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presents:**

The 10 Things You're Not Doing, But Should Be, To Become A Better Footballer



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1 – Address Your Injuries

Everyone gets injured at some stage and the only difference is the severity of the injury. Most soft tissue injuries can be avoided with a balanced training program that address any weak points that you might have.

Bad mechanics from restricted joints plus trying to perform high intensity movements under fatigue, is a recipe for disaster. Any injury can be trained around but too often, players will simply leave the area alone with the old “I’ll rest it and see if it gets better mantra” which is ridiculous. Nothing just “gets better” by itself, especially if the actual problem is still not resolved.

Below are some common injuries, why they occur and their potential (and common) weak spots:

- Quadricep Strain – a muscle imbalance between the anterior muscles of the leg (quadriceps and hip flexor muscle groups) and the posterior muscles of the leg (gluteal and hamstring muscle groups)
- Hamstring Strain – an imbalance between the gluteal and hamstring muscle groups
- Lower Back Soreness – can and will include poor core stability, excessive pelvic anterior tilt, restricted ankle mobility and restricted hip mobility to name a few.

Once you know what types of weak points will contribute to various injuries, then you know exactly what you need to address in your rehab.



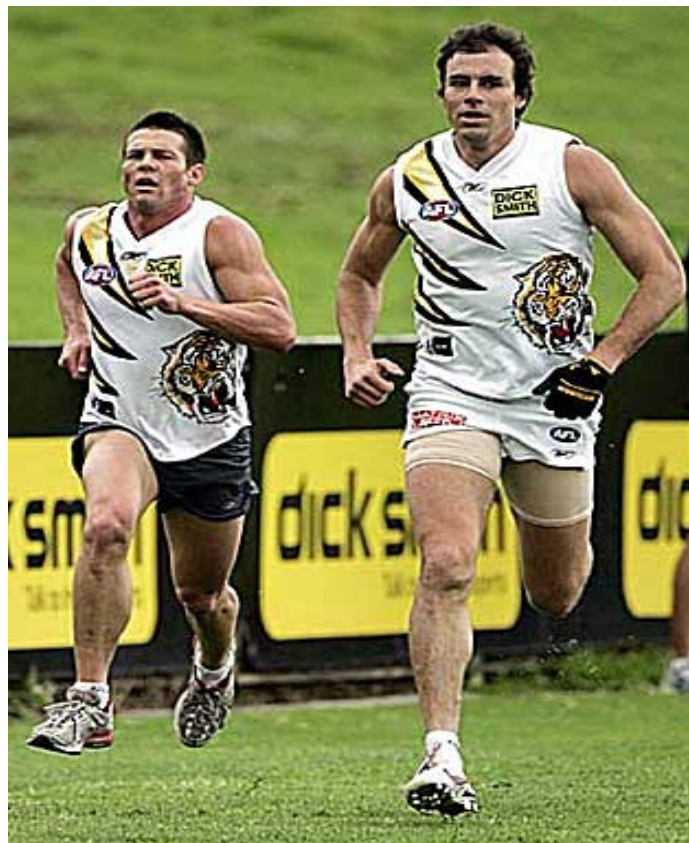
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2 – Density Fartlek / Interval Training

Whether you call it fartlek or interval training, it is probably one of the more specific energy system training methods you can use for football. Fartlek training usually involves various intensities with a walk, jog and sprint set up where interval training is basically a stop and go approach.

Whichever one you opt to go with, and I suggest a little of both, I strongly advise that you go with a density training progression.

Density can be described as either doing the same amount of work in less time, or doing more work in the same amount of time. Either way, your fitness will skyrocket once you give it a reason to recover faster.



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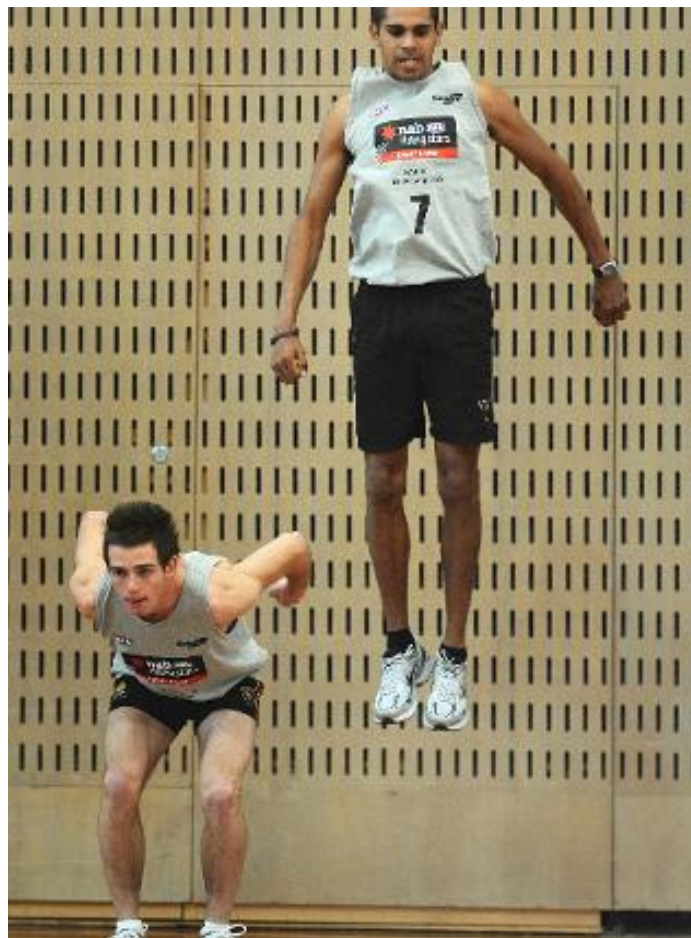
3 – Assessing

