

STRENGTH & CONDITIONING



Speed & Agility Ladders

By Roger White (BS, CSCS),
Sterling Heights, MI

The speed and agility ladder is a very popular piece of equipment for coaches looking for ways of improving their speed, coordination, balance, and agility is the speed and agility ladder.

The ladder is made up of two nylon straps with plastic rungs spaced apart about 15-18 inches. It can be used in hundreds of ways, depending upon the training purpose. It can be purchased through the sports equipment manufacturers or can be made at home using supplies from your local hardware store (rope and PVC pipe).

LADDER RUN

Ladders can come in different shapes, lengths, and functions. Some ladders can be buttoned to make a

long ladder, or unbuttoned to make a shorter ladder. Other models have the capacity to adjust the distance between rungs, making it ideal for acceleration development.

How do I use a ladder? Ladders can be used for a variety of purposes. The two most obvious purposes are increased foot speed and coordination. By improving these qualities, your athletes will develop better footwork and improve their overall athleticism.

To get the most out of your ladder drills, it is important to progress from easy drills to more advanced. Have a set purpose before scheduling your drills into your practice plan.

If foot quickness is the ultimate goal, then choose drills that require fast foot movements.

If improving the ability to change direction is your main focus, progress through those types of drills.

LADDER RULES

By nature, athletes do not like failing. Helping athletes succeed in practice, as well as in training, is a must. When using a ladder, particularly for the first time, coach the athletes to perform the sequences correctly at slow speeds. Athletes love to go as fast as they can but will often trip, stumble and fall over the rungs, leading to frustration.

The first ladder rule is to perform the sequence perfectly. The phrase "Get it right" seems to fit nicely with this rule. Once the athletes "get it right," then they can "get it fast." For most athletes, they can learn the sequence within five repetitions.

The second ladder rule is to progress from easy drills to more difficult ones. This progression usually takes place over the course of several weeks. Waiting this long gives the athletes time to learn the sequence and then perform it as fast as they can.

After a few weeks of mastering a few drills, add one new drill, while eliminating one old one. This will allow each ladder session to stay at a

high level of intensity, instead of shifting to a learning intensity seen during the first few weeks. In each training session, 3-4 drills performed 3-4 times works great and can be done in five minutes.

The third ladder rule is to give athletes simple cues for performing each drill. Since the athletes know when they make a mistake or not, there is little need to tell the athlete to perform the drill correctly! However, giving them movement cues can greatly increase the learning of each sequence.

A FEW BASIC DRILLS

Quick Feet: The simplest drill of all. Athletes run through the ladder placing two feet inside each box. It can be performed forward, starting with both feet, and sideways both left and right.

Coaching Cue: Right-left-right-left; left-right-left-right.

Hop Scotch: The old grade school game is a great drill for developing coordination, balance and foot quickness. Perform this drill both forward and backward.

Coaching Cue: One in-two out; right in-two out-left in-two out.

Shuffle: This is a great drill for teaching athletes how to plant and cut during straight sprints. Athletes start on the side of the ladder and move the inside leg first in an in-in-out cadence. Perform this drill both forward and backward. An alternate movement for this drill is to run through, instead of shuffling through.

Coaching Cue: In-in-out; one-two-three. ■

Roger White (BS, CSCS) is the Owner and Founder of Sport X Training, based in Sterling Heights, MI. For more information, visit www.SportXTraining.com. More ladder drills are included in Roger White's book titled *Developing Youth Speed* found at www.DevelopingYouthSpeed.com.