

## **BAYLOR SPRINT RELAY EXCHANGE**

**By Clyde Hart  
Head Track Coach  
Baylor University**

Over the years, there have been many types of sprint relay exchanges that have been used to varying degrees of success. As both a participant and a coach, I have used many different methods of exchanging the baton and have found each to have advantages and disadvantages. I can recall using the upswing method with the outgoing runner changing the baton from one hand to the other before making the next pass. Later we were introduced to a newer method which called for the baton to be kept in the same hand that the outgoing runner received it. We felt at that time we were getting a tremendous advantage over the opposition who were still using the old-fashioned method of changing the baton from hand to hand. Of course we accomplished this miracle of miracles by simply alternating left, right, left, right.

I feel now, looking back on this style of exchanging the baton, that the major thing was probably not the fact that we did not exchange hands with the baton but that we, as a team, were sold on the fact that we were gaining a decisive advantage over our opposition because we were saving time in not moving the baton from one hand to the other. I continued to use this method during my high school coaching career and my early years at Baylor. In about 1970, we decided to make a drastic change in our traditional manner of handling the baton and go to the overhand pass with the flat palm up by the receiving runner. I felt for many years that this was a very excellent way of receiving the baton and today still feel this to be an excellent way to make a good and fast exchange. However, while making a recruiting trip to West Texas and visiting with a fine high school coach, he showed me a method he was using for his high school sprint relay team. At first I was not very impressed with this method because I just could not see how it could work with any degree of accuracy and how you could possibly teach youngsters to do what he was asking them to do.

Upon returning home, I experimented with his method and was amazed at how fast our youngsters could pick up on this and we have been using a variation of this method ever since that time. In my opinion, it is an outstanding way to achieve a quick, fast exchange with a minimum of error. Basically, the sprint relay exchange we use is very similar to the regular overhand pass that most people use today. However, there is one major difference and that is in the actual exchange of the baton from incoming to outgoing runner. In our method the outgoing runner does not have the baton presented to him but instead he literally takes it out of the incoming runner's hand. Most people would say that it is totally impossible for an outgoing runner, without visual aid to take a baton out of an incoming runner's hand while going at full speed. I believe you will readily see when we go through our drills that it is not only possible but quite easy to accomplish this without a great deal of work. The average person watching the exchange being made, not knowing before hand the technique being used, would think he was watching the same method that was used in the past.

One of the major advantages is obvious and that is that the outgoing runner is able to concentrate totally on his responsibility of gaining as much speed as possible prior to receiving the baton. After all, this is the real key to fast relay running; making sure the

outgoing runner is going at the maximum speed he can possibly attain. In most relay exchanges, the outgoing runner will have to thrust his arm back and hold it in this position until the baton is given to him and he is able to resume a normal running position. Sometimes it only takes a matter of a fraction of a second for this to be accomplished. In other cases I have seen runners run with his arm in a back position for several yards before receiving the baton. There is no way an outgoing runner can reach top speed while running with one arm extended back and the other arm pumping vigorously trying to obtain as much speed as possible. This is not a natural running style and does not offer this runner a fair opportunity to get a good run out before receiving the baton.

In our method, the outgoing runner is able to use both arms in a vigorous manner much as a runner does in leaving the starting blocks. We all agree that the arms are a vital factor in gaining a good fast start. In our method, a runner can continue to use his arm even while the exchange is being made. Upon a sound command the outgoing runner will swing back his take hand and literally grab the baton from the incoming runner's hand and be back with a natural swing without ever missing a movement. We use the same sound command method as we did in our old exchange style. At first appearance, one would think this method of exchange to be very dangerous and that there would be a high probability of dropping the baton. Over the years of using this method, I have found the contrary to be true. There are several reasons for this.

First, it puts the full responsibility of the exchange on the incoming runner and allows the outgoing runner to concentrate entirely on getting a fast start and building as much momentum as possible before taking the baton. I find that at the end of a relay exchange, the incoming runner is decelerating and any action that he takes at this time will not hurt his speed nearly as much as the one who is trying to generate speed. The incoming runner aims the baton at the elbow of the outgoing runner and when he feels he is in a position to make a clean exchange, he will give a command. In our case the command is "Hey!" The outgoing man with a super-quick motion snatches the baton from the incoming runner's hand and is on his way. In a rare case, when the outgoing runner misses the baton on his first grab, he simply will resume his natural arm swing and will make a second grab at it on his natural back swing. In the old method of exchanging the baton, if the outgoing runner misses the baton on the first give, it usually results in the baton falling to the track. But in our case, the baton never leaves the incoming runner's hand until the outgoing runner has taken it from him. I feel that this insures us of a better chance of making a cleaner pass than it did in the old method of giving the outgoing runner the baton by simply laying it in his hand. As they say, "the proof is in the pudding," and we will demonstrate to you in the drills we show our kids. We are continually showing our youngsters this method because the ones we get from the high schools are rarely ever using this technique. You will face the same problem on continually showing our youngsters this method because the ones we get from the high schools are rarely ever using this technique. You will face the same problem on continually showing new youngsters this technique each year. I find it is very easily adapted.

