Preparing for the Season: Pre-Season Readiness Training

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Proper Preparation

The end of summer is drawing near and with that comes pre-season training camps for fall and early winter sports. Unfortunately, many athletes wait until these 2 week mini-camps to begin to prepare the body and mind for the upcoming competitive season. Improper or lack of preparation typically leads to poor performance, weakness as the season develops, and worse of all, injuries.

Consequences of Lack of Preparation

Take a look at the Steelers Training Camp 2008. I don't think I need to mention Casey Hampton's lack of preparation, but there have also been consequences of some of the other athletes not being 100% prepared for the specific demands of their sport and their pre-season training camp. Some of these players have been injured as a result, and are not able to practice, or play, and may need to miss part of the competitive season—all because of a lack of proper preparation.

I'm not saying that players only get injured because of improper preparation, but I am saying that most often, improper preparation (physical, mental) is one of the main causes, especially with non-contact injuries (ie. ACL tears due to landing, change of direction moves, etc.).

So, what exactly does it take to be properly prepared for a pre-season training camp or pre-season practices?

As with all other readiness training, it will depend on the demands of the sport, and even the position that each athlete plays. Take ice hockey, for example. A hockey player needs to be strong, fast, and explosive, with a very high level of anaerobic endurance (specifically, power endurance). He/She needs to be flexible, mobile, balanced, and mentally capable of handling the grueling practices and skating sessions, not to mention the physical collision nature of the sport—not everyone rebounds mentally from getting knocked down a few times!

Technical Preparation

Proper preparation also includes specific technical training specific to the sport and position. A basketball player needs to be practicing drills with a basketball and working on improving his/her shot technique. It is also helpful to study the game in order to better understand the strategies and schemes of each sport.

Preparing the mind and the body is necessary in order to compete at your best. A solid strength and conditioning program will prepare the athlete physically and help develop essential confidence and mental toughness. Off-season camps, clinics, and skill sessions are crucial to the tactical development of the athlete. The combination of the various preparations will assist the athlete in performing at a level that he/she was previously incapable of doing. Better physical preparation will also allow the athlete to get more out of each learning/skill practice during the

pre-season training and help the athlete stay focused and energized (instead of worrying about being too sore or tired to perform).

It is the job of the strength and conditioning coach to help prepare athletes to perform their best when it matters the most.

Better physical and mental preparation reduces the risk of overuse injuries (tendonitis, shin-splints, etc.), non-contact injuries (ACL, MCL, etc.), and reduces imbalances and weaknesses from prior injuries or inefficient motor patterns. Better physical preparation helps an athlete run faster through better technique, and a stronger, more powerful body. It also helps an athlete skate faster and improves burst quickness on the ice. It helps an athlete be more mobile and more flexible. And, what I think is one of the most important benefits of proper physical preparation is the specific training of the muscle tissues and energy systems involved specifically in the movements of each sport. In most sports, it is not only important to be powerful/explosive at the beginning, but also to be able to maintain that power throughout the entire event. An athlete must be training (conditioning) specific to the intensity (heart rate and energy system specific) and other demands of the sport. For example, look at a typical hockey shift. How long does each player spend on the ice? How many bursts does the player make during that shift? How many shifts are there during a period? During a game? How many bursts during a game? – These are all important things to consider when designing a proper conditioning program to prepare the player.

Pre-Season Readiness training is best when it has an accumulative effect from training that began after the last competitive season ended.

Training should have been designed to progressively prepare the athlete for his/her next competitive season, and should have been designed to meet the needs not only of the athlete (strengths, weaknesses, etc.), but also the sport. A systematic, progressive approach to training and performance preparation is essential for optimal results. Proper preparation is key. Are you ready for your next competitive season? Are you ready to get the most out of your skill practices?

If you're not ready, now is the time to get started—don't wait any longer. For more information or training ideas for urgent preparation, please call or email me (especially if you haven't been preparing this summer!).