

Warm-up for Soccer Training and Games

To improve your soccer coaching skills, you've got to make sure your players give their bodies the chance to perform at their best. That means sensible warm-ups and cool-down, before and after a match or a soccer training session of any kind.

Soccer is a demanding physical game. So providing encouragement and instruction and making sure your players do adequate physical preparation is one of the most important responsibilities in soccer coaching.

The warm up is a process to increase awareness, improve co-ordination, improve elasticity and contractibility of muscles, and increase the efficiency of the respiratory and cardiovascular systems.

Soccer training and blood flow to muscles

In a body at rest, the blood flow to the muscles is comparatively low, and the majority of the small blood vessels (capillaries) supplying them are closed. When soccer training or playing begins, the blood flow in the exercising muscles increases markedly, as the capillaries open.

At rest, 15-20% of the blood flow supplies muscles, while after 10-12 minutes of all-round exercise, the percentage of blood flow supplying the muscles rises to 70-75%. A muscle can only achieve maximum performance when all its blood vessels are functional. Physical work increases the energy output and temperature of the muscle, this in turn leads to improved co-ordination with less likelihood of injury.

A warm-up therefore prepares the body by:

- raising muscle temperature towards an optimum level for performance
- enabling metabolic processes in cells to proceed at higher rates
- and allowing nerve messages to travel faster

Why warm-up is important in soccer coaching

Reasons for conducting a thorough warm-up prior to soccer training and games include the following:

- To increase blood flow to muscular tissue
- To increase muscle temperature
- To reduce muscle tightness
- To elevate body temperature
- To stimulate reflex activity related to balance and co-ordination
- To achieve full joint mobility in the specific joints involved in the activity

- To achieve full soft tissue extensibility – muscles, tendons, ligaments
- To enhance the functioning of the neuromuscular system
- To prepare the cardiovascular and respiratory systems
- To prepare the player psychologically for the coming activity
- To familiarize themselves with the environmental conditions

Warm-ups should be intense enough to increase the body temperature, the effects of which will ultimately wear off depending upon its intensity and specificity. The procedure should begin with movements of the large muscle groups, as these are the main areas to which blood is redistributed. These include the following areas:

- Back lower leg: gastrocnemius and soleus
- Front lower leg: peroneals (shin)
- Front thigh: quadriceps
- Back thigh: hamstrings
- Inner thigh: adductors
- Back: erector spinae
- Trunk: abdominal muscles
- Shoulders and chest: deltoids and pectorials

Specialized soccer exercises

After the general warm-up players can begin more specialized exercises including mobilization of the joints and dynamic movements of muscles, particularly of the lower extremity. The final stage of a warm-up concentrates on technique, and/or practicing a specific movement.

Whether warm-ups are performed with or without a ball depends entirely upon the philosophy adopted by the coach. This part of the soccer training session does provide an opportunity to work on specific technical skills in conjunction with mobility work and may also provide a greater mental and neurological stimulus for the players. In soccer coaching generally a lack or improper use of a warm-up and a cool-down is a risk factor for lower extremity overuse muscular injuries, especially during running.