

Preseason Workout

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Preseason conditioning and preparation is far more involved than a few scrimmage games to work out the kinks. What the pros and the Division I schools have known for years is that a preseason work ethic directly effects the competitive season's performance.

To get the most out of a conditioning program, it's important to understand the purpose and goals of the different periods of conditioning and how to enter the competitive season in peak shape. Every sport is a little different, local rules and restrictions often vary, individual athletes may respond differently and school calendars and scholastic requirements often take precedent, but one thing is certain, the better a team is conditioned the better they will perform.

There are common mistakes that can diminish the effectiveness of off-season and pre-season plans. One perennial mistake is cutting the preseason too short. Due to either a lack of foresight, or a lack of understanding, many coaches and athletes try to jam too much work into too short a time resulting in more injuries and mediocre results. At every level there is an initial period of general conditioning. This is a time when general strength and fitness is improved and weaknesses are identified and addressed. There are broad considerations based upon the approaching season but for the most part this period, especially in high school and smaller college programs, is pretty routine and may resemble a standard health club style strength routine. Important to remember is that less experienced and younger athletes need more time for preparation. The younger and less experienced body needs more time to adapt to demands, including becoming stronger, more powerful, quicker, and more coordinated.



In order to win during the big game you need a few weeks of proper conditioning.

Another common error is to fit the wrong conditioning program to the wrong sport. As the season approaches the routines become more sport specific. Success in this stage is what separates quality programs and the best will allow an additional five to six weeks for meaningful development. Strength, flexibility, power, endurance and coordination having been built in general terms are now molded to fit athletic requirements. The stop and start speed bursts and angular movements of a basketball player require different training than the sustained output of a swimmer or the power generation required by a football lineman. This is the time when the experienced eye can identify what sport is being trained for just by watching the workout session. If a basketball player and baseball player are doing the same routine in this period, someone's performance will suffer. At elite levels this period is further refined to address the specific athlete's biomechanics, preferences, techniques, and strengths.

After all this hard work it's important that athletic gains are utilized properly. As practices begin and off-season and pre-season gains are realized each athlete's technique must be honed for their new capabilities. Timing, coordination, and balance are the final pieces of the puzzle as the faster, stronger, more flexible, more conditioned athlete returns to regular practice. Of course most athletes will engage in their sports of choice recreationally or sporadically throughout the year, but the final stages of pre-season work is dedicated to perfecting technique and developing habitual patterns of muscle memory which will exploit new capabilities and lead to consistent success. One of the major differences between higher levels of performance in every sport is consistency. Physical conditioning and perfection of technique are the critical puzzle pieces.

Perhaps the most common oversight made by coaches and athletes in high school and college programs is the lack of a proper in-season maintenance conditioning program. If the goal of a pre-season workout program is to gain in capability, the in-season maintenance program should strive to keep these gains. If conditioning is allowed to erode as the season progresses, technique and performance will also erode and injuries will prevail. As the weeks roll on, an intelligent maintenance program helps to keep performance high throughout a rigorous season and often helps athletes to feel more confident in their ability to perform consistently, to bounce back from losses, and often adds to morale and feelings of camaraderie within the team. In most high school settings where another season is on the horizon, maintaining fitness throughout also leaves athletes better prepared to move on and not become overstressed or fatigued.

Long gone are the days when only the football players lifted weights. Today's savvy coaches know that to increase performance and consistency in every sport from distance running to baseball to golf, proper weight training and conditioning is irreplaceable. By understanding how to develop and manipulate strength, stamina, power, flexibility and coordination to fit certain sports requirements, trainers, coaches and athletes can aspire to peak performance.

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