

Presented By:



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FOOTBALL SEASON 2008
STAYING STRONG AND FINISHING STRONG

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The game of football is a very tough, demanding sport that each player must work hard to be successful. That work to be done is not only on the field, but off the field each player must **work to maintain 85-90% of their off-season/pre-season strength levels by season's end** to stay strong and injury free. Those teams fortunate to play beyond the regular season usually are the teams that have done everything to prepare and maintain physically throughout the season. When you're talking about losing strength improved in the summer months and Pre-season, it doesn't take long to begin to lose the strength that you have worked so hard to gain. Too many times coaches and athletes think that the work they did in preparing for the season in terms of strength, power, flexibility, speed and conditioning will stay with them the entire season regardless of what they do once the season begins. **The research shows that in terms of strength alone that the strength levels begin to decrease at less than 1% every 72-96 hours of inactivity.** From a coaches prospective the in-season program serves two purposes, 1) to maintain strength levels (to keep performance levels high), 2) injury prevention (the healthier the team stays, the better the opportunity for success). Even with the additional time constraints and the heightened physical stresses induced by practices and games, it is vital to administer an effective strength-training program for the duration of the season.

While there are never any guarantees, a progressive strength program can help sustain performance and serve as an injury deterrent over the course of the season.

Early Season

Once you get out of camp and into the weekly routine of game preparation, the schedule becomes more structured in terms of allowing set designated days to lift weights. Coaches will normally pare-down the practice duration and intensity as the week progresses. An ideal scenario is to get a **minimum of two workouts in per week**. Optimally, after playing a Friday night game it would be best to bring your players in on Saturday mornings for light conditioning, stretching, and lifting. **The goal is to attempt to reduce the muscle soreness and flush the lactic acid (waste products) out of the body as quickly as possible after competition.** The faster the body recovers and regenerates the quicker the athlete is able to compete for the next game.

One example of an in-season lift is as follows:

- 4-Way Neck Machine - 1 x 8-10 each direction
- Shoulder Shrugs - 2 x 10
- One of the following multi-joint movements: Back Squat, Front Squat, Front Squat-Press, Dead Lift, Leg Press - 3 x 8-10
- Romanian Dead Lifts (commonly referred to as "straight-leg" dead lifts) - 2 x 10
- Incline Barbell Bench Press - 3 x 6-8
- High Lat Pulls/Rows - 2 x 8
- Dumbbell Standing Military Press - 2 x 8

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- Horizontal Rows - 2 x 8
- Dumbbell Supine Bench Press - 2 x 8
- Grip Work (varying exercises) - 2 x 10-15
- Core Targeting (various exercises) - 4 x 1 minute of continuous reps

Mid/Late Season

At the Mid-point of the season is where you usually see teams either or getting better or getting worse and this can definitely be attributed to the in-season strength program or lack of taking place. As the season progresses, attention must be given to the fact that players are going to get beat up and a few alternative plans must be put into place. Linemen, for instance, are notorious for spraining fingers, wrists, and elbows.

While these injuries can hit all positions, offensive and defensive linemen are especially vulnerable due to the heavy collisions that occur in the trenches on every snap.

When confronted with these injuries, the players are sometimes unable to handle certain implements in the weight room (e.g., barbells, dumbbells, and other rigid tools).

With the use of specially designed machines (single-limb and "hands-free" models), flex bands, manual resistance, and other more flexible modes (e.g., medicine balls and sandbags), you can design "no-hands" and/or limited range of movement exercises that work the proximal (above the injury) and distal (below the injury) musculature.

It's important to also have lower extremity alternatives for hip, knee, and ankle injuries that keep the surrounding muscular compartments strong, while also providing a neural stimulus to the affected areas that can expedite the rehabilitation process.

Final Rep

In-season strength training is an often-overlooked yet extremely vital component for the long-term success of your program. I am always disappointed when I hear coaches make excuses of why they can't incorporate and maintain at least two lifting session per week during this critical time of year.

Whether you follow a format similar to the one presented here, or use a system that better fits your experience, background, and philosophical convictions, it is important to understand that you must do something!

If you're having difficulties with the in-season program design due to a limited facility, lack of equipment, time constraints, or any other administrative or organizational roadblocks remember that if they don't use it they will lose it and all the hard work to get to this point will all be for naught.

A "no excuses" approach to in-season strength training:

High school coaches who are having difficulties cranking-up the lifting sessions during the season - for whatever reasons - might pick up an idea below:

- Schedule your first lift on the day after the game. It also provides the athletic training staff with an opportunity to check on any "delayed" injury situations.
- How about a 30-Minute early morning lift once a week (early in the week would be best) It gives the kids plenty of recovery before practice.
- Another option for a strength session is a post-practice, on-the-field manual resistance/flex band workout. The flex bands are light, easily transported, and multi-functional. Several bodyweight movements (some schools have outdoor chin/dip stations for exactly this purpose) can be incorporated.

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- A post-practice, timed circuit workout of 10-12 movements, 45 seconds per movement, and 30 seconds recovery between sets, can be incorporated in your weight room with the inclusion of free weights, machines, sandbags, dumbbells, flex bands, manual resistance, and chin/dip stations.

“The only place where hard work comes before success is in the dictionary”

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