

# SUMMER IS HERE



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## 8 EXERCISES TO IMPLEMENT INTO YOUR SUMMER TRAINING

With the help of Darryl Nelson (USA Hockey's National Team Development Program strength and conditioning coach) and Brian Sipotz (owner, Advantage Strength), MiHockey has compiled a list of eight drills that are essential for your summer conditioning program.



### STRAIGHT-LEG DEAD LIFT (SL-DL)

To perform a straight-leg dead lift, take a dumbbell or kettlebell with each hand and, while coming off one leg and letting it elevate behind you, bend over at the hip until your back is nearly parallel with the ground and stand back up. Despite the exercise being called a "straight-leg" dead lift, it is actually done with a slight knee bend to protect the lower back.

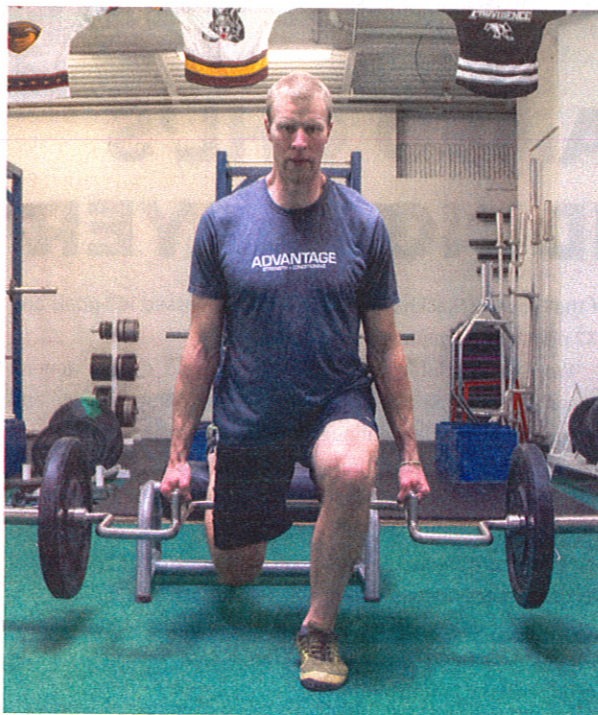
"It's teaching the athlete to keep their core tight and their spine straight and to move from their hip joint instead of flexing and extending their lower back. Also, a great way to build strength in the posterior chain, so the hamstrings, your butt, into your back and your back to your shoulders, which is where unfortunately a lot of people are lacking because they spend so much time sitting down... The big catch there is you don't do it with your legs totally straight. You shouldn't be locked; you should have a small amount of knee bend. It'll protect your lower back." - **NELSON**

### SINGLE-LEG SQUAT

Standing on an elevated platform with your hands out in front of you, squat down on one leg to a 90-degree angle and come back up. Repeat. To add load, you can grab a kettlebell in each hand or hold a dumbbell with both hands. There are other variations that can be done.

"When we run or skate, we're pushing with one leg at a time, so all of our squatting is done single extremity, whether it's a split squat, one-leg squat... I really like the one-leg squats, too, because without the other foot providing any support, it really requires a lot of hip and core stability and strength. One-leg squats are a must-have in your training." - **NELSON**

"Another version of the one-leg squat, and this is actually one that's used quite a bit because you can add a significant amount of load to it, if you get a player or athlete that's strong enough to do a single-leg squat, you can put a certain amount of load on a single-leg squat, but if we take our back foot up and do what's called a rear-foot elevated split squat or also some people call it a Bulgarian split squat, you can add a significant amount of load. In the picture, we're holding a barbell and you can basically load that up if you get a player that's strong enough. It's a nice way to load the movement. It requires a little bit of balance and a lot of demand on the front leg, but it's something that can really get hips, knees and quads really strong in a hurry." - **SIPOTZ**



### PULL-UP

Using a pull-up bar (or even a high bar on a playground), with your palms facing away from you, grip the bar and use your back to lift your bodyweight up, bringing your chin up over the bar. Do not use momentum to swing yourself up.