Three of the drills we use for sprint relay exchange are similar to the drills that you will be using for any type of exchange you might use. However, we emphasize a couple of different points in order to change drills to accommodate the method we are using.

First, we will insist that the incoming runner will make sure that he has the proper distance from the outgoing runner before giving the command for him to swing back to take the stick. This is done by making sure that the incoming runner is about double arms length from the outgoing runner before presenting the baton, aiming it at the outgoing runner's elbow. This is very important. If he will aim the baton directly at the outgoing runner's elbow, the pass will be made. The key for the outgoing runner is to remember that when the sound command is made, he is to immediately swing back his hand and grab the baton. He should remember to keep his hand of the arm that is to be swung back in a position similar to that of a runner in a starting line position. That is, have the fingers and thumb spread wide apart, giving a wider target in which to take the baton. In many cases this will be anywhere from six to ten inches. If the baton is not in exact position, the runner will still be able to grasp it if it touches any part of the wide spread palm.

Drill One is simply a drill involving the two participating exchange men. The incoming runner stands behind and slightly to the side of the exchange side of the outgoing runner and gives him a sound command, at which time he aims the baton at his elbow. The outgoing runner swings back as quickly as possible with his hand in the proper position and takes the baton. This is repeated as many times as the coach thinks is necessary; we usually try to take about twenty-five of these before moving on to the next drill.

Drill Two is very similar to drill one except this time we line up the four participating exchange men in the order which they will be running and we exchange the baton right, left, right, left. The four exchange men will exchange in the same manner that they were exchanging as pairs except this time the drill will require them to exchange completely down the line until it gets to the last man.

Drill Three is usually the drill that will conclude our drill session. We call it the "Hot Stick Drill". This is the one they enjoy the most and I feel they get a lot of benefit from this as it is excellent for them to get their confidence that they can get the baton without even looking back. It is quite amazing to me that they can handle it in the manner in which they do. In fact, we even ask the incoming runner on this drill to move the baton slightly each time so they can see that they can exchange without the baton being exactly in the same place each time. The runner will not be expecting it to be in a certain spot but will keep his hand spread open wide so that the baton could be moved several inches either way and the exchange would not be affected in any way. It gets the name "Hot Stick Drill" simply because we are working the drill as in Drill One in pairs and the incoming runner is passing the baton to the outgoing runner except this time the incoming runner keeps his hand in exact position after the outgoing runner takes the stick from his hand. The outgoing runner will then swing the baton back and put it in the incoming runner's hand. On the next swing he will take it out and this is repeated, taking it and putting it back as many times as they can possibly do it until someone breaks the rhythm. I think it is an excellent drill.

Of course, we take full speed hand-offs each week working from half, three quarters and to where we are taking three to four fast exchanges at each position. We do this through the first three days of each week, exchanging the baton at full speed. Daily hand-off drills must be done so that the runners are confident they can do the exchange

without difficulty. Moving on to the track and at full speed, there is a tendency to revert back to throwing the hand back so the incoming runner can place the baton in the hand, but will rapidly learn to take the baton as confidently at full speed as in the standing position. I believe one of the primary secrets in a good relay team is their confidence in the advantage they have over their opponent which their method gives them. After experimenting with this method, you have a good selling point to spur your kids on to better and greater performances in relay running.

# **4 x 400 Relay Running**

## **I. Selection of Personnel**

- A. Close observation of all candidate's abilities is important**
- B. The best four open 400-meter runners are not always best for the relay, but it's a good starting point.**

## **II. Placement of relay team members**

- A. Normally the fastest runner should run last. However, if the team is not competitive enough to have a chance to win, then run him/her earlier in the line-up.**

- B. The lead-off runner needs to be consistent. A strong runner such as 400 Intermediate hurdler or 800 runner would work well leading off the 4x400 relay.**
  
  - C. The second runner should be a sprinter-type runner because he/she needs to run the first 200 in lanes, and the ability to get to the break point is important.**
  
  - D. The third runner is a competitive “go-after-them” type runner. Usually it’s the second-best 400 runner.**
- III. Include 200, IH, and 800 runners, as well as 400, in the pool of runners to be considered.**

**Many runners will run totally different races with a baton in their hand.**

**IV. Hand-offs**

- A. More time can be given on a 4x400 relay hand-off than can be given on a 4x100 relay.**
- B. Right-to-left hand-off is preferred.**
- C. The incoming runner should present the baton high so it can be easily seen.**
- D. The outgoing runner should not take his eyes off the incoming runner.**

- E. The outgoing runner should let the incoming runner get close enough to let him/her sprint out hard and take the baton while running as fast as possible.**
- F. The outgoing runner will take the baton by reaching upward like picking an apple off a tree.**

## **V. Common mistakes**

- A. Outgoing runner not going out hard enough at start.**
- B. Outgoing runner taking eyes off incoming runner.**
- C. Trying to make more than one pass. There is time for only one pass.**

- D. Getting boxed inside and not being able to get out and run.**
- E. Not pacing oneself (running too fast at start and losing valuable time at the end by not being able to run through hand-off zone.)**

