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Megan Joy Hoffmann & Jiling Liu

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# Teaching Triple Jump to Middle and High School Aged Track Athletes



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By Megan Joy Hoffmann and Jiling Liu 

**T**riple jump is a track and field event in which athletes run and perform a three-step jump into a pit of sand (World Athletics, 2020). After they land and exit the sand pit, the entire length of their three-step jump is then measured and recorded. Teaching athletes how to triple jump seems to be a challenging task, especially among middle and high school aged track athletes (Brenzikofer et al., 2021). Often when young athletes initially learn how to triple jump, they know nothing more than just basic mechanics and principles of the movement. They may not be able to pick up the movement perfectly after the first day of practice. To assist teaching this complex technique, we will discuss an effective approach that involves proper preparation, breakdown of three phases, and combining each phase into a unified, fluid movement.

## Preparation

One of the most important components of any sport, including triple jump, is the preparation or warmup for the activity. The warmup needs to begin with static stretching, followed by plyometric exercises, and ending with three run-throughs on the triple jump runway. The run-throughs are necessary because, as athletes warm up, their stride lengths will increase. Because triple jump is based on hitting a mark consistently, athletes need to be properly warmed up so that their stride lengths can become consistent. Once athletes have stretched and are warmed up, the basis of triple jump can be explained and modeled.

Athletes should be taught what the movement is, how the jump is measured, and where they need to be landing on the board. After all the basic information about triple jump is covered, athletes need to decide with which foot to jump off. This can be done by the coach standing at the end of the runway next to the sand pit and having an athlete stand in line at the other end of the runway. The athlete on the runway will be instructed to run and jump into the pit without considering the takeoff board or mark; simply run and jump. This is to see with which foot the athlete naturally jumps off. After the athlete jumps, tell them with which foot they jumped off, and it will be their end foot for the jump. Have each athlete run and jump twice to make sure they are jumping off with the same foot consistently. If an athlete switches foot between the two jumps, ask them to run a third time, and use the foot this time as the jumping foot.

## Three Phases

Once a jumping foot has been established, it is time to begin working on the three phases of triple jump: Hop, Step and Jump. Each of the three phases accounts for roughly one third of the total jump length, so they are equally important (Romer & Weimar, 2019).

During phase one, Hop, the athlete will take off and land on the same foot. This foot will be the *opposite* of their jumping foot. The athlete should be hopping out and forward down the runway rather than up (Hay, 1992). The most effective way to teach this phase is to demonstrate it first for athletes. Explain that the leg with which they jump off

and on which they land will go through a “cycling” motion to drive them forward. A good drill to teach this phase is having athletes stand and jump in place while practicing the cycling motion to become comfortable with the movement (Mohammed, 2015). Once the first phase has been practiced, it’s time to begin the second phase, Step.

When athletes land on that same leg from phase one, they will then take the opposite leg and drive their knee up and forward to keep that momentum going forward. This contact immediately transitions an athlete to phase two, Step. At the end of Step, the athlete will land on the opposite leg that is used to drive the body forward. The foot that they land on should be the jumping foot. To practice this skill, have athletes slowly jog anywhere from the runway and go through phase one and then as soon as they land from phase one, practice driving the knee forward and landing for phase two. Here we need to emphasize driving that knee *up* and *forward* and athletes should try to stay in the air for as long as possible. It is exceedingly important to practice both phases together to help athletes become comfortable with the movement as a whole and to help them learn how to transition from one phase to another (Brenzikofer et al., 2021).

The last phase, Jump, is similar to a long jump but there is not as much momentum and speed going into it. This is when arms become critical in assisting driving the body forward and out. During phase three, athletes should jump out rather than up and throw their arms *up* and *forward* to help keep the body’s forward momentum. It is also important to teach athletes to never fall backward or put their hands back when landing because measurements are taken from the furthest back point in the pit, which is not always where their feet land (World Athletics, 2020). Athletes should also land with feet together in the pit. To practice this phase, combine phase one and two and add in the last step of jumping and throwing the arms up and forward to gain forward momentum (Fukashiro et al., 1981). Once athletes have practiced all three phases together and feel comfortable with the movement, it is time to put it all together on the runway.

## All Together

When having athletes practice on the runway, start them all from the 24-foot board to make sure they all make it into the pit when jumping. If a 24-foot board is unavailable, measure back 24 feet and create a board using a floor tape on the ground. Have them place their starting foot (the foot they use in phase one) on the board with their heel approximately an inch forward from the foul line on the board and the other foot behind. Stand down the runway and have athletes run down the runway *away* from the pit. Count and mark the spot where their lead foot hits on the runway for the seventh time. This spot will be where athletes start their takeoff from to perform the full jump into the pit. This is called a run-through. Athletes will then line up with their phase one foot forward on the mark made down the runway. Remind them to make sure they are running consistently, taking consistent stride lengths, and their steps are correct, so

that they do not scratch on their jump (Eissa, 2014). For the first few times of running and jumping down the runway, tell athletes not to pay attention to the board but just go through the motions of the jump. Watch where they land in relation to the board when jumping and adjust their mark as needed. If athletes are struggling with the movement, have them move off the runway and practice at half-speed until they feel comfortable enough with the movement to practice on the track.

## Conclusion

Triple jump can be a difficult movement to teach and perform. By following the steps described above, young athletes should be able to identify critical elements of the technique and be prepared to have a flow experience during their training. In addition, we would like to emphasize the following points to assist effective teaching of triple jump:

- Be sure athletes are always warmed up and take run-throughs before anything else to help avoid injury.
- Each phase is equally important, so be sure put equal focus on all three phases when teaching the movement.
- Once the full movement has been taught, break up areas of focus as needed for each athlete.
- Using slow-motion videos to demonstrate the skill is an effective way to show students the breakdown of each phase (Zerf et al., 2015).
- Always remember to be patient and encouraging with athletes who are new to the skill.

## ORCID

Jiling Liu  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4264-5806>

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Megan Joy Hoffmann was a senior undergraduate student in the Physical Education Teacher Certification program at the submission at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX.

Jiling Liu ([dalingliu@tamu.edu](mailto:dalingliu@tamu.edu)) is a clinical assistant professor in the Department of Kinesiology & Sport Management at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX.

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