

DUKE SPORTS MEDICINE

OUTREACH SOCCER PROGRAM

Off – Season Training

As the competitive season approaches, it is important to consider the topic of off-season training. When to rest, how long to rest, when to train and how to train are all important questions which will be addressed in this article.

Active Rest

After working hard all fall and spring and developing a good level of fitness, it is important not to lose that and have to start over in August when the fall season begins. It is much easier to stay in shape than it is to get back in shape. However, having said that, it is also important to allow your body to rest and recover from the demands of the season and to prevent overtraining. Finding the balance between these two concepts can be challenging.

Active rest is a term we use to balance rest and maintain fitness. Active rest means finding enjoyable ways to stay active in order to maintain fitness. For example, play a recreational sport. Every sport has different demands on the body and a recreational sport will allow the player to recover both physically and emotionally from the soccer season while maintaining a reasonable level of fitness. Other leisure activities such as hiking, biking and swimming can also be good active rest activities.

Fitness Maintenance

As stated previously, it is easier to stay in shape than it is to get in shape. Active rest is a good way to maintain fitness while allowing for recovery from the demands of the season. However, in order for active rest to be effective in maintaining a reasonable level of fitness, a high level of intensity must be performed.

In order to stay in shape, you can decrease the frequency and the duration of training with little effect, but if you decrease the intensity of training you will lose fitness fast. For example, decrease the frequency of training from 4-5 days per week to 2-3 days per week and decrease the duration from 1 hour and 30 minutes to 45 minutes at the same intensity level and you should be able to maintain fitness. Therefore, during the active rest period, try to sustain a high level of intensity during the activity.

Preparation Phase

As the season draws closer it is important to begin training specifically for the demands of soccer to fine-tune fitness. Being fit for the season allows for faster recovery. This will allow you to stay on the field longer and prevent a decline in performance coming from fatigue. Another benefit of being fit is injury prevention. As the body fatigues, it is less capable of guarding against injury. Therefore being fit it extremely important with keeping you on the field longer and able to perform at the highest level.



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At the end of the active rest phase and the beginning of the preparation phase, it is important to build an endurance base of fitness. This can be accomplished by running, biking, swimming, cross country skiing or other endurance activities. This is really important because the majority of soccer is aerobic exercise and having a good endurance base allows for faster recovery during the game.

The next step in preparing for the season is interval running or repeat runs; however a good way to transition into the interval running is to do fartlek runs. Fartlek is a Swedish term for "speed play". This is an easy way to increase the intensity of normal jogging. In order to perform fartlek training, start out at a normal jogging pace until warmed up and settled into the run (5-10 minutes). Then pick out a landmark up ahead (a telephone pole or mailbox, etc) and increase running pace to that landmark (this is not a sprint, but a harder run). Then return to what you think is the original pace; do not use a watch to pace yourself. When your breathing has recovered, repeat the hard run. Continue this for the duration of the run.

Interval running is the last piece to fitness preparations for the soccer season. Soccer is full of longer paced runs. Going to a track and running 200 meter, 400 meter, or 800 meter repeats, allowing for recovery between repetitions is a good sport specific way to train. These runs should not be a full sprint, but should be a hard paced run. Shorter sprints can also be performed to work on sprint speed and quickness.

During this time of interval running, not every day should be spent doing intervals. Endurance training should be performed 1-2 days per week, intervals 2 days per week and 1 day of shorter sprints. One to two days are reserved for rest or recreational activities. For an example of a preseason training program, go to:

<http://www.thefa.com/GetIntoFootball/Players/PreSeasonTraining.aspx>

Summary

The most important thing to remember with off-season training is that it is easier to stay in shape than to get into shape. However, rest and recovery is also important to allow your body to recover from the demands of the season. Active rest and participation in recreational sports is a good way to allow recovery while staying in shape. As the season approaches preseason training to fine tune fitness will allow for improved performance as well as preventing injuries.

SOCCKER OUTREACH STAFF

Kelly Hess PT, DPT is a Physical Therapist and Soccer Outreach Coordinator for Duke Sports Medicine. She received her Doctorate of Physical Therapy from Duke University. She is a former collegiate soccer player at Messiah College, PA. Having her NSCAA Advanced Regional Coaching License, she has over 10 years experience coaching youth through collegiate levels. **Email - hess0012@notes.duke.edu**

Randall Lazicki, PT, DPT, LAT, ATC, CSCS is a Physical Therapist and Outreach Athletic Trainer for Duke Sports Medicine. He received his Doctorate of Physical Therapy from Elon University and is credentialed as a Certified Athletic Trainer and Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist. He is a former collegiate player at Wingate University, NC. **Email - randall.lazicki@duke.edu**

Dr. Bill Garrett, MD, PhD is a Team Physician for Duke University. For the past 16 years, he has served as the Chairman of Sports Medicine's Committee for the United States Soccer Federation and has served as team physician with the U.S. Men's and Women's National Teams in World Cup competition. **John Lohnes, PA-C** and **Libby Pennington, RN** assist him in providing care.