

Taking Advantage of the Offseason

As the weather gets colder here in November, a lot of athletes competing in predominately warm weather sports are into their offseason. This would include sports such as baseball, track and field/cross country, softball, football, lacrosse, triathletes, etc. So much focus is placed on training during a particular sports season and the intensity of the practice field and the weight room can be overwhelming. Combine that with a long season (some 6-8 months) and it can wear an athlete down. Once the offseason hits, the athlete feels like they want to spend an extended period of time holding the couch down, instead of training, to recover. The focus of this commentary is to highlight some keys to offseason conditioning and how training focus will shift from the early offseason into the preseason. We welcome local trainer Hudson Rose to give his expert advise on these topics. Hudson trains several local sports teams as well as many collegiate and professional athletes across a variety of sports.

While a short period of rest is a great idea, the responsible athlete will utilize the offseason to accomplish some critical goals to set the table for success next season. "My belief is that the offseason is your best opportunity to get stronger and make gains that will translate and directly affect your game next season" says Rose. "For me, this requires the integration of proper training, high performance nutrition, and active recovery". Knowing how to rest and train in the offseason is critical, especially since almost year round play is becoming more and more popular in youth sports.

Regardless of sport, most offseason training programs follow the same basic concepts. A comprehensive offseason training program should include corrective work, strength and power, and a focus on energy systems. According to Rose, "Programs are progressions of three phases intended for optimal performance heading into training camp."

Phase One consists of corrective work and education. Training in Phase One will focus on correcting flexibility and strength imbalances, improving mobility and any necessary rehabilitation. Imbalances in strength and mobility are inevitably created by the repetition of specific movement patterns required in a sport. If these imbalances are not corrected, they can lead to injury or decreased performance as the athlete enters the following season.

Phase One is a great time to get treatment for any nagging injuries the athlete experienced during the season. Whether it is a sore knee in a triathlete or a sore shoulder in a baseball pitcher, physical therapists and athletic trainers should evaluate the athlete and create a plan to return to pain free function before intense training begins again. According to Rose, "The goal of Phase One is to ensure the athlete's body has a strong foundation that is ready for the added load in Phase Two. It is critical that the athlete understands the direct link between what they eat and how they perform."

Phase Two is the longest training phase where the focus shifts to building strength, power, and explosiveness. "We incorporate lift days with both flexibility and conditioning", comments Rose. "Strength training is strategically combined with recovery allowing for optimal growth and improved strength across the board." Nutritional needs are modified to provide adequate caloric intake and hydration to meet the demands of Phase Two. This gives athletes lasting energy through a workout and aid recovery between workouts.

At this point the athlete transitions into Phase Three. This final phase continues to build strength and power while also focusing on training energy systems. Athletes continue to translate their physical gains from the first two phases into sport specific demands. Rose states, "The goal is to create workouts that utilize the gains in strength and power to move more explosively, especially in the athletes first instinctive action." Nutrition remains critical. "Nutrition is 80% of the battle in the offseason. Better the kitchen is the better the gains in the gym and in your offseason program", says Rose. At the end of Phase Three the athlete is fully prepared to enter the regular season performing optimally.

"I strongly believe that the combination of proper training, high performance nutrition, recovery strategies, and proper sport specific instruction will give the athlete the best opportunity to maximize their gains in the offseason", comments Rose. "Athletes will be ready for training camp and most importantly ready to perform throughout the entire season."

Hudson Rose trains individual athletes and teams at Wilmington Performance Lab and can be reached at 919-920-5211. Follow him on Facebook and Instagram at Hudson Rose Athletic Development.