficulties: First, the arms are not used in the start, for they are found

in the same position as before. Second, the runner must jump from both legs to make up for this deficiency, most of the effort being thrown upon one part of his body, viz., the legs. Third, the possibilities of jumping too far or not far enough, and thus not secure a balance. Other things being right, the second stride will be a good one.

YALE START.



No. 2 a.

To meet these difficulties and yet use the same position, the "Yale" start was designed. Cut No. 2a. represents the first stride. The front leg has advanced about eighteen inches, and arms are swinging as in a regular stride. The balance is never lost as in the first one, and the start does not simply depend upon the effort of the legs.

HARVARD.



No. 3.

Cut No. 3 represents the so-called Harvard start. It is the same position except that the opposite arm is forward. Hence the arms and legs are in their proper relation from the beginning. The effort of "getting off" is



No. 3 a.

not nearly so great as in No. 1. Cut No. 3a. represents the stride.

FULL CROUCH.



No. 4.

Cut No. 4 represents the full crouch. Advantages: First, a large base. Few false starts are made from this position. Second, the arms are used. Cut



No. 4 a.

No. 4a. will show their position in the first, but you will notice that there is a tendency to bend the one coming forward, hence shortening the lever. Third, the snap of the back. A new element is brought to here, in that the

HALF CROUCH.



No. 5.

body is flexed upon the legs. Thus the powerful muscles of the back are

brought into play in raising the trunk.

To give more leverage with the arms, cut No. 5, known as the half crouch, has been designed. Here you have all the advantages of base, spring of legs, swing of arms, and snap of back. Cut



No. 5 a.

No. 5a. represents the first stride. It is proving very popular and is surely very safe.

A person who expects to sprint next year ought to be practicing in the gymnasium during the winter. It is a bad thing to practice with the same starter all the time, for you will get used to his method, and so will be thrown out when you come to a new man. One of the best ways to practice is to have some one light a firecracker and hold it where you cannot see it, or light it yourself and drop it on the floor behind you, then wait for it. There is absolutely no element of certainty in this and there is no such thing as beating the pistol in this way. This might be a good way to start races, using a cannon cracker, of course.—From the Physical Educator, by permission.



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