How do you know what you need to improve on without any sort of self assessment?
As they say if you're not assessing, you're guessing.

There are a million ways that you can assess your abilities and performance but however you do decide to go about, make it standardised in the fact that the same test can be replicated exactly the same way every time you do it.

This will cut down your assessment modes as a calliper body fat test is a great test, but unless you have the same person perform the test, and that person will need to have performed over 100 of these tests at a bare minimum, then you'll get a wide range of results.

At a maximum I wouldn't really exceed 5 – 6 tests that you'd use at any one time and even then, you might not need all of them. You could easily get by with 1 test each addressing body composition, explosiveness, relative strength and a time trial over a specific distance.



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4 – Muscle Activation and Integration

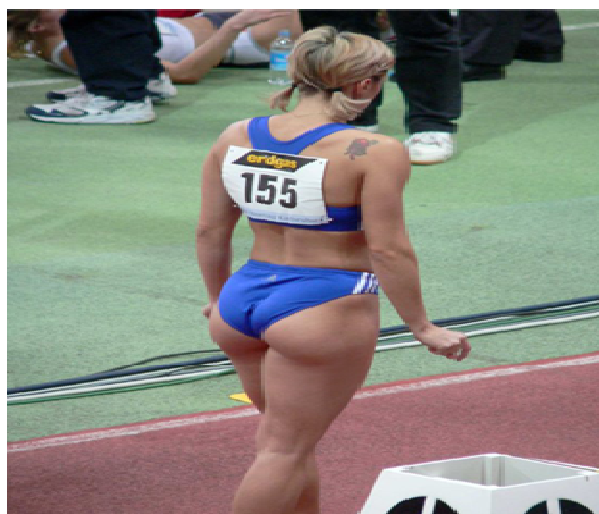
Everyone has underperforming muscles which is the nature of the beast when training for a specific sport. The movements used in that sport creates an overload of a number of particular motor patterns which in football, is a quad dominant pattern from all the running and which also uses a limited range of motion, emphasising the hip flexor and quadricep muscle groups.

What this can do is lead to severe inhibition of the gluteal muscle group which is the strongest muscle of the body, so it's vital to get this muscle working through activation exercises such as supine bridges, side lying clams, prone hip extensions, glute marches and mini band side steps.

Below are some other dominant muscles in the body and the muscle they inhibited when you aren't partaking in a balanced a structured training programme:

- Dominant Quadriceps – inhibited glutes
- Dominant Hip Flexors – inhibited glutes
- Dominant Chest – inhibited retraction muscles (lower traps, mid traps, rhomboids)
- Dominant Erectors – inhibited core muscles

Once you have activated the inhibited muscles with various activation exercises, then you must immediately go to work to strengthen them while that are awake and able to do their share of the work in resistance exercises so again taking the glutes as an example, after a set of prone hip extensions and mini band side steps you'd jump right into some deadlifts and/or do a set of each before each set of deadlifts.



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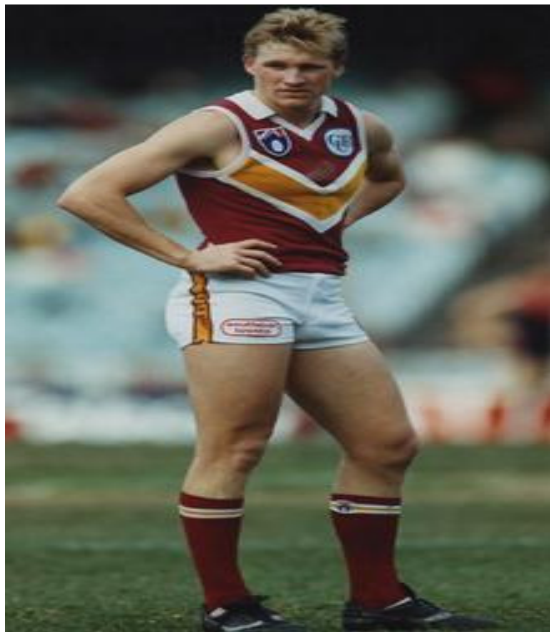
5 – Progression

A training program is only as good as its progression. You may have a program that uses all the best exercises, allows optimal rest between each muscle or movement patterns combined with the perfect nutrition plan, but if your training doesn't get harder, you'll get nowhere. Progression should be built into your program as it guides you towards your goal.