"Pull-ups are extremely important, the back of your body is very important, but a lot of times, I think people forget about it because you can't see it. That kind of strength to have in your back, to have in your butt and

the back of your legs is very important. So we use pull-ups with hands facing forward, but any kind of pulling pattern where you're pulling your head up toward the ceiling is gonna be really important for developing back strength, keeping great posture, your shoulders and that's something that a lot of times with screen time and school, a lot of athletes wind up rounding forward and they get in their gym class and they do a bench press on top of that... Back strength is actually a huge factor in shooting. We want to make sure we're balanced back there, so for every push we do, we're gonna do one pulling exercise and pull-ups are great for that." - **SIPOTZ**



### SUITCASE CARRY

The suitcase carry is an easy exercise to set up for. Take a heavy weight (dumbbell, kettlebell, a packed suitcase, etc.) in one hand and, while standing upright and tall, walk a certain length and then make the return walk with the weight in the other hand to work both sides.

"Picture yourself walking through the airport, carrying a suitcase on one side. Basically, what we're looking for there is to stay nice and tall, even though you have a heavy weight on one side. What that's gonna do for you is number one, you're using your core as it should be used... The function of the core is actually to keep you tall, so we're staying nice and tall with weight on one side and it's almost like a walking version of the side plank... You're working on your hand strength, as well, so you're gonna feel a lot of work on one side of your body. The way we do it is, you'll walk a certain length with the weight in one hand, switch up your hands and come back with the weight in the other hand." - **SIPOTZ**

### TRX ROW

Lay between two handles of a TRX suspension system with your chest facing the ceiling and only your heels on the ground. Use your back to pull yourself up between the

handles. Do not use your momentum to swing yourself up. This can also be done using a barbell on a Smith machine. "We use the TRX row because you can vary it to anyone's ability level. The TRX row is sort of like a pull-up and in a pull-up you're pulling your head up toward the ceiling. In a row, your chest is facing the ceiling, you're pulling your chest up between the handles and what we look for there is just a nice complete pull so even at the top, you're controlling it and pulling all the way up to the top. A lot of times what you'll see is people who are weak in the back give one hard rip and their arms are relatively straight and just sort of fling themselves up in between their hands, but what we want to see is a full, nice even count, controlled movements here so you're building strength throughout the full movement rather than giving one-hard pull and relying on momentum." - **SIPOTZ**

