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Train hard to improve your game

By Joy Hollingsworth
HoopGurlz

It's an athlete's worst nightmare to be stuck on the sideline, wobbling around in some boot, riding crutches or limping in a knee brace. It sucks when you feel like the only impact you can have on your team's success is yelling, "Defense!" from the bench. From ACL tears to concussions to ankle turns, it's a fact that you'll become injured at some point during the season.

Right now, your body is probably starting to feel the wear and tear of every suicide, foul, or charge. Or you experience anything from knee pops, muscles twitches or soreness from head to toe. It's crucial that you start doing the little things that will help decrease your chances of getting injured this season.

I encourage all student-athletes to do a number of exercises to help prevent injuries and pay close attention to body signals to avoid burnout.

Hit the weight room

"Get grown," and start throwing some hardcore weight around. If you want to shade some time off a sprint or manhandle someone inside on a postup, strength training is the main ingredient. Olympic lifting packed with hang snatches, hang cleans, and squats are highly recommended. Lifting weights will help decrease the risk of an injury.



If you want to come up with the ball every time, train harder in the weight room.

Plyometrics

So you want to snatch a rebound off the rim? Plyometrics are a great way to strengthen those fast twitch muscles, learn the mechanics of jumping and increase foot speed. Just be careful on the box jumps! I've busted my shins on those things a number of times.

Eating right keeps the body tight

Stay away from junk food. Food that soaks through the wrapper with grease is probably not a healthy choice. Think color when eating -- fresh vegetables, fruits, pasta, fish, or chicken breast. Stay way from foods that will slow you down and are hard to digest. Tell your parents the same thing as I tell my pops -- go easy on the butter and stop cooking up that heart attack.

Learn how to fall

If your nickname is "floor burn," then you probably need to learn how to fall properly. I had a teammate who was the clumsiest person ever. She would injure everyone around her and take people down like in a bad wrestling match. Most of the time it's not when you get hit that gets you hurt, it's the impact of the fall. As you drop, brace yourself and slide into the fall rather than slamming recklessly into the hardwood floor.

Ice baths

The first 60 seconds are going to be freezing, but it's well worth it. Ice baths are good to do between double days, after practices or games because they help muscles recover quicker. Even if you don't feel tired, you should still ice after every workout. Your body will thank you after this cold moment.

Get some sleep

At least eight hours of sleep is a must. On pre-game nights, it's bed by 9 p.m., lights off and tucked in so the body has time to rest and rebuild. If you want to play collegiate basketball, be ready for bed checks and curfews.

Finally, it's all about mental toughness. Everyone is tired. Find a way to keep pushing through it. Champions never complain -- they just find a way to win.

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