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PHYSICAL PREPARATION IN A SHORT SEASON

BY RICHARD BUCCIARELLI

This year marks my 3rd season as Assistant Coach and Fitness Coach with the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) Ridgebacks Women's Varsity Soccer Team.

The Women's Soccer program at UOIT itself also happens to be only 3 years old, having been introduced in the winter of 2012.

The first three years in our team's history have been very successful. We qualified for the playoffs in year one, and improved upon that record in year two by advancing to the OUA Quarter-Finals. Moving into a new division (OUA East) in year three, we finished the season in 2nd place, with a 13-2-2 record (going unbeaten in our first 14 games), and even earned a CIS National Top-10 ranking for the majority of the year, finishing with a #7 ranking heading into the play-offs. We continued to get good results in the post-season, earning a bronze medal in the OUA Final Four, plus a place in the 2014 CIS National Championships at Laval University in Quebec City, as the 3rd place team from Ontario.

The success of the UOIT Ridgebacks Women's Varsity Soccer Team owes itself to numerous factors and people, the most important of which is the Head Coach who literally built the team from scratch three years ago, Peyvand Mossavat (he was also named OUA East, and CIS Coach of the Year this season).

I am honored to have been part of the coaching staff since the team's inception, and to have contributed to its impressive performances on the pitch.

Below is a brief description of the four physical preparation strategies that I and the Coaching Staff used, which have contributed to our team's success over the past three years in general, and specifically during the incredible 2014 season:

1. RECRUIT GOOD ATHLETES (AS WELL AS GOOD PLAYERS):

The reality of university soccer is that the season is very short (only 2 ½ months including play-offs) and there are typically 2-3 games per week. There is also very little time to prepare teams, as the actual "pre-season" comprises only 2 ½ weeks in the middle of August. For teams to be successful, they must recruit players with certain athletic qualities that will enable them to thrive in this environment. Among the qualities to look for are:

- Speed (especially over 20-35 metres)
- Leg strength and jumping ability
- High intensity running ability (as measured by a field test like the Yo-Yo Intermittent Recovery Test)

2. CONDUCT THE RIGHT FITNESS ASSESSMENTS (AT THE RIGHT TIME):

Part of the process in recruiting players who are good athletes, as well as training to develop and maximize their athletic abilities, is having the right fitness assessment protocol to measure them. The best time to test for speed and jumping ability is in the off-season or the beginning of the season. This is because it is difficult to train to improve speed and jumping ability, so testing should be used to identify who is already good at these abilities. Tests of high intensity running ability (like the Yo-Yo tests) must be used consistently (every 4 to 6 weeks) throughout the off-season, summer, and pre-season. If athletes are training properly, there is a very large capacity to improve, and the Yo-Yo test in particular is very sensitive to improvements in fitness through training.

3. CREATE HOME TRAINING PROGRAMS (AND HOLD PLAYERS ACCOUNTABLE TO THEM):

As mentioned previously, the preparation time allotted for "pre-season" in university soccer is not nearly enough time to actually prepare players for the physical demands of the competitive season. Thus, university players must use the spring and summer months to train and maximize their fitness levels. Because university teams are prohibited from

training together “as a team” during these months, fitness training for the players must be accomplished through home training programs that the players must complete on their own. Home training programs must focus on improving high intensity running ability, as this is the one area of fitness with the greatest capacity for improvement through proper training. High intensity aerobic interval running (with 4-6 intervals of 3-4 minutes in duration and work-to-rest ratios of 1:1) is the most effective method of training to improve high intensity running ability. Players must be held accountable to their home training programs. This can be accomplished by having them sign-in and report their workouts, and of course also by conducting frequent fitness assessments to evaluate their progress throughout the year.

4. GET THE IN-SEASON FITNESS TRAINING RIGHT (WITH, AND WITHOUT THE BALL):

Even though the university competitive season is short, with the right timing of

training, teams can still improve fitness during the season. In general, schedule allows for only one day per week of intense fitness training. In the first month (September) aerobic training should be done with a high intensity (speed) but low volume (number of repetitions/distance covered). Work periods of 30 seconds - 1 minute, with work-to-rest ratios of 1:2 - 1:4, are most effective. It is also useful to use a combination of hard running workouts (much easier to control for intensity) with technical exercises/small-sided games (more specific to soccer). As the season progresses into the second month (October), a switch must be made to performing repeated sprint training and speed training. Shorter work periods (5-10 seconds) with much longer work-to-rest ratios (1:5 - 1:10) are most effective. Again, combining running and sprinting exercises both with and without the ball works best.



UOIT Fitness Coach Richard Bucciarelli with Goalkeeper Coach Ramon McIntosh at the 2014 CIS Banquet.

Richard Bucciarelli is the Assistant Coach and Fitness Coach with the University of Ontario Institute of Technology (UOIT) Ridgebacks Women's Varsity Soccer Team. The Ridgebacks recently competed in and placed 8th at the 2014 CIS National Championships at Laval University in Quebec City, Quebec, November 5-8, 2014.

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