

# SOCCER FIT-FACTS

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## SUMMER INTERNSHIP WITH GNK DINAMO ZAGREB—BY MATIJA VUGRINICEK

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This past summer, I spent one month in Zagreb, Croatia, where I obtained professional educational experience with GNK Dinamo Zagreb Youth Academy. Dinamo Zagreb is the most successful Croatian team, producing world-class players such as Luka Modric and Eduardo Da Silva. The Youth Academy has a lot of success in international tournaments against teams such as Manchester United, Barcelona and AC Milan.

The staff consists of former Croatian national team players, and Dinamo Zagreb legends. Growing up in Croatia, I used to look up to these local heroes, and there I was at Dinamo Zagreb, given a chance to learn from the people I grew up idolizing - amazing experience!

Other staff at Dinamo Zagreb includes, fitness trainers and athletic therapists who work alongside the coaches to offer comprehensive training for the players. One thing all of them mentioned to me is that communication between coaches, fitness trainers and therapists was the key to the success of player development. The following is the outline of things that stuck with me from countless conversations with coaches and fitness trainers, and observation of their sessions:

- World -wide player selection
- High volume of training sessions and games
- Parents are not allowed to observe training sessions
- High volume of technical training
- Focus on coordination training for younger age groups (12 and under)
- Weekly video analysis of games for older age groups (16 and older)
- Discipline, professionalism and respect is demanded from players
- Involvement with the senior team is encouraged (ie. ball-boys, match attendance)
- Appearance on international tournaments is encouraged
- Individual training for players recovering from injury
- Periodized strength and conditioning sessions
- Three meals per day provided for all players

The focus on youth development, both as athletes and human beings, is obvious at Dinamo Zagreb. Athletes are taught at a very young age what it means to play for the biggest club in the country and that only hard work and dedication can take you to the world

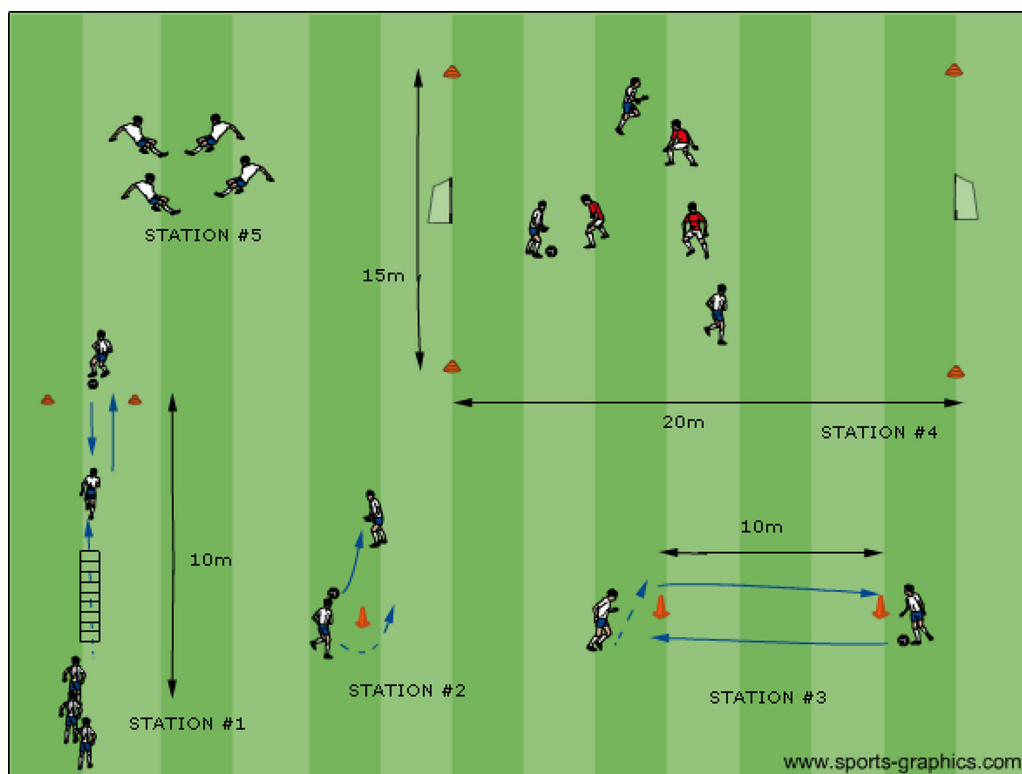
stage. Athletes train 4-5 times per week and play one game. The older age groups sometimes train twice a day. Younger age groups (11 and younger) play a lot of tournaments, and they treat each tournament like a world cup. I have seen eight year-olds cry because they lost a semi-final game of a minor tournament. All athletes in the academy have only one thing on their mind- to make it pro. The passion, drive to learn and "professionalism" is evident at a very early age. The significant component resulting in this early "professionalism" is the soccer culture evident in every part of Zagreb. Every day, the first thing children do once the school bells rings is run outside and play soccer, often for hours at a time. All players at Dinamo Zagreb live and breathe soccer.

My time spent with Dinamo Zagreb Youth Academy provided me with better understanding of things that are necessary for young players to make it to the pro level. Professional coaches, quality player selection, high volumes of training are all the key aspects of youth development, but most importantly players need to have the natural passion for the beautiful game.

