

Getting Coached

How to pick a good Sprint Coach?

If you're training for Speed and Agility (SAT) for lateral training or Sprint Training for pure speed linear training. A coach will help you focus on the goals and accomplish the results you want. They will help you hone your skills, get organized, and keep you practicing so that you can be successful. But are all coaches the same? No way! But how can you tell the difference between a phenomenal coach, a good coach or a mediocre one? One of the main factors in looking for a good sprint coach is obviously what experience they have. I have had many an athlete young and old, professional and amateur come to me after spending years with the wrong coach. The sad part is the athlete wasted time and money doing the wrong type of training. That's time lost they can't get it back. Or worse case scenario they became injured doing the wrong type of training! If you are considering hiring a Sprint coach take your time. Talk to a few coaches before making your decision.

The one thing I say to the athletes I train is: "To get speed you have to practice speed!" Of course, this requires many factors involving the athlete and coach. How do you get faster? Let's start with the fundamentals of finding a good Sprint/SAT Coach.

1. **Homework:** Parents/athletes do your homework! Preferably, you need a coach who knows how to work with your age group. Yes, there is a different training method working with youths versus adults. You want someone who is certified and trained in your age group. Check the coach's credentials. In addition, and more importantly, check the credentials of the group who certified the coach. Is it a reputable organization? Who are they? How long have they been in existence? Who are they associated with or backed by? Just because they have a big name does not necessary mean they know what they are doing? Also, just because the coach has a degree does not mean they know how to coach or know their craft. In addition, what is their degree in coaching or science? Remember, this is your future your planning do you really want to leave it up to someone who's not the real deal?

2. **Experience:** A good Sprint coach will have experience. A good coach will recognize your level of ability and train you appropriately. Your chances of getting an experienced sprint coach will greatly improve if the coach was a sprinter too. Better, if he or she is still competing or at least, currently coaching Sprinters. I know it's hard to find good sprint coaches but in the long run it's better for your health and career if you do your homework. So take the time to look for someone who knows your sport/position or event(s). Find out who they've worked with. Ask for a resume and references. Find out who you will be training with.

3. **Knowledge base:** A great Sprint coach will have a basic knowledge of a Multi-System Training Philosophy. This would consist of the: Musculoskeletal System, Energy System, Neuromuscular System, Neuroendocrine System, and the Proprioceptive System which, is all part of the Physiology aspect of training. They should also have knowledge of Psychology (to motivate) and know how to communicate effectively. They must also utilize an effective Training Philosophy as oppose to winging it at practice. Not to mention the Technical aspect of sprinting like the Five Bio Motor Skills: Speed, Strength/Power, Mobility, Coordination and Endurance (Speed endurance, Special endurance {type I and type II}) they need to know how the Central Nervous System (CNS) works and drills to develop and train this vital component of speed. They should know Explosive Strength Training and the mechanical aspect of sprinting i.e. form. Of course, I could spend a lot of time going over each of these factors but not today. Hopefully you're starting to get the point of what a good/great coach is.

4. **Relationship:** A good Sprint coach will possess the ability to foster a good coach-athlete relationship. This relationship should be based on trust if it is to work. The coach will become your training partner, your friend, your ally, and your mentor. This is how it should be. However, you, the athlete must believe the coach is looking out for your best interests but it is your responsibility to ensure you have the right person for the job.

5. **Goals:** A good Sprint coach will work with you to identify both short-term as well as long-term strategic goals; he or she should want to know your goals upfront. They will work with you to set up a training plan (Periodization Table) to achieve these goals. They will also explain how the two of you will realize these goals. And they should have a system of checks and balance to ensure you're sticking to the time table the two of you established in the beginning. If not the coach should be able to make changes in the program to correct it and be able to explain to you what's going on and why.

6. **Communication:** A good Sprint coach, can communicate even under the worst of circumstances, he or she can communicate what you need to do, and how to do it. They can articulate what you need to know in a clear fashion without screaming at you. Just because the coach was a great sprinter back in the day does not mean they are a good coach. One may have the ability to perform but not possess the ability to teach or the ability to articulate it properly. Does the coach ask questions to help identify what's really hindering your success? Or, do they tell you the same thing over and over like: "Get your legs up"? There may be a reason you're not able to get your legs up it could be weak core, hip-flexors or a number of other reasons (see #11).

