



Structured Warm-Up = Less Injuries

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It is commonly accepted within the strength and conditioning community that the warm-up in rugby plays a critical role in performance enhancement and injury prevention. Each top level team will have their own specific way of warming up. After watching the first few rounds of the Heineken Cup, it was very obvious to see differences in the methods and drills used by the French and English clubs. However, they all followed a typical structure and approach. The purpose of this month's article is to highlight evidence of its effectiveness as well as providing coaches with a template on its structure and layout using drills and exercises.

So, should we actually bother with a warm-up?

Coaches always want more time with the players and this is understandable as there may be a lot of areas which have gone wrong in the previous game. Unfortunately, some often overlook the need for an effective warm-up or reduce the time spent warming up so that they can spend more time with the players during that session. If this occurring on a regular basis, it could create more problems for the coach than solve especially from an injury prevention point of view. A study by Ekstrand et al. (1983) looked at the need for a warm-up in soccer. They used 180 players divided into two groups.

Group A: Warm-ups were carefully planned and monitored

Group B: Little or no warm-up was used

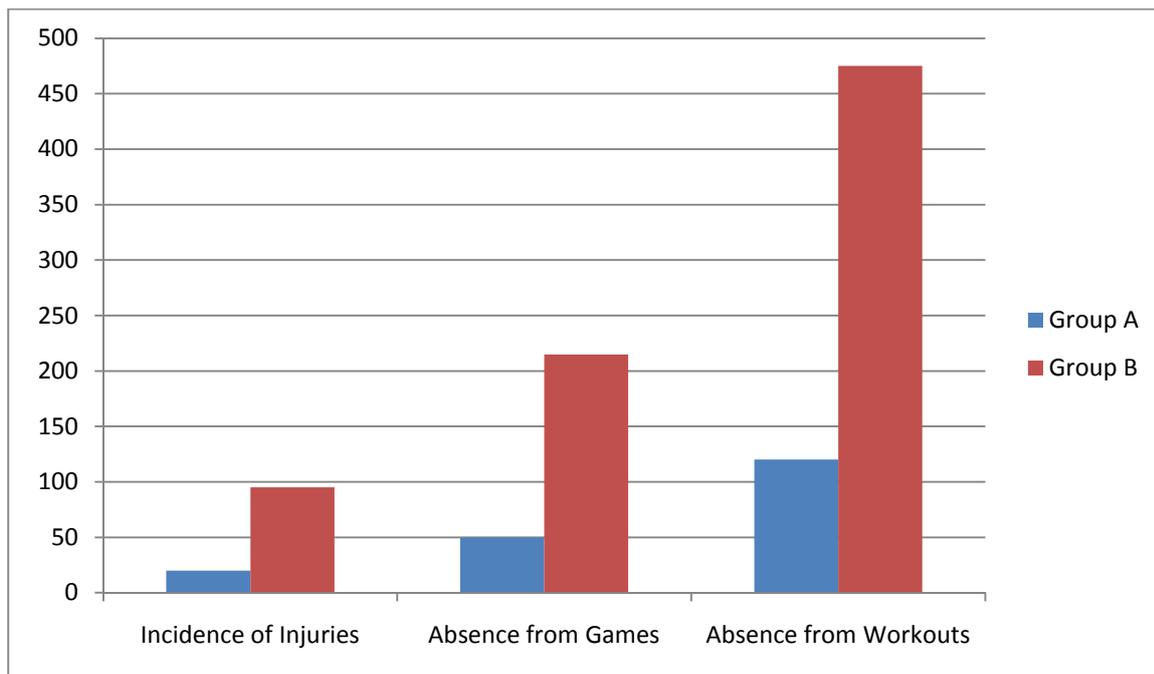


Figure 1 - Number of Player Cases

The results in the Ekstrand et al. (1983) study make a compelling argument in favour of planning the warm-up more effectively for a multitude of reasons.

So, are there any other benefits to warming our players up properly?

Beginning the warm-up with some low intensity work such as handling drills and progressing to higher intensity work such as continuity drills/contact drills, we gradually raise the player's core and muscle temperature which will allow a number of benefits to occur. Player's muscles become more pliable with improved extensibility which helps reduce the risk of strains. We enhance our player's metabolic reactions so that they are better prepared for the game or training session. We facilitate muscle blood flow so the muscles can work at their optimal level.

A new structure has been put on warm-ups by Ian Jeffries (2007) called the R.A.M.P. Approach. The RAMP method provides coaches with an effective framework around which the warm-up can be built. Drills and exercises can change within its framework but the general approach remains the same.

1. R – Raise

- Aim is to elevate body temperature, heart rate, blood flow and respiratory rate
- Drills could include: handling/passing drills, individual unit core drills, movement drills, speed mechanics drills
- All of these drills should begin at low intensity with a gradual build-up in speed

2. A – Activate

- Stimulate key muscles which will be worked during the training session/game eg. glutes, hamstrings, lower back muscles, etc
- Exercises could include: glute/ham bridges, single leg squats, good mornings, hopping/jumping exercises etc
- The goal is to activate not fatigue so no more than 8 repetitions of each exercise

3. M – Mobilise

- Perform key movement patterns which will be involved in the subsequent session/game
- Exercises could include: lunge variations, squat variations, push up variations, etc
- Move joints through full range of motion in a dynamic fashion
- Very little if any static stretching performed

4. P – Potentiate

- Perform aspects of rugby at increasing intensity
- Exercises to include: rucking drills, tackle drills, sprinting drills, continuity drills

References:

Ekstrand, J., Gillquist, J. And Moller, M. (1983). Incidence of soccer injuries and their relation to training and team success. American Journal of Sports Medicine, 11, 63-67.

If you are looking for a strength and conditioning internship or just some simple advice, contact Karl through his website www.kg-elite-performance.ie