The best ways to progress is through:

- increasing the load
- increasing the sets
- increasing the reps
- decreasing the rest between sets (a mode of density training)

The type of progression you use will also be dependent on your goals and different goals will respond best to different progressions.



6 – Actual Speed Training

Speed training should actually result in getting faster but unfortunately a lot of players get speed training confused with anaerobic training. Doing 100m sprints doesn't really make you faster. It gets you very tired and it may enable you to work through lactic acid build up a little better, but as soon fatigue and lactic acid are produced, you're actually going slower.

For speed work you need to focus on quality over quantity. Short duration sets with full recovery between sets that enable a 100% effort for every set, will enable to actually increase your speed.

Activities to use include:

- 5 – 20m sprints
- technique work
- quick response plyometric exercises
- rate of force development work in the gym
- relative strength work in the gym

Speed can and should be trained throughout the entire season as it will not incur much, if any, actual muscle damage if performed with the correct parameters and thus, soreness should be minimal.



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7 - Actual Strength Training

The best players are the strongest and thus, the fastest players. Gary Ablett is the strongest pound for pound player in the game and that is a big reason why he is the best player in the game. Chris Judd is in the same boat.

Too often players train like bodybuilders to try and get better at football but at my last glance, not many bodybuilders are playing in the AFL.

The focus on your gym work should be in gaining strength which is the foundation of all your other fitness qualities so by simply getting stronger, you'll automatically increase your endurance and power potential.

Now to get strong you actually need to lift heavy wts in the 3 -5 rep range (no real need to go lower in reps), and you should progress through trying to increase the weight as often as you can.

A couple methods you can use to increase strength is:

- [Cressey Performances "Singles Above 90%" Method](#)
- [Jim Wendler's "531" Method](#)

Both methods have built in progression and are easy to follow. Like speed, strength should be trained throughout the entire year but you'll need to be a bit more careful with this as you don't want to induce too much nervous system fatigue during the season.

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8 – Developing a Proper Nutrition Plan

Everyone knows the importance of good eating habits but not many adhere to it. Whether it's laziness or just a lack of awareness, a ridiculous percentage of people's eating habits in the world are not doing them any favours, including those who are very active.

Unbeknown to most players, they rarely eat anywhere near enough of the total food volume required to sustain optimal performance, and that's without taking nutrient timing and portioning into account.

Just think that you need to eat enough to:

1. supply your vital organs with enough fuel to function
2. supply your body with enough fuel to last the day with limited activity
3. supply your body with enough fuel to last the day with moderate activity
4. supply your body with enough fuel to last the day with a high amount of activity
5. supply your body with enough fuel to last throughout the day with a high amount of activity and then recover from that activity
6. supply your body with enough fuel to last throughout the day with a high amount of activity and then to recover from that activity and re-fuel itself for the next day and so on.

Unfortunately most of us barely reach level 3 and couple this with alcohol and a few “off days” from your nutrition plan, and you will be leaving a lot of energy in the change rooms before you even run out. If you ask AFL players what is the biggest change in their preparation over the last 5 years, I bet a lot of them would say they're nutrition.



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9 – Rest and Recovery

Resistance training wise, you make progress when you're not in the gym. Energy systems training wise, you make progress while you actually do it which causes a conflict of sorts. A lot of players think they need to train with “AFL type volume” or close to, which is not going to end up pretty in the long run.

I used to do this in my young years and then I would regularly be burnt out by the season's end and if finals weren't in site, I would then struggle to have the motivation to play. You don't need to be in peak condition 4 weeks before the season starts and if you do start behind the rest of the pack for whatever reason, you still need to take time to get your fitness up which may not occur until after the season starts but it's now where you start, it's where you finish.

Take your time to build up your fitness and plan some rest and/or deload weeks into your training. If it's good enough for AFL players to have planned breaks or low volume periods of training, it's probably good enough for us weekend warriors.



10 – Improve Weaknesses, Maintain Strengths

This is missed by the majority of players. Great runners will continue to run and big blokes will continue to try and get bigger. Unfortunately their potential to get better at their strengths is limited, and they're simply ignoring their weak points which would be pretty easy to bring up as they never train them.

Each year AFL players come back with an extra string in their bow whether it be that they are bigger and stronger or they have increased their endurance to move into the midfield. If you do choose to improve on your weak point/s, then it is important to at least maintain your strengths, not ignore them or keep training them at the highest level you can.

And as mentioned above, you'll struggle to achieve 2 goals at once so if you need to gain some muscle then put endurance on maintenance and vice versa, yet try and maintain them at the same time which requires much less volume.

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