

The Lead Leg

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A discussion of the lead leg cannot start at the 1st [hurdle](#). It has to begin in the [starting blocks](#). For an 8 step approach in the high hurdles, which is the normal approach for the majority of men and women hurdlers, including elite and word class, the lead leg will be the leg in the back block.

The lead leg attack begins with a high knee action and with the foot "dorsi flexed" (toe back toward the knee). This action comes from the hip flexor (quads and groin). When driving the knee into the hurdle, the foot should always stay behind the knee. A locked knee over the hurdle occurs when leading with the foot, which causes a jumping effect and loss of speed. If the knee is held in a locked position during hurdle clearance, a delayed landing will result.

Some hurdlers, depending on their size and speed will take more than eight steps to the 1st hurdle or more than three between the hurdles. Some will take off to close to the hurdle with their normal stride. This can cause problems in the future because they will do everything possible to get their lead leg over the hurdle (i.e., drive their leg to the outside of the hurdle or bend their knee to the inside). This habit stays with them once they get stronger and faster, and start taking 8 steps to the 1st hurdle or 3 steps between hurdles.

The lead knee should cross the hurdle in a slightly flexed position to ensure an efficient and fast cut down and landing. The lead leg must be lifted and then extended, straight up and down, or the hurdler will land off balance. At the same time the lead leg is lifted, the lead arm or opposite arm is extended forward. It should be driven forward toward the hurdle and not crossed over the body's midline because this will tend to twist the upper body, which in turn, results in a loss of balance and timing. When the lead leg's foot advances over the hurdle and starts downward, the descent phase begins. Strong knee flexor (hamstring and calf) are essential for a fast cut down of the lead leg. As the trail leg comes forward, the equal and opposite reaction is the backward action of the lead arm. If the shoulders are to remain square throughout the flight then these two reactions must be equal. Since the legs have more mass than the arms, the arm must swing wider than the leg to counteract its reaction. This action is terminated as soon as the lead leg hits the ground.

The touchdown foot is to be placed in front of the body (6 - 12 inches) at the time of impact with the ground. The ankle needs to be strong to keep the athlete tall upon landing and prevent them from "mushing out" (body collapsing toward the track).

Lead Leg Drills

All drills should be done with both right and left lead legs. It not only keeps muscles in balance, but teaches athletes to hurdle with both legs.

Walking, Skipping, Running Lead Leg Drill

Purpose: Serve as warm up prior to hurdle workout and to develop proper lead leg action.

Description: Begin with 3 to 5 hurdles spaced at regular hurdle distance. Use a 30" height or lower for beginning hurdlers. The athlete approaches the hurdles so that the lead leg will go over the side of the hurdle and the trail leg will be in the open lane adjacent to the hurdle. The knee is then driven at the hurdle. As the foot reaches the hurdle top, the lead leg should be forced quickly to the track. For the running drill, the number of steps between hurdles will generally be 5 short quick steps. If the athlete is uncomfortable going over the hurdle, have them move to the outside of the hurdle until they are used to the drill.

Common Errors:

1. Straight lead leg.
2. Swinging lead leg to inside or outside.
3. Be sure to emphasize arm action while working on leg action
4. A short hop/step just before lead leg leaves the ground should be discouraged.

Wall Drill for Lead Leg

Hurdler stands about 1.5 meters from the wall. The lead leg's knee is driven up before the lead foot and the hands are driven at the wall. The hips are kept high and forward during the exercise and the athlete needs to stay on their toes.

Common Errors:

1. Failure to keep the hips up and the athlete standing too close to the wall to execute the drill.

Lead Knee Kick Ups (quick rhythm drill)

Toe comes up (led by lead knee) and touches hurdle board and then quickly back down to the ground. Repeat rapidly. Use correct arm action. Height of hurdles is not important.

Sitting Lead Leg (muscular endurance in hip flexor)

Sitting on the ground in hurdler's position, lift lead leg off of ground as high as possible, keeping knee bent and foot dorsi flexed. Can either repeat rapidly or hold. Repeat with other leg.

Same Leg Walk Overs

Set up hurdles so athlete can walk over them with one step. The distance and height should fit athlete. Walk over using same lead leg and trail leg on each hurdle. Concentrate on driving lead knee up and down quickly on the other side of the hurdle. Pause between each hurdle. Repeat with other leg.