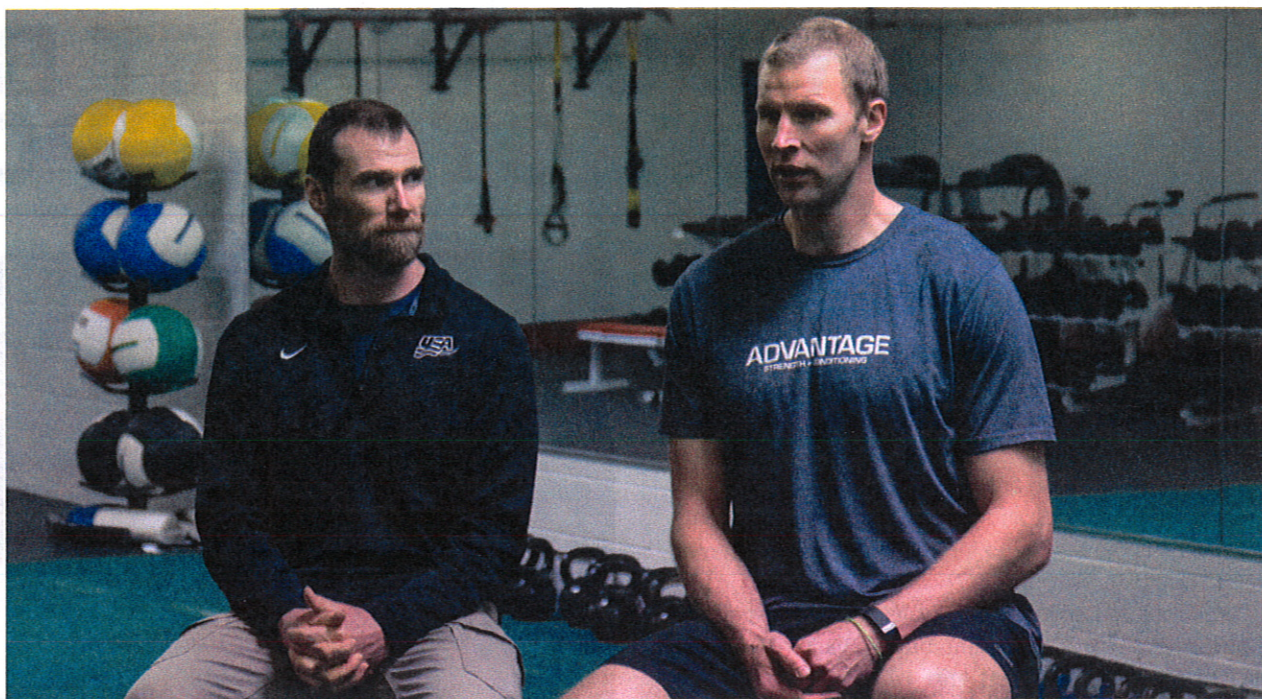
## PUSH-UP

The key to a proper push-up is to keep your back flat while lowering and pushing off with control.

"The number one reason why we like push-ups is because, unlike bench press and other exercises, when you're facing down, your core muscles also have to work, so you have to stabilize your lower back, so when you do push-ups, you want a flat lower back, no big scoop or arch where your hips are sagging to the floor, so it activates a lot more muscle fibers in your entire frame, from your shoulders all the way down to your core. It's very easy to adapt push-ups to people that are stronger and more fit; elevate your feet, wear a weight vest, you can incorporate some sort of unstable surface, like hands on a medicine ball." - **NELSON**

## STABILITY-BALL ROLL OUT

With the stability-ball roll out, start on the ground, upright on your knees with your hands on a stability ball in front of you. While keeping a nice, tall posture, lean



forward and roll the ball outward as far as you can with your arms. Roll back in to return to the starting position.

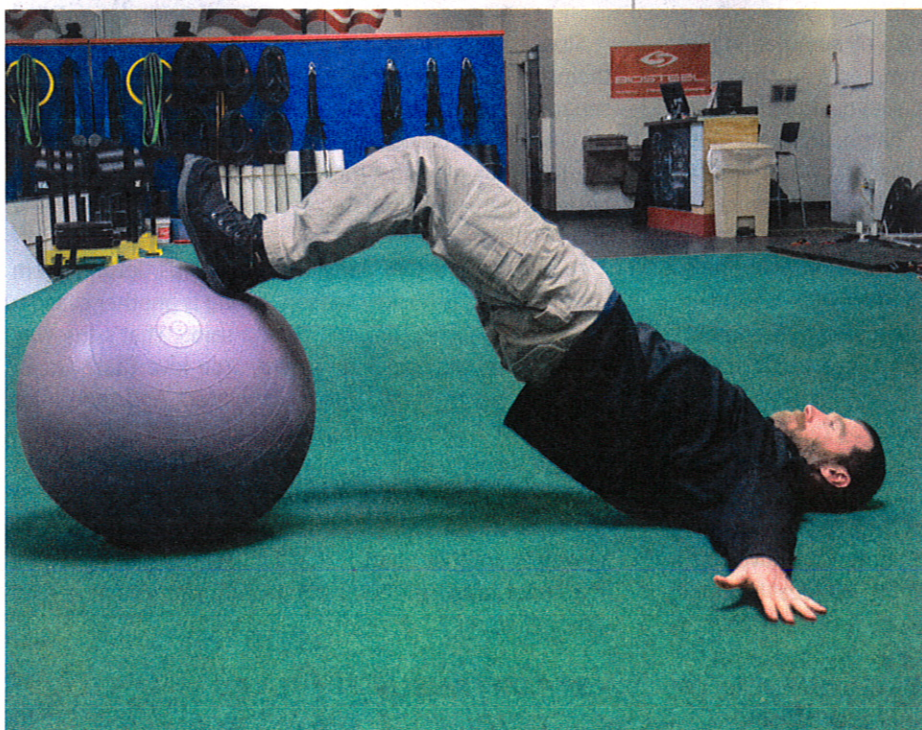
"We're looking to stay nice and tall and a cue we use a lot is, pretend you don't have a hip joint, so you're one piece from your shoulders straight down through your knees, so we're looking to fall forward from your knees and push into the ball and bring yourself back up. Again, we're looking at the core as a stabilizer because you're gonna use your legs to produce power and you want all that power you've produced to come through a really solid core, so we're gonna work on keeping that core nice and solid." - **SIPOTZ**

## STABILITY-BALL LEG CURL

Laying down on your back with your arms out at your

sides, place your feet up on a stability ball in front of you. With your butt elevated, use your hamstrings and glutes to curl the ball inward toward your body before extending the ball back out.

