

2.3 – The Velociraptor Toe

The exercise starts quite simply by having an athlete sit with their legs crossed, one foot resting on top of the opposing thigh. Instruct the athlete to use their thumbnail and press it into the bottom of the big toe directly underneath the second joint. Instruct the athlete to apply enough pressure so that the big toe folds over their thumbnail. This exact action is what should be created when the foot strikes the ground. In order to identify if the athlete possesses the ability to maintain this position have them remove their thumb and see if the athlete is able to maintain this position without the aid of their thumb. This will indicate if the short extensor has the current ability to contract and hold the toe in position.

When the athlete can in fact hold the position, they are ready to place their foot on the ground and practice this position standing. Instruct them to place their body weight on the ball of the foot and big toe, cue them to now curl the big toe creating a short toe position. To make this drill a little more challenging prompt the athlete to put a towel underneath their big toe pulling the towel up with their big toe while also keeping their bodyweight on the ball of the foot. A common dysfunctional pattern that athletes have when they are working to strengthen the big toe and foot is that they exhibit the inability to keep their weight on the big toe during the movement. As they work to pull the towel, they cannot keep their weight on the big toe. I have seen this issue numerous times personally as well as it being identified as one of the most common dysfunctions in current research. If they are unable to control their foot during this movement, the athlete never truly shortens the foot.

Athletes will find it strange that as they develop the short extensor of the big toe their environmental acuity may begin to increase as they will start to truly feel the ground when walking. Often times the athlete may experience an increase in hamstring cramps during training sessions. This is due to the fact that the short extensor is now working efficiently, getting optimal contraction from the base of the chain. The body now knows that everything is in place and functioning properly. This increase in function instinctively alerts the body that it can now handle all the power that it wants to put out. As a side note, keep in mind these cramps should happen during sprinting training. The hamstrings are designed for sprinting. If an athlete feels their hamstrings activating during walking this may be a sign of an issue that needs to be addressed somewhere along the chain.

Be sure to watch the videos included in this section, as Chris discusses both the Velociraptor Toe as well as short foot exercises.