## GNK DINAMO ZAGREB— SAMPLE TRAINING SESSION

Below are the details of a sample training session performed by the Dinamo Zagreb Youth Academy

- Age group: 11-12
- 10 minute coordination warm up using music and having players perform exercises to the beat
- 5 minute soccer specific warm up including dynamic stretches
- 45 minute circuit training session: 5 groups of 5 players, each group visits a station 3 times, 3 minutes per station
- 5 stations:
  1. Agility/speed (ladder drills with sprints)
  2. Heading technique
  3. Passing (two touch, one touch)- focus on technique and accuracy
  4. 3 v 3 game
  5. Core strengthening (front plank, side plank, crunches)
- 15 minute cool down including light jogging and static stretches



## EXERCISE SPOTLIGHT—STABILITY BALL KNEES-TO-CHEST

In this feature of Soccer Fit-Facts, Exercise Spotlight, we highlight an important exercise that can—and should—be incorporated into the training program of young soccer players. In this issue, we feature the stability ball knees-to-chest, an exercise which can help build core strength, balance, and also improve trunk stability and reduce risk of injury to the lower back and pelvis. To perform this exercise, start

by placing hands on the floor in push-up position, as wide as the shoulders. Place the feet (or toes) on a stability ball, and slowly raise the torso so that body weight is supported completely by the hands and feet. Keep the abdominal muscles contracted throughout the exercise, which will maintain the pelvis in a neutral position. Slowly bring the knees towards the chest, stopping when they have reached the

maximum amount of hip flexion (Figure 1). Hold this position for 1 second, then slowly extend the hips and knees until the starting position is reached.

Perform 2-3 sets of 10 repetitions, with about 1 minute of rest between sets, for optimal improvements in core strength. This exercise should be performed prior to players stepping onto the field.



Figure 1

Level	5.1																	Name:				
Distance	40																					
Level	9.1																	Date:				
Distance	80																					
Level	11.1	11.2																				
Distance	120	160																				
Level	12.1	12.2	12.3																			
Distance	200	240	280																			
Level	13.1	13.2	13.3	13.4																		
Distance	320	360	400	440																		
Level	14.1	14.2	14.3	14.4	14.5	14.6	14.7	14.8														
Distance	480	520	560	600	640	680	720	760														
Level	15.1	15.2	15.3	15.4	15.5	15.6	15.7	15.8														
Distance	800	840	880	920	960	1000	1040	1080														
Level	16.1	16.2	16.3	16.4	16.5	16.6	16.7	16.8														
Distance	1120	1160	1200	1240	1280	1320	1360	1400														
Level	17.1	17.2	17.3	17.4	17.5	17.6	17.7	17.8														
Distance	1440	1480	1520	1560	1600	1640	1680	1720														
Level	18.1	18.2	18.3	18.4	18.5	18.6	18.7	18.8														
Distance	1760	1800	1840	1880	1920	1960	2000	2040														
Level	19.1	19.2	19.3	19.4	19.5	19.6	19.7	19.8														
Distance	2080	2120	2160	2200	2240	2280	2320	2360														
Level	20.1	20.2	20.3	20.4	20.5	20.6	20.7	20.8														
Distance	2400	2440	2480	2520	2560	2600	2640	2680														
Level	21.1	21.2	21.3	21.4	21.5	21.6	21.7	21.8														
Distance	2720	2760	2800	2840	2880	2920	2960	3000														
Level	22.1	22.2	22.3	22.4	22.5	22.6	22.7	22.8														
Distance	3040	3080	3120	3160	3200	3240	3280	3320														
Level	23.1	23.2	23.3	23.4	23.5	23.6	23.7	23.8														
Distance	3360	3400	3440	3480	3520	3560	3600	3640														

**We are on the Web!**  
[www.soccerfitness.ca](http://www.soccerfitness.ca)

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Soccer Fitness was created to help coaches at all levels of the game improve their knowledge and practical skills in training their athletes. With huge and growing numbers of players registered in Canada at the youth level, it often seems that there are just too many players and not enough qualified fitness trainers. Today, most clubs in Ontario have Club Head Coaches and Technical Staffs, whose primary responsibility is to help train, educate their club's "rep" or competitive coaches, and ensure that they are able to plan and deliver appropriate technical and tactical training to their respective teams. Physical training of soccer players, however, seems to be the missing link in most clubs' overall training programs. **Soccer Fitness is a company that aims to help coaches in understanding and implementing appropriate physical training programs for their athletes.**

## BREAKING NEWS—SOCCER FITNESS AND THE EVEREST ACADEMY

Soccer Fitness Inc. is excited to announce that we have reached an agreement with Everest Academy, a private school in Richmond Hill, Ontario. President Richard Bucciarelli and his staff will be providing High Performance Soccer Training to Everest Academy students, two days per week. Through his business, Soccer Fitness Inc., Richard has assembled a team of High Performance Soccer Trainers and Coaches. Coach Matija Vugrinicek, who works with Richard at Soccer Fitness, will also be providing High Performance Soccer Training under Richard's direction at Everest Academy.

The training will focus on the development of individual techniques, including dribbling, passing, receiving, and shooting. The technical skills developed will be applied into functional, small-sided games where players will be required to apply their skills in realistic game situations. Technical development will also be supplemented by soccer-specific on-field fitness training, including speed/agility training, aerobic endurance training, and strength training. If you are interested or would like more information, please view on the attached flyer, or visit:

<http://www.everestacademies.com/>

## MEET CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR MATIJA VUGRINICEK

**Matija Vugrinicek** is a soccer-specific Strength and Conditioning Coach, and Senior Trainer at Soccer Fitness Inc. Originally born in Croatia, Matija played provincial level soccer for four years for CSC Mississauga and Mississauga Falcons Soccer Club. He has over three years experience in training soccer players and other athletes of all age groups and levels of ability. Matija's academic credentials include an Honors Bachelor of Science degree in Kinesiology and Health Science from York University (2011), NSCA Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (2011) and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Exercise and Lifestyle Management from Humber College in 2012. In May of 2012, Matija completed a one month internship with a professional soccer club from Europe- GNK Dinamo Zagreb. He also recently obtained the Canadian Society of Exercise Physiology's CEP – Certified Exercise Physiologist – certification.