"Whenever we do any of our leg curl type exercises, try to avoid the weight machine-based leg curl where you're laying on the bench face down, two fold there: one is people tend to arch their back and use their hip flexors when they're laying face down, which is the opposite of what we want to happen and two, your leg faces down, your legs your glutes don't have to fire, so if you lay on your back and face the ceiling when you do your leg curls, glutes have to fire to extend your hips and then your hamstrings flex and extend your knee joint, and that's really important." - **NELSON**



Photos by Michael Caples/MiHockey

# HOW DO YOU GET BETTER? PLAY OTHER SPORTS

Darryl Nelson said it's rare that he sees a player enter USA Hockey's National Team Development Program who strictly played only hockey.

Yes, even the country's top teenagers played multiple sports while growing up.

Nelson is the strength and conditioning coach for the NTDP and also works with Advantage Strength and Conditioning, stationed at the Ann Arbor Ice Cube.

While many parents and players think playing hockey year-round is the way to go for becoming a better player, Nelson points to the opposite.

"Well-rounded athletes are always great," Nelson said. "I guess never say 100-percent, but I think almost all our players are multi-sport athletes when they come into the National Team Development Program. Very few kids specialize in hockey and then become that good. **Cam Fowler (right)** and Reid Boucher played here. They were all-star baseball players. We had all kinds of kids, players like Brady Skjei, he was a stand-out football player, Andy Copp I think has the state record in Michigan for passing yards in football. The examples are endless. If you went through an NHL roster, 90-percent of the guys on every team were multi-sport athletes until they were 17, 18 years old."

With travel teams playing upward of 80 games per season and then spring hockey beginning shortly after the fall season ends, kids are vulnerable to burning out.

"I think the other thing, too, is the way to not like something is to have it all the time," Nelson said. "If you had chocolate cake every day, how much would you like chocolate cake? Time away actually increases your motivation I think. So to take a few weeks or even a couple months off hockey in the spring and summer is great... Our version with the National Team Development Program of spring hockey is great because we don't play games. The hockey is all about practice, it's all about reps, it's all about handling pucks, it's all about skating. It's not playing a game where you might have the puck for 30 seconds in two hours. You practice for an hour, you have the puck for 40 minutes."

Brian Sipotz is the owner of Advantage Strength and Conditioning and a certified strength and conditioning specialist. He said kids can simply play "anything that's going to make them an athlete," citing the valuable skills they learn that translate back to hockey.

"Anything where they get out and they're active and they're being athletes and they're learning how to move their body, that's really beneficial, too," Sipotz said. "Say you go play pickup basketball as a summertime activity. You're learning things like spatial awareness, you're learning give-and-go, you're learning how to get open for people. Everyone talks about the 10,000 hours toward mastering a sport. You don't have to play hockey to get



that. You don't have to be on the ice all summer. In fact, you shouldn't be on the ice all summer. You should be working on things that are going to make you athletic, things that are going to help you read the game, understand the game, how people move off each other and where you can be in a good position to get the ball or get the puck. All those are things you develop just like people are trying to return to playing more pond hockey and just unstructured play. You get that through other sports, too."

With how expensive hockey season already is, parents don't need to break the bank with these other sports, either.

"I think a big misconception, maybe by the players but also by the parents is that you say, 'Oh you should play multiple sports' and they go, 'Oh well shoot, I'm paying for all this travel hockey and now we've gotta go play AAU baseball and something else.' It doesn't have to be AAU baseball," Nelson said. "It can just be local baseball, it can just be the lowest level league, it doesn't have to be a grand. People are... whatever it is, 'Keep up with the Joneses' or they want a status symbol or something like that. Those are adult values. Kids don't need that."

