



Fitness Guidelines for The Off – Season & Pre-Season.

We are at the end of the 2010/2011 season so I am sure there are many coaches and players around the four provinces already planning for next season. Before next seasons games there are two very important stages of the season to complete –

The off Season – Is an important part of the season that last between 4 to 6 weeks where the player concentrates on rest and recovery from the previous season. There is also an opportunity to complete alternative or cross training events and to correct functional compensations.

The Pre season – This is an important developmental stage of the season which lasts somewhere between 6 to 12 weeks. It is this stage of the season where with appropriate supervision and content gains can be made in the different areas of fitness and skills.

In order for the young players to get the most out of the above stages the below guidelines should be followed. Don't worry this is not an article about punishing runs or hours in the gym, it is just an article to explain the most appropriate and fun way to lead into your rugby season.

There are four areas that if covered appropriately will lead to getting the most out of the off season and pre season they are –

- Find a qualified Fitness Coach
- Screening
- Foundation Strength
- Game Fitness
- Facilities

Find a qualified fitness coach

If you are a coach or player wondering what he should be looking for in a fitness coach one or more of the following qualifications are important.

- I.R.F.U. Certified Conditioning Coach Course (Attended)
- I.R.F.U. Certified Conditioning Coach Course (Accredited)
- I.R.F.U. / I.A.W.L.A. Weightlifting Level 1 (Attended)
- I.R.F.U. / I.A.W.L.A Weightlifting Level 1 (Accredited)

Other valuable courses available from the I.R.F.U. Fitness education partner are –

Setanta College (Hetac Accredited Courses)

- Certificate in Resistance Training and Weight Training For Sport
- Certificate in Physical Fitness and Conditioning for Sport

There are many other courses available but the above courses are the qualifications that the I.R.F.U recommends for developing fitness in rugby players.

Link: http://www.irishrugby.ie/468_81.php

Screening

Once you have found a competent coach, the next step is for you to be screened. This will help towards the planning of the most appropriate content for the off and pre season. This is where the fitness coach assesses your training age, injury history and assesses your stability and mobility with one or more functional assessments. If you are found not competent functionally and technically, you will not be advised to complete the advanced forms of strength training. Every player should spend a certain amount of the season completing foundation strength (Anatomical adaptation) (see below).

Player A is an example of poor functional ability and player B is an example of a player with good functional ability. Player B is ready to progress onto more advance training programme after a short period on foundation strength (anatomical adaptation) where as player B most spend a longer period completing foundation strength to improve functionally and technically.

N.B. most of the young and old players in the county are in need of foundation strength if the players are rushed onto advanced training programmes like hypertrophy and max strength this may cause problems if they are not ready for those training methods. This is why it is so important to have a qualified fitness coach looking after your players or your programme



Player A



Player B

I would also suggest that you visit your doctor and after discussing your training history and injury history he will give you advice if you need to complete further medical screens. It is important that your mobility, stability, strength and fitness are assessed so an appropriate programme can be planned for you.

Foundation Strength

To help prevent injuries and improve your performance it is advisable to complete a foundation strength programme (Anatomical adaptation) at home or in your local gym. This will gradually help to strength your muscles, ligaments and tendons for the season ahead. The most appropriate programme for a rugby player with a low training history would be an anatomical adaptation session. This is a mainly body weight based session based on the initial fitness test / screen. The result will be an improvement in the compensations picked up in the screen which will help reduce injuries and improve you performance on the pitch. A programme like this should only be prescribed by suitably qualified fitness coaches.

Game Fitness

As it gets close to the season you will have to get prepared for the in season with pre season training on the pitch. This does not have to consist of numerous laps or multi sprint endurance. You can get fit for the season through conditioned games and integrated conditioning. There are two very important rules before you start out on this –

- (1) Complete a good warm up and warm down
- (2) Don't rush into high intensity training

One easy way to measure training is the rate of perceived exertion. Players commonly use the below table to assess the intensity of training –

10	Match
9	
8	
7	Very Hard
6	
5	Hard
4	Somewhat Hard
3	Moderate
2	Easy
1	Very Easy
0	Rest

If you complete your first training session at intensity level 10 it may be too high a level of intensity to start your on field training, especially if you have not played rugby for some time. I would suggest that you control the intensity you train at for the first few training sessions to help prevent any earlier injuries. An example of the first few weeks back to pitch training would be like this –

Week 1 – Session Intensity (3)

Week 2 – Session Intensity (5)

Week 3 – Session Intensity (7)

Week 4 – Session Intensity (9)

This will help ease you into training and gradually increase your fitness. Again the above game fitness or integrated fitness is covered on the certified conditioning coach course.

Facilities

If you are thinking of adding to or developing a gym in your club or school please start by looking at the I.R.F.U. guidelines they can be found by following the link below. If you would like more advice please contact me via Niamh Nash at niamh.nash@irfu.ie .

Link: http://www.irishrugby.ie/downloads/IRFU_Gym_for_club.pdf

Finally I hope you have a fun and healthy rugby off, pre and in season. Remember the above information is only guidelines. We would recommend that your fitness development should be supervised by a fitness coach who has completed the I.R.F.U. certified conditioning coach course or the setanta college courses. So to summaries find yourself a qualified fitness coach build your foundation strength and ease into high intensity training and games.

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