



The Proper Athletic Warm Up

Matt Hank, MS, CSCS, USAW

A common site before any practice or game is to see a team grouped in a circle sitting on the ground reaching for their toes. These athletes are trying to warm up and stretch their muscles before it is time to perform. Why do they do this? Probably because at some point in little league, on the club team, or in high school the coaches said to stretch before you play. Is this the most effective warm up technique- sitting around holding a stretch for 20-30 seconds? Let's examine this question.

Static stretching (a stretch held at a certain length for usually 10-30 seconds) is not an effective technique for warming up an athlete before he/she has to perform in practice or a game. Static stretching is beneficial for improving overall flexibility and used as a recovery technique from a hard work out. However, during a game or practice situation an athlete does not sit and hold a stretched position for 10-30 seconds at a time. Athletes are constantly moving in a quick and dynamic fashion. Static stretching used as a warm up might be better than doing nothing at all (still debatable), but a sports specific warm up is more valuable to an athlete.

A sports specific warm up is the most effective way to prepare an athlete to perform to their highest potential. This type of warm up would be about 10 minutes in length and include dynamic exercises to increase blood flow, enhance movement patterns, and prepare the soft tissue (muscle, fascia, and tendon) for exercise. These types of drills can include skips, squats, lunges, butt kickers, high kicks, jumping jacks, hurdle walks, build up sprints, and arm circles. The goal is to progressively speed up the pace of the warm up to the point of performing full speed exercises that mimic game like situations. These drills should be performed with perfect posture and technique to improve movement patterns and enhance stability and mobility. Other benefits of a

sports specific warm up include improved speed, power output, coordination, and sports performance.

Athletes and coaches need to take the first step and include a sports specific warm up before any practice or competition. An example of a basic athletic warm up would consist of a 3 minute jog, forward and backward arm circles, hand walks/inchworms, hurdle walks, butt kickers, high knees, high kicks, carioca, lateral skips, skips for height (X2), 50% sprint (X2), 75% sprint (X2), 90% sprint, and 100% sprint. After this 5-10 minute warm up it is then appropriate to do sport specific warm up drills such as playing catch for baseball or softball. Take time to warm up properly so your body is ready to perform at the highest level.