

Top Tips to help you remain successful throughout Pre –Season Football.

Tip #1: Establish a Plan – Form a schedule that will help you reach your goals.

- If you have not formed your own personal routine based on the practice schedule then you are already a step behind the ball. Creating your own personalized schedule enables you to understand and seize potential moments to support optimal health. These opportune moments can be in the form of nutrition sessions, such as understanding when to focus on calorie dense foods and/or nutrient dense items. Establish a plan that focuses on frequent eating periods with moderately sized meals. As performance athletes with multiple demands throughout your day it is important for you to implement an eating schedule that includes 5 – 6 meal periods throughout the day. Start your day with breakfast and be sure to end it with a night time recovery snack. Consider important “high volume” periods such as practice, lifting and conditioning sessions as appropriate moments to focus on carbohydrate consumption and/or calorie dense items. Conversely, aim to focus on consuming nutrient dense items during periods of “low volume” or relative rest such as lunch, dinner and before bed time. These meals can help to control blood sugar and improve body composition by improving lean mass and decreasing fat mass. Understanding the demands of your schedule can provide you with the tool to develop your ideal routine to help you succeed.

Tip #2: Protect yourself from increased volume of exercise

- As you prepare for camp be mindful of the sudden increase in exercise and training volume. For many of you, preseason camp will signify a significant increase in exercise activity. This increase in volume and repetition can impact you in many ways. Listed below are just some examples of the effects of high volume training on athletes.
 - Increased muscle soreness
 - Mental and physical Stress
 - Stiffness
 - Greater susceptibility to injury
 - Dehydration
 - Muscle cramps
 - Fatigue
- To help diminish the physical and mental stress associated with high volume training focus on the following strategies:
 - Make sure to be mindful of volume of play with your teammates and coaches. Share the physical stress of practice by being responsible and rotating a balanced rate with teammates during drills. Sudden increase in volume (increased reps) can often play a major role in the prevalence of soft tissue injuries. As you spend this period demonstrating your ability to play the sport of football, be mindful of your volume of work and how your body responds.
 - Be mindful of your exercise nutrition. Protein consumption (especially before, during and after practice) can help to alleviate muscle soreness and help to promote muscle repair. Simply focusing on a carbohydrate/protein drink such as chocolate milk post workout can help to make your preseason camp injury free, successful and pleasant.

- Focus on consuming carbohydrates to help endure high volume periods such as training camp. A carbohydrate filled breakfast can be beneficial for the athlete who is exercising for an extended period of time without food such as early morning practice or lift and conditioning sessions. Carbohydrate rich meals can help prime athletes for competition by restoring liver and muscle glycogen lost during exercise or a long night of sleep.
- Proper warm up can help to alleviate these issues. Prior to and post practice focus on active movement/mobility sessions that center on exploring and maintaining range of motion. During the first few days of practice these warm up/cool down sessions can help minimize the potential for injury, soreness and an unpleasant training camp experience.
- Embrace the benefits of non-impact – steady state exercise (recumbent, elliptical, stair climber) which can help to maintain blood flow, improve mobility and joint health while limiting the volume of stress applied to the body. Exercises such as the recumbent bike, elliptical and stair climber can all be effective tools to help maintain conditioning levels during the preseason while also preventing high impact trauma to musculoskeletal tissue.

Tip #3: Be conscious of your weight and body composition.

- Be mindful of your weight and be proactive in understanding your ideal weight. For football positions that incur a great deal of running volume, it is often beneficial to be lean and carrying a low amount of fat mass. However, various positional demands (responsibilities on the line, special teams play) may require you to maintain a relatively higher weight. Nevertheless, it is important to be conscious of your weight and fat mass so that you feel most comfortable as you incur the normal stressors of football. Sudden increase or decrease in weight can contribute to soft tissue injury. The elite athlete operates within a narrow range of weight. Sudden and dramatic increases in weight from external sources such as weight vests and equipment can also contribute to soft tissue injury. Likewise, a sudden decrease in weight can also be a stressor to tissue. A sudden decrease in weight is often a sign of dehydration and/or diminished potential for fuel. To help manage weight be sure to be mindful of appropriate nutrition throughout the day. Consider the following recommendations as a good way to help stay fueled and ready for practice. For example, you are standing in the cafeteria dining hall at the hot cereal counter and you are presented with a choice between steel cut oatmeal or cinnamon-flavored grits. Consider the following in making your decision: oatmeal is digested and absorbed at a slower rate because of its high fiber content. Our gastrointestinal tracts lack the enzymes needed to breakdown fiber and for the most part, it passes right through us. As a result, this carbohydrate is relatively calorie-less, making it a perfect addition for those looking for ways to decrease caloric intake. Fiber also has some fat-relinquishing properties. When fat and fiber are combined together in a meal, digestion of the fat decreases while fat excretion increases. Researchers in Denmark showed that flaxseed intake (a high fiber source) was linked to increased fecal fat excretion, as well as decreased energy intake. Fiber is thought to bind fat in the intestines, carrying it out of the body before it can be absorbed. Additionally, insulin (*aka* the carbohydrate responder), the hormone involved in regulating the amount of fat deposited in the tissues, responds poorly to fiber. Compared to the low fiber content of grits, ingestion of steel cut oatmeal decreases the insulin that signals for fat deposition. Staying lean means adding fiber-rich foods to your diet. This practice can result in lowering your intake of unwanted fat from your meal and also, keeps insulin levels from sky-rocketing. On the other hand, if your breakfast meal is just before your practice meal try focusing on low fiber foods to help diminish gastro intestinal distress. Low fiber foods empty more rapidly and cause less bloating than high fiber foods.

Tip #4: Hydrate! Hydrate! Hydrate!

- As athletes arrive to preseason they can often experience a great deal of challenges and obstacles to performance before stepping on the field. Football athletes can often be dehydrated and potentially unprepared to perform at their best. The following conditions represent potential threats to performance:
 - Inappropriate fuel and hydration due to travel
 - During the summer period athletes can often suffer from heat related injuries or issues related to dehydration. It is very important that athletes, coaches and training staff focus on maintaining appropriate levels of hydration before, during and post exercise. Athletes can often arrive to preseason camp and/or practice dehydrated. Dehydration can be the result of changes in altitude, inappropriate food and beverage consumption, increases in training intensity, frequency and long plane flights. Dehydrated athletes cannot drink enough to rehydrate during exercise. As a result, it is important to focus on strategies to help mitigate dehydration. Listed below are a few simple strategies
 - ✓ Focus on the consumption of sport drinks before, during and post exercise
 - ✓ Increase carbohydrate consumption during days leading up to competition as well as during competition.
 - ✓ Add extra salt to foods
 - ✓ Focus on a hydration plan during long plane rides
 - Inappropriate carbohydrate consumption during competition
 - Maintain appropriate fuel substrate within muscle tissue. Carbohydrates are the number one macronutrient to help fuel athletes during sprint activities. Make sure to focus on carbohydrate rich meals before and after intense activity sessions such as practice, lift and conditioning sessions.
 - Low level of conditioning
 - Appropriate conditioning – it is important to be mindful of your levels of conditioning. Recent research has now proven that cardiovascular ability as well as familiarity with exercise to be a significant predictor for susceptibility for exercise induced muscle cramps. In order to prevent exercise induced muscle cramps it is important to be mindful of your number of conditioning levels. If you find that you have not received a sufficient number of repetitions or conditioning opportunities for the day it is your responsibility to make sure you have not missed an opportunity to stay conditioned.

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