7. **Lead by example:** A good Sprint coach will lead by example. They should also be able to demonstrate the drills to ensure you learn how to perform them properly. The coach themselves should be good athlete and look the part. They should be able to set an example of what an athlete should look like. I have seen way too many coaches who are totally out of shape. Yet these same coaches are trying to convey nutritional values and how important it is for their athletes to train properly. I will run with my athletes sometimes giving them instructions on form while we are sprinting. Yes, sprinting! I'm not expecting all coaches to be able to do that but again they should be able to at least perform the drills and hopefully, compete as well.

8. **Nutrition:** A good Sprint coach has to understand your nutritional needs. They should be able to give you a nutritional program that fits your lifestyle and age requirements. In addition, as we train the more stress and pounding we are putting on our bones. All of this can place a heavy toll on our body thus we need to be pro active as oppose to reactive to prevent injuries. Of course, there are many other nutritional factors that need to be considered but that's for another time.

9. **Time:** A good Sprint coach will try to give everyone equal time and will make themselves accessible. A friend of mine trains with semi-pro and professional runners she feels left out because the coach does not give her any attention. His main focus is on the money makers. She is the only Masters' athlete he has. It is imperative that the coach and athlete try to bring in others who are like minded and within the same age category and training level. This will allow the coach to set up another practice session for your age group if necessary. Also, training together with others with like minded goals will help the athletes push each other in practice. And the coach will get a little more money, a win, win scenario all around.

10. **Support:** A good Sprint coach will make the time to support you at your events. Having your coach at your event can mean the difference between winning and losing. During your game or event they should take notes of items you need to work on. Of course, most of this will be discussed during practice before your event.

11. **Elucidate:** A great Sprint coach will recognize your strengths and weaknesses. He or she should be able to explain why you're having difficulty performing a drill or exercise and should be able to tell you how to correct the problem. They should be able to tell you what the problem is, what's causing it, and what affect/effect it will have on your body or performance. They should know that there is a major difference in training volume, nutritional values, recovery system, weight bearing exercises, between youths and adults. To prevent injuries they should provide testing to see what needs to be worked on before you advance into more strenuous training program. Sometimes they will need to play detective. Many times I have found out that my athletes think they need more training during competition season which, can lead to over training or the wrong type of training "Reversibility".

12. **Coaches Philosophy:** A good Sprint coach will have their "Coaches Philosophy" posted on their website or handy to ensure they are following it. Because, sometimes we need to be reminded as to why we love what we do...

13. **Edification:** A great Sprint coach stays updated on the latest information. The more we learn about the human body the more things change. A coach who is training the same way they did two years ago is not doing their job to stay current. They should be on a quest of constantly learning and improving. They should have a good knowledge base of the human body and how it applies to sprinting. One of the areas that I see neglected in training is the Central Nervous System (CNS). The CNS plays a very important part in sprinting and should be trained and trained properly. Even in the warm-up drills if you're doing the wrong type or not doing them correctly you're giving the CNS the wrong signals. If you're doing the wrong type of weight training you're giving the CNS the wrong signals. This applies to your whole training program. If you're doing the wrong type of training it could set you back months or even years. Think about it: Anaerobic versus Aerobic, Fast twitch versus Slow twitch or Endurance versus Speed endurance or Strength endurance. Doing the wrong type of training is called "Reversibility". Again, I could go on in more detail but I hope you get the idea. Sprinting is a science and as Hippocrates said: "Thinking that you know is one thing, knowing is quite another. Thinking that you know is ignorance, knowing is science."

Coach Dixon has competed and coached Track for over 30 years, in the sprint events (60m-800m). He has coached many; Nationally ranked youth athletes, American Masters record holders, and World record holders in events from the 60m to the 1500m. He is certified to coach Elite Youth and Adult athletes for International level competition via USATF. In addition, he is a spokesperson for the USA Track & Fields [Win With Integrity Program](#) and director of USATF [Coaches education](#) programs: [Level 1 School](#) (where we coach the coaches).

Got Speed,

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