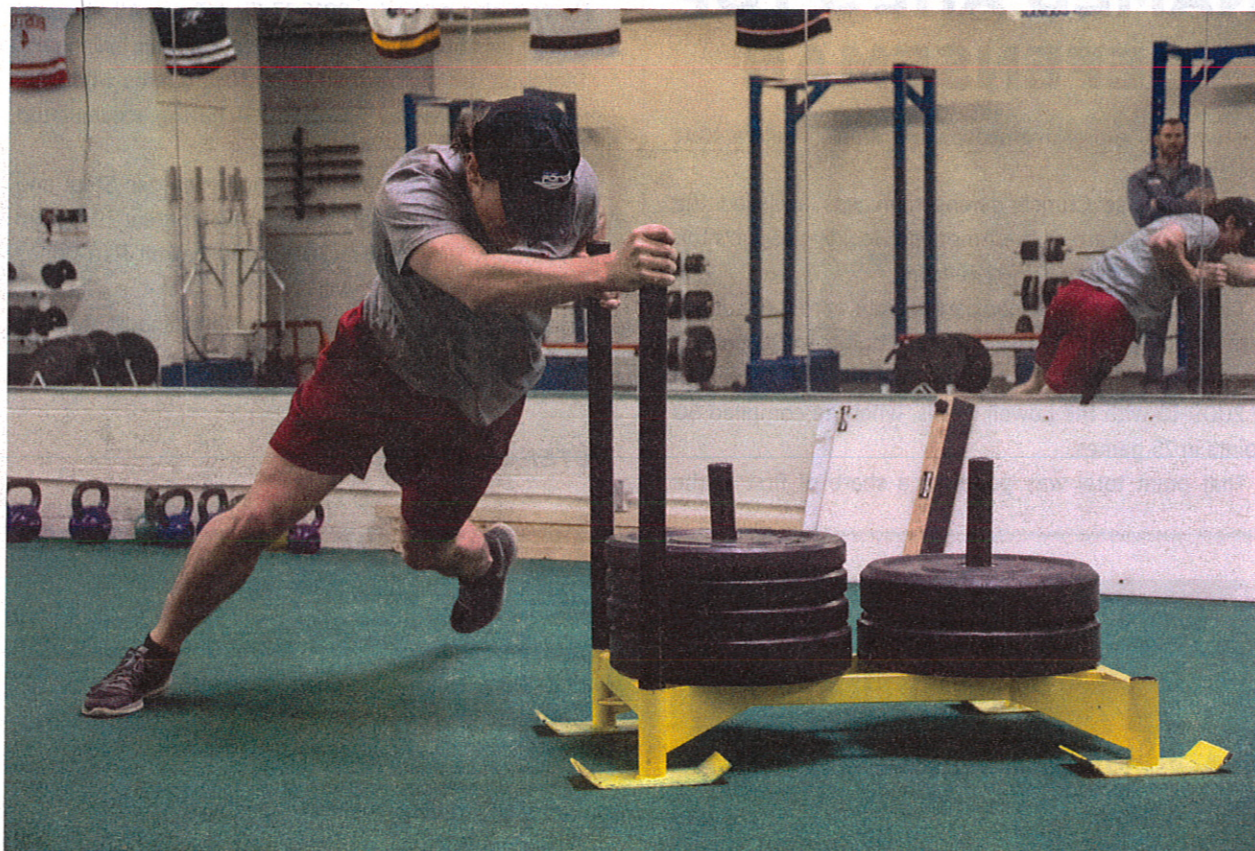
Sipotz and Nelson said having parents educate themselves and establish early on that hockey season is separate from spring and summer will go a long way.

"One thing is being educated and knowledgeable about the fact that playing other sports is gonna make you a better athlete and ultimately a better hockey player in the end," Nelson said.

"It's about starting early with your kids, letting them know that this is hockey season, spring is another season, summer is another season," Sipotz said. "That's the way we set it up with our kids where, 'You love that? Great, look forward to it next fall, next winter.' And then a lot of times, too, people will say, 'Well my kid loves hockey. There's no way he'll step away.' Well, lacrosse is a lot like hockey. Give that a shot. A lot of times kids like the competition, so they're gonna like that competition just as well in another sport if that's what they really like. It's just about trying different things until you try something else that works."

