

ATC Article Series – Article #3



In Season Conditioning



Now that the hockey season is underway, its time for all that preparation you've put in over the summer to pay off. Hopefully training camp has gone well and the regular season is off to a great start. But it's a long season that can be physically demanding and draining, and maintaining that fitness level you worked so hard to obtain is crucial for success from now all the way until playoff time.

A lot of players work hard in the summer, have great regular seasons but start to falter down the stretch and have disappointing playoffs. Many times if this happens to goalies, they are accused of choking as the pressure increases. In reality, it is often simply a case of not maintaining their fitness during the season and while they're in great shape to start the year and their performance displays that, as their fitness level decreases towards the playoffs, their performance decreases as well.

Other goalies I've worked with have told me that they tend to play great for one game, but average the next. As a result, their coaches don't feel that they can handle the load of being a number one goalie because they aren't consistent enough to play a high number of games. In cases like these, often the problem isn't consistency. Again, its due to the lack of conditioning' where a goalie can play a great game but in back to back games they don't have the fitness to excel during the second game because they begin to tire out.

These are two classic cases of a goalie having to pay a high price for not maintaining their conditioning. Being labelled a choker or never being given an opportunity to be a number one goalie can have a devastating effect. So don't make the mistake of stopping your workouts during the season. Typically, you can maintain a level of fitness with two-thirds of the volume that you used to gain it. This will also lasts for about two-thirds the length of time it took you to gain that fitness level. So for example, if you worked out six days per week for three months, you can keep that fitness level by working out four days per week and won't see a drop for about two months. This is variable depending on your fitness levels but gives you a rough idea.

Don't fall in the trap of being satisfied with just maintaining though. Increases can still be made during the season. It's just that with all the practices, school, and other commitments, your ability to train will be limited. Focus on both your biggest weakness and your biggest strength, and try to keep improving on them while just maintaining everything else. That way you'll have a chance to eliminate that weakness, improve what makes you good in the first place, and keep up the rest of your game.

I won't go into specific ways of training here but there are a few tips to remember. First, eliminate any long cardio sessions. Practice will give you the same effect. Shorten your cardio workouts but make them more intense using intervals. For example, sprint on a

bike for thirty seconds, then go very light for one minute. Repeat ten to fifteen times. The lengths of the sprints and rest intervals can be varied depending on what you want to accomplish, but it makes your cardio much more similar to how you will be working in a game and you'll finish in 30 minutes instead of an hour. You're legs will get a lot of work during games and practices, so keep your leg workouts very specific. You won't need to do a lot of general squats and lunges because your legs will be maintained from all the on ice work. Stick to plyometrics and speed drills instead.

Lastly, realize that your conditioning levels involve much more than just workouts. A proper warm up, a good cool down, proper nutrition and rest will all have a huge impact. Make the most of those opportunities as well and you'll feel better, recover faster, and play your best.

Keep Working Hard!!



Brad Handley

Brad has been involved in strength and conditioning for ALL hockey players for the past 12 years. Brad graduated from the University of Alberta in 1997 with a degree in Kinesiology. Over his 12 years Brad has worked with over 40 players currently playing pro hockey, over 100 Major Junior and Div 1 college players and consulted and developed team conditioning programs for 10 different junior hockey teams. Brad is a welcome addition to the ATC staff!!!