

FitFacts®

Off-season Success

HAS THE LONG, HARD-FOUGHT SEASON COME TO AN END? ARE YOU LEFT TELLING YOURSELF THAT THERE IS ALWAYS NEXT SEASON? IF SO, START PREPARING FOR NEXT SEASON TODAY AND ALLOW YOURSELF THE PEACE OF MIND THAT COMES WITH KNOWING THAT YOU DID EVERYTHING IN YOUR POWER TO BE ALL YOU COULD BE

Creating an off-season training program is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Each individual has different needs that must be considered when putting together a successful plan. Different factors will be taken into account, such as how many weeks are left until next season starts, what you need to improve physically, your history of injury and any other physical requirements that are involved.

REST

First and foremost, your body has earned several weeks of rest after a full season of hard work. If you are injury free, take two to four weeks off to give your muscles a chance to recover. If you have an injury, visit your doctor for a recommendation prior to starting a training regimen.

TEST

Now it is time to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses. Several weaknesses may be evident from observing how you performed during the previous season, but it's a good idea to get some baseline and max test measurements to determine what needs improvement and how much progress is being made.

ENDURANCE

If you were unable to keep up your work rate in the second half of games or matches, chances are that your endurance needs some work. To determine if endurance truly was the reason behind this second-half collapse, complete several endurance tests such as the 1.5 mile run and the beep test (i.e., running continuously between two points that are 20 meters apart synchronized with a pre-recorded audio tape or CD, which plays beeps at set intervals). Record your results, compare them to norms, and retest to track for progress.

To improve your endurance, you should start by establishing your aerobic base. During the first four weeks of training, run intervals at a low level of intensity (50–70% maximum heart rate, or MHR) for 20 to 30 minutes with intervals of five minutes of work and five minutes of active recovery. After the aerobic base is established, it's time for performance training. During weeks 5 through 10, run intervals at a medium to high level of intensity (60–100% of MHR) for 25 to 35 minutes with intervals progressing from five minutes of work and five minutes of active recovery to 20 seconds of hard work and one minute of active recovery.

SPEED

Speed is a crucial element in almost every sport. One step can be the difference between becoming a star and not making the team. Two universal measures of speed are the 40-yard dash and 100-meter sprint. With proper training, you can improve your times and become an elite athlete. There are a number of trainable factors

that affect speed, including flexibility, fatigue, technique, and stride length and frequency. Flexibility allows an athlete to sprint through a full range of motion. Static stretching is one way to improve flexibility; however, dynamic flexibility exercises are more effective.

Speed training should never be performed while fatigued. Fatigue can affect technique, stride length and frequency, all of which will cause you to train at a slower speed. This may result in teaching you to run slower. Technique, including stride length and frequency, is vital in reaching your sprinting potential. This can be improved by breaking down the form and then training each specific mechanic. Some specific types of exercise that can help improve these factors are sprints covering varying distances and intensities, sprints with changes in speed, sprints with resistance and sprints with assistance.

STRENGTH AND POWER

Being the strongest and most powerful person on the field is probably one of your goals if you're dedicated to transforming yourself into an exceptional athlete this off-season. To achieve this goal, it is important to be able to differentiate between exercises that develop strength and those that develop power. Strength exercises entail heavy resistances, but under controlled speeds and with deceleration. Power exercises entail acceleration for the full range of movement and high lifting velocities.

SPORT-SPECIFIC GOALS

Much of the off-season training takes place in the weight room or on a track, which is likely not sport-specific. So now it's time to get back on the field or court and start training your body with the movements that your sport requires. Give yourself at least a month before the pre-season starts to alter your focus to the skills your sport requires. Maintaining all the results you achieved in the off-season won't require nearly as much time as it did getting there, so spend that extra time practicing with your teammates.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American College of Sports Medicine](#)

American Council on Exercise® is a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering people to live their most fit lives. In addition to offering quality certifications and education for health and fitness professionals, ACE also protects the public against ineffective products, programs and trends by arming them with unbiased, science-based health and fitness information. To learn more about ACE, or how you can use or purchase Fit Facts, visit ACEfit.com/FitFacts.