- STEFAN KUBUS

# HOW TO DIVE INTO A SUMMER TRAINING PROGRAM



When it comes to a youth hockey player's training, the motivation to improve ultimately has to come from within the player.

But once the decision has been made to add a training regimen, what's the next move?

Brian Sipotz and Darryl Nelson offered advice for youth hockey players and shed some light on how both parents and players can help choose the right trainer and type of training.

Nelson is the strength and conditioning coach for USA Hockey's National Team Development Program and also works with Sipotz as a strength coach at Advantage Strength and Conditioning, stationed out of the Ann Arbor Ice Cube.

Nelson offered a simple piece of beginning advice for parents searching for that quality trainer or training facility: treat it as if you were hiring someone to do a job.

"Generally speaking, be conscientious of who your kid is working with," Nelson said. "I've had a lot of parents come to me and say, 'We saw you speak at this or that, and I'm starting to realize that maybe my son or daughter maybe has been doing the wrong type of stuff.' Well, you should realize that before you get the checkbook out and you're paying someone. Think of it as hiring someone. Say you're a person who runs a small business, do you just get anybody or do you get résumés and references and try to learn a little bit about what that person's role is before you pay them to do it? I think people are going in blind - take time to educate yourself on what is and what's not good training, and if that person is doing [good training],

check up on their references. You'd be surprised. A lot of people haven't worked with all the people they claim to have worked with or worked with the teams that they've claimed to work with haven't accomplished the things they've accomplished, so maybe look in their background a little bit and get some sort of references. If the person is not willing to give those to you, then I probably wouldn't work with them."

When it comes to his own experiences working with new players that come in, Sipotz said the misconceptions about wild, over-the-top training couldn't be further from his philosophy of keeping it simple.

"I think one of the biggest things we see in here is maybe that expectation that maybe it's gonna be 100-percent crazy-looking training where people are crawling out of the gym, and if it's not that way then it's not a successful day of training," Sipotz said. "Things have changed to the point where we know a lot more now about function, we know a lot more now about how the training should go, especially in the offseason, and we're looking to not just reinforce that circuit-type stuff right away because the players just spent an entire season in that 30 seconds in, two minutes off thing, so we're not really gonna touch that right away. We're gonna spend time getting the aerobic base back, which we know is important now."

Because of where kids are in the developmental stages of their lives, it's the basics that are most crucial, especially considering many still need to learn how to handle their own bodyweight. That's the biggest thing Sipotz said he sees when working with new players. Nelson added that,

in addition to the kids' low strength-to-weight ratio, poor posture and a lack of competitiveness are big things I notices with new players entering his program. But for kids who haven't yet had any serious training in their lives, some of those things are to be expected.

"Especially with youth players, you're not dealing with people that are in the third year of a four-year stretch before the Olympics," Sipotz said. "You're dealing with kids who are not yet to 75-percent of their potential strength, so the basics and working hard in those basics gonna be the key for young players to get stronger and to build strength in the off-season."

And when it comes to the latest fads, Nelson said ignore them. Most are simply for the general population, not for specifically maximizing athletes in team sports.

"Avoid the things that are most popular, whether it's infomercial stuff or franchise-type gyms, the P90X or Crossfit-type people; just because something is real popular doesn't mean it's good training for an athlete," Nelson said. "Those things are more general population. They're not concerned with things like neuromuscular control, increasing the number of fast-twitch muscle fibers you have and those sorts of things. The problem with doing really high-rep, really endurance-based training is that for a teenager, that can increase the number of slow-twitch muscle fibers they have and decrease the number of fast-twitch they have. Obviously you want to go the other way for team sports; you want to increase the ratio of fast-twitch motoring units, and you do that by training that's oriented toward speed and power, not by doing endurance-based training. So if you're doing 50 pull-ups and 50 squats and you're doing those type of things for time, the body circuit-type stuff where the whole idea is that you're really gassed and fatigued at the end, then that's the end product you're gonna get: slow twitch, endurance-oriented muscle fibers. What you want is speed-oriented, power-oriented work."

