

NSA PHOTOSEQUERICE 35 - 100M HURDLES: GAIL DEVERS

Photosequence by Helmar Hommel (© Hommel AVS 1996), commentary by Lorna Booth

Lorna Booth is a former British record holder — 12.98sec in 1978 — for the 100 meters hurdles. She was Gold Medalist in the Commonwealth Games of 1978. She is now actively engaged in coaching the hurdles event.

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Gail Devers (USA)

The sequence shows Devers clearing the 9th hurdle in the first semi-final at the IVth IAAF World Championships in Athletics, Stuttgart 1993, which she won in 12.67sec. In the final she won the gold medal in 12.46sec.

- Born: 19 December 1966
- Height: 1.62m
- Weight: 52kg
- Best marks:
 - 12.46sec (100m hurdles / 1993)
 - 10.82sec (100m / 1992 & 1993).
- Devers was Olympic Champion in 1992 and World Champion in 1993 and 1995.

Progression:

		100m	100m hurdles
1983	(16)	11.69	
1984	(17)	11.51	14.32
1985	(18)	11.19	13.16
1986	(19)	11.12	13.08
1987	(20)	10.98	13.28
1988	(21)	10.97	12.61
1989	(22)		<i>ill</i>
1990	(23)		<i>ill</i>
1991	(24)	11.29	12.48
1992	(25)	10.82	12.55
1993	(26)	10.82	12.46
1994	(27)	11.12	-
1995	(28)	11.04	12.61

Commentary

Gail Devers has the distinction of being only the second athlete to win a gold medal in a major competition for both the flat 100 meters and the hurdles event

since Fanny Blankers-Koen achieved that feat in the 1948 Olympic Games. In 1948, of course, the hurdles distance for women was 80 meters, with 8 hurdles 0.762m in height.

Just 1.62m tall, Gail is short for a top class hurdler but her powerful sprinting gives her a more than adequate stride length. In fact, her problem is occasionally to find herself crowding the hurdle at take-off. The differential of 1.64sec between her best time for the 100 meters flat and that for the 100 meters hurdles is greater than that of any other world class hurdler, but that is due more to her exceptional speed than to any gross faults in her hurdling technique.

The photosequence shows her winning very comfortably from Cécile Cinélu of France and Aliuska Lopez of Cuba.

Photos 1 to 5 show the last stride before takeoff. The arms move in a good, powerful sprint action but appear to be not sufficiently active to prevent a slight twist of the shoulders. The less pronounced pick-up of the leading knee shown in photos 2 and 3 is evidence of the required shortening and quickening of the last stride, in preparation for the take-off. Nevertheless, it appears, in photos 5 and 6, that the take-off foot lands a little too far ahead of the centre of gravity for the ideal take-off position.

From photos 7 to 9 there is a fairly pronounced, gradual rise of the centre of gravity, much more than would be shown by a taller hurdler and there is also the beginning of a slight forward lean of the trunk. This continues to develop and is at its maximum in photo 12 and is maintained through to photo 15.

At take-off, there is an excellent pick-up of the leading knee but it appears that the lower leg is swinging out a little (photos 8 and 9).

Photos 12 to 18 show the characteristic lead leg action of many women hurdlers. Although the leg is fully straightened as the foot clears the hurdle (photo 12), it then flexes (photos 13, 14 and 15), begins to straighten (photos 16 and 17) and is quite straight for the landing, well up on the toes (photo 18). It seems that the lead leg is 'dropped' down rather than 'swept' down, as is the case with men hurdlers, and there is more emphasis on the trail leg action than that of the lead leg.

The position of the landing foot underneath the centre of gravity, the pick-up of the knee and the alignment of trunk, shoulders and head are excellent, all leading to a good get-away from the hurdle. Purists might argue that the trail leg is not tucked up well enough, with the heel close to the buttocks as it is pulled through, in order to encourage speed of movement, and the rear arm, similarly, is too straight, but then speed of movement is not one of Devers great problems.

That there are such big differences between the techniques of the top women and top men hurdlers, in respect of body lean and movements of the arms and legs, would seem to make a case for raising the height of the women's hurdles and perhaps increasing the distance between them, in order to emphasize hurdling skill rather than sprinting speed.



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