

# Race Strategy for the 400 Meters

By

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Based on the times posted in the 400 meters and the 1,600 meter relay by athletes I've coached I feel I can speak with some authority on the topic.

## 400 METERS

Lamont Smith	44.30
Darnell Hall	44.34
Kempa Busby	44.80
Samuel Matete	44.88
Seymour Fagen	44.88
Andrae Williams	44.90

## 1600 METER RELAY

Texas Tech University	3:01.69
Blinn Junior College	3:01.89
University of Arkansas	3:02.02
Blinn Junior College	3:02.22
Blinn Junior College	3:02.86
University of Arkansas	3:03.14

You may be aware that the human body can't sprint an entire 400 meter distance. Scientific studies have shown that the human body can only sprint all out for about 350 meters. Because of this, the athlete must find a point somewhere in the race to "relax" for about 50 meters in the race.

If you break down the 400 meter race into four equal parts, there will be four 100 meter segments. When looking at the races of the great world class 400 meter runners the first thing to notice is that the first 100 meter segment is always the fastest of the four. This is because the human body's "SPEED" energy system is completely fresh at the beginning of the race. No matter how hard the athlete tries to run any of the other four 100 meter segments, the first 100 meter segment will always be the fastest provided an honest effort is being put forth by the athlete.

It is my belief that to be a great 400 meter runner, athletes must have good 200 meter speed along with the strength of an 800 meter runner.

## **Race Modeling**

As preparation for a great 400 meter race, I like to have my athletes do 300 meter “event” runs.

I break these event runs down into the following zones:

- 150 Meters:                   Get out *hard* and “*Attack*” at 90%-95% effort!
- 151 to 199 Meters:       “Chill-out” and let the momentum that you created during the first 150 meters carry you to the 200 meter mark.
- 200 Meters to Finish:   With the emphasis on cycling the arms quicker and be sure to not over stride or reach. During this final phase to the finish “desire” and “heart” are vital to overcome the lactic acid that often surfaces during this final phase of the race.

## **How to Time the 300 Meter “Event” Run**

I time the first 150 meters and then time the next 50 meter zone and then get a split time for the final 100 meters. Then, I give the athlete a final or total time for the 300 meters. Here is an example:

150 Meters	16.5
50 Meters	6.5
<u>100 Meters</u>	<u>12.5</u>
300 Meters	35.5 seconds

## **Curve Running**

It is important that the athlete is aware of how to run the turn as there are two 100 meter segments in the race or ½ of the race is run on a curve. To master the race, the athlete must learn to lean into the curve. To do this the athlete must dip the head inwards to the left as well as lower the inside left shoulder. This will allow the athlete to “flow” gracefully around the turn with

the turn instead of trying to fight or “out-muscle” the turn. The athlete’s arms should not cross the mid-point of their body when running the curve. *No matter how strong the athlete is he will never win fighting the turn.*

### **Late Race Charge**

After the athlete relaxes for about 50 meters he must be ready to attack the final segment of the race by shifting gears one final time. Great 400 meter runners attack from 150 to 200 meters from the finish line.

Athlete’s who wait until the final 100 meters and then find a last minute gear, cheat themselves out of running a much faster time. Athletes who attack from 150 to 200 meters out from the finish line are the true champions in my opinion. They are willing to lay it on the line with “heart”.

### **The Final 100 Meters**

As the athlete comes of the curve, he must be running in “*Hips Tall*” position. During this final stage of the race it is important that the athlete focuses on great frequency with “*quick arms*” and good knee lift. Most athletes try to “over-stride” or reach during this final segment only to find that they tire even quicker. If the athlete keeps the shoulders and the face relaxed during this period of great lactic acid build-up they will be successful in getting to the finish line with a great time.

### **Race Splits**

As I coach I believe in the high school and the college 400 meter runner running the first and the second 200 meters in the race with 1.50 second differential. World Class athletes should have a differential of between 1.00 to 1.25 seconds. Here are examples below:

<u>First 200 Meters</u>	<u>Second 200 Meters</u>	<u>Final 400 Meter Time</u>
22.25	23.75	46.0
22.5	24.0	46.5
22.75	24.25	47.0
23.0	24.5	47.5
23.25	24.75	48.0
24.0	25.5	49.5
24.5	26.0	50.5
25.0	26.5	51.5
25.5	27.0	52.5

# Example of a Championship Race

## 400 Meter Dash finals 1988 Summer Olympic Games Seoul, Korea

Place	Athlete	Country	First 200	Second 200	Time	Dif.
Gold Medalist	Steve Lewis	USA	21.41	22.46	43.87	1.05
Silver Medalist	Butch Reynolds	USA	21.68	22.22	43.93	.57
Bronze Medal	Danny Everett	USA	21.37	22.72	44.09	1.35
4 <sup>th</sup> Place	Darren Clark	Australia	21.61	22.94	44.55	.33
5 <sup>th</sup> Place	Innocent Egbunike	Nigeria	21.76	22.96	44.72	1.20
6 <sup>th</sup> Place	Bert Cameron	Jamaica	21.66	23.28	44.94	1.66

**We also do numerous drills for the sprinters, hurdlers and relays. I have also published the following materials for junior high, high school and age group track coaches:**

- **Coach Silvey's "Arkansas" Training Program (Book)**
- **The 45 Minute Workout for Middle School & Small HS Program's (Book & DVD)**
- **The 49 Minute Championship Workout Program For Track & Field (Book & DVD)  
(4 week general conditioning program & 16 Week training program)**

**If you like information on any of these please go to my website:**

**[SSEproducts.com](http://SSEproducts.com)**

**Good luck in developing your 400 meter runners!**

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