Remember, hockey shifts are typically no longer than one minute, often shorter, and then there's roughly a two-minute rest period on the bench before going back out on the ice again. Even the premier NHL players who log top minutes on a nightly basis are still playing 23 minutes in a two-and-a-half hour time span.

"The whole idea of specificity of training is to use the neuromuscular system and the cardiovascular system in a way you can use in your sport," Nelson said. "Well in hockey, you play a shift that, depending if you're a forward or defenseman, is probably gonna be anywhere from 40 to 60 seconds, and you're probably gonna get a two- to two-and-a-half minute rest after that, so the amount of rest you do is actually two to three times the amount of work you do during your competition, so your training should reflect that."

**- STEFAN KUBUS**

# MAXIMIZING YOUR OFFSEASON

Jason Hodges knows a little bit about helping players through a season.

He's the head athletic trainer for USA Hockey's National Team Development Program, which means Hodges is overseeing the year-long health of not one but two teams of elite teenagers competing against some of the best players in the world.

Heading into the summer, he wants every hockey player to do something simple - recuperate.

"It's very important after the long grind of a season to let your body heal," Hodges said. "Rehab any injuries or things that are bugging you during the season - give them time to heal or seek out help, physical therapy or whatever else you may need, before you take that next step in your training in the offseason."



Once those lingering injuries are fully healed, the summer is an opportunity to prepare yourself for the following season. Time should be spent in the weight room, as this is the point in the calendar that you can dedicate yourself to muscle gain. Older players should seek a proper work-out regime; first-timers should make sure they are learning their way around the weight room correctly.

"It's flexibility and strength - not super heavy lifts, but getting yourself into the weight room and getting yourself familiar with lifting," Hodges said for the players starting to explore weight training. "If this is your first time lifting, it's about starting the process and making sure you're doing the things right. Make sure you're under the guidance of somebody who knows what they're doing, so that they can teach you the right way of doing things. You don't need a lot of machines and heavy weights and stuff - you can do a lot of simple body-weight things and other things that you can do on your own, not with a \$1

million gym."

Hodges wants to see players work on building good habits during the offseason, especially when it comes to training.

"I think obviously nutrition is key," Hodges said. "Eating the right things, staying away from junk food or fast food. Everybody says this, but it's true - eat your vegetables. It helps, it all helps. It helps your body heal after a workout, but it also helps your body grow. Good habits, warming up and stretching before you start your work-out - same thing as a practice carries over to a workout where you want to make sure your body is loose and ready before you do your training or your conditioning.

"Foam-rolling, some static stretching, a dynamic warm-up, they're all good to get the blood flowing and the muscles ready before your start. You want to do those same things once you start playing again, too - you want to continue that dynamic warm-up and that good solid foundation when you start playing, you want to get your body ready for a game just like a training session."

And as soon as you're done training, get some protein in your body. Hodges makes sure his NTDP players have chocolate milk within 20 minutes of each workout.

"Recovery is important," Hodges said. "Eating well, at some point, here we do the simple thing of chocolate milk.

Low-fat chocolate milk has a good balance of proteins and a little bit of fats and carbohydrates to help rebuild those muscles after they break down. You don't need to buy a bunch of supplements, especially at that age, it's just eating food, real food goes a long way in recovery. You want to make sure you stay hydrated, lots of fluids helps to replenish the muscles for anything that's lost during a warm-up. At that age, sports drinks can help a little bit, but just a little caveat, Gatorade and Powerade have a lot of calories. Sometimes that can be good, sometimes it can be bad. Just keep an eye on how much you drink."

And while he wants to see players training, he doesn't want them overdoing it.

"Usually three times a week is kind of the standard, a good rule of thumb is three to four times a week," Hodges said. "You don't want to overdo it, and you want to mix it up so it doesn't get monotonous or get boring. It doesn't have to be necessarily lifting all the time - you can do off-ice stuff, running, Darryl, our strength coach, says go play a different sport. Go play tennis, go play golf. It's amazing how much those other sports work different muscles, different but the same, and kind of break it up a little bit."

**- MICHAEL CAPLES**

