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PRE-SEASON PREPARATION

With the end of summer comes the unenviable task of getting back into shape for the upcoming hockey season. We have all heard the typical approaches, such as running a few miles each day, hitting the gym or just doing a few crunches before a player begins on the ice. But is this the best way to prepare as a hockey player for the upcoming season?

Whether they play at a professional, recreational or developing level, hockey players' today need to look at preparing their whole body for the demands of the sport. Many hockey players have found there is a better way to get their body ready for the season before getting back onto the ice. Proper preparation will give them two distinct advantages over those who chose not to train. The first, and most apparent benefit of the off-ice preparation is an improvement in a player's ability and productivity on the ice. But more importantly, the second benefit is the reduction in the likelihood of injury, so that a player will be able to spend more time playing the game they love.

The "CORE"

The first component that a player needs to look at training in the off-season is the region of the body known as the "core". [GLEN - Make this into a diagram. (I.e. use a picture of a fit body) The core, (a.k.a. the abs) is the area extending up from the

top of the thighs, through the hips, stomach, lower back, up to the chest and mid-back level.] The muscles of the core are required to control the positioning of the spine, hips and shoulders, allowing for efficient and proper movement of all the joints in this region.

The core must be able to hold the body rigid, to absorb and direct impacts such as those received during a bodycheck, working against opponents in the corner or battling for position in front of the net. But the core must also allow for controlled movements and precise skills, such as when a player is shooting, deking or skating. For proper development of the core region, hockey players should train with exercises that require them to flex, extend, rotate and stabilize their spine, hips and shoulders. Exercises performed on unstable surfaces, such as a stability ball or air filled discs will require the core to stabilize the appropriate joints and develop the muscles of this region to complement the work they need to do while on the ice.

FLEXIBILITY

The second component a hockey player needs to train prior to hitting the ice is their flexibility. It is very important for a player to have full range of motion in their joints, especially in the legs and core region. For most players, increasing their range of

motion will allow them to skate and move about on the ice without working against their own body. Full range of motion at the hips allows a player to fully extend the leg behind them as they stride, giving them maximum propulsion and skating efficiency.

Flexibility training can be performed in two ways, either dynamically or statically. Dynamic flexibility exercises use controlled, multi-joint actions to develop full range of motion in movements required on the ice. Dynamic flexibility training is excellent both before and after activity to help players achieve their flexibility goals. Static flexibility exercises involve isolating specific joints that have restrictions and are best done in the evening, prior to bed. Both types of flexibility training are excellent choices for hockey players, giving them unrestricted movement and control while on the ice.

ANAEROBIC FITNESS

For many, the beginning of the season is a tough challenge. Over the summer, players lose their fitness level for hockey and the first few times on the ice can be quite a workload for their body. To prepare for the season, players need to look at developing their anaerobic fitness. Anaerobic, by definition, means "without oxygen". Hockey is an anaerobic sport, requiring powerful movements and sprints



to be performed at maximum intensity, without adequate rest time for the muscles used to refuel themselves with oxygen and energy before the next repetition.

Being in shape for hockey allows a player to perform as close to 100 percent as possible, each shift, all game long. Many players train to sprint, but do not train so that their sprints in the third period or in overtime are equal to the first sprint they had in that game. Fatigue sets in quickly on any player who has not performed the necessary pre-season conditioning work, since their body cannot tolerate the waste products that are generated while skating hard. Until their body adapts to the workload, players will under perform in comparison to their potential ability, set themselves up for a potential injury, or begin to

make mental errors on the ice as the game progresses.

Prior to the season, it is important for players to stress their body with anaerobic training that mimics the energy output and shift length they will experience on the ice. Short, intense sprints that last ten, twenty, up to forty-five seconds in length

need to be emphasized. Also, limit the rest time between sprints as players improve. Players should group these sprints together, such as three sets of six sprints, to replicate the shift lengths and periods they will be required to play in. By training without the necessary rest and recovery time, players will see huge gains in their ability to perform on

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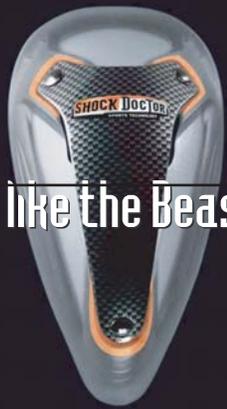
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