

Improving Lateral Speed and Agility With Agility Rings



An excerpt from *Functional Training for Sports* by Mike Boyle.

A Lateral Warm-up is used to prepare the body for workouts devoted to improving lateral movement. The Lateral Warm-up consists of eight minutes of Agility Ladder work followed by 5 minutes of lateral dynamic flexibility.

The key is to stress the abductor and adductor groups to a greater degree than would be possible in the linear warmup. Obviously warm-up should be specific to the demands of the activity. The “linear only” influence of track and field has caused warm-up to often be one dimensional, or uniplanar.

The lateral warm-up prepares the athlete for the lateral movement and lateral speed progressions to follow.

Lateral Agility Progression

The old adage that you can't teach speed has been disproven for years. However, many coaches still believe that agility and coordination cannot be taught. In truth, change of direction, the essence of lateral movement, can be taught and comes down to three simple things.

1. Do you have the single leg strength necessary to not only stop movement, but to restart movement after a stop? Single leg strength is the major key to developing agility. Without single leg strength no amount of agility will allow athletes to make cuts at top speed.
2. Can you decelerate? Eccentric strength is the real key. Think of eccentric strength not as the ability to lower a weight, but instead as the ability to bring the body to a rapid stop. Eccentric strength is the ability to put on the brakes.
3. Can you land with stability? Is the proprioceptive system prepared to create a stable landing?

Athletes need to understand the most basic concept of agility: *In order to move to the left, the athlete must push off with the right foot.*

You never get anywhere fast by stepping in the direction that you are going; you have to literally push yourself in the direction you want to go with the foot that is furthest away. However before you can apply the push so necessary in change of direction, you need to decelerate and land with stability. Most of what coaches pass off as agility training is simply timing movement. Our philosophy is to teach movement, not time movement. We will not just ask athletes to run around cones and attempt to lower their time. We will teach athletes the proper way to execute a right turn, a left turn, or a 45-degree cut. To do this we begin with a simple drill we call 1-2 Stick.

The essence of this drill is the “stutter step.” A stutter step is the basic component of most offensive evasive maneuvers in sport. The crossover dribble in basketball and the wide dribble in field or ice hockey are just a few examples of athletes executing a stutter step to elude an opponent.

All of our lateral movement drills are taught using [flat fitness rings](#) to teach foot placement. We will not run laterally over mini-hurdles as we feel that lateral movement is generally more of a shuffle action than a step-over action. We want the feet moving quickly, accurately, and low to the ground.

