

Conditioning Games

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Conditioning is a necessary component for most sports and one that many athletes do not like. While repetitive sprints, suicides, and other running drills, when utilized properly, help to improve energy system development, they can be boring, tiring, and uninspiring. It is possible however, to reach your conditioning goal by incorporating games into your conditioning routine.

Many games enhance conditioning and improve sport skills by demanding feats of agility, explosion, acceleration, and quick stops with changes in direction along with displays of eye-hand coordination and reaction. All the while making the entire task at hand a bit more enjoyable. Here are a few games to consider as part of your conditioning routine.

Tag

Tag is a great way to increase your ability to move explosively in different directions. “Freeze Tag” demands multi-directional, explosive movements to avoid being touched by the “it” person. “Free” team mates by leaping over them or tagging them. Be sure to mark boundaries at a distance that allows all athletes to move freely but requires

sharp changes in direction when chased. You can determine which energy systems to focus on by making the game longer in time or shorter in time and by changing the number of times the game is played.

Frisbee Football or Ultimate Frisbee

Frisbee football or ultimate Frisbee has the potential to improve eye-hand coordination and movement skills while developing aerobic and anaerobic energy systems. As in soccer or football, the object is to put the Frisbee into the defender’s goal. Quick changes of direction along with explosive accelerations and stops make this game specific to sports like basketball, football, lacrosse, and tennis. It is important to make and adjust rules to fit your training goal and current performance level.

Wall Ball Relays

Wall ball relays allow for the inclusion of upper body explosive actions during conditioning. Using a medicine ball (2-8kgs) throw the ball (overhead or chest pass) towards a wall that is about 25 ft away. Immediately run after the ball and retrieve it as it bounces back off the wall. Return to the starting line



and repeat this three to five times. On your last run, hand the ball off to the next athlete. Once again, adjust the wall distance and repetitions to fit your needs and abilities.

Punt Returns

Punt returns are a great way to improve eye-hand coordination, speed, and anaerobic conditioning. Unlike straight ahead sprints, returning punts forces you to concentrate on catching the ball before exploding forward. Make this more demanding and multi-directional by adding defenders.

Keep Away

Keep away demands that players on one team continuously play catch and keep moving around a predetermined field ensuring that the opposite team does not intercept the ball. Use any kind of ball, determining score by timing a team’s possession or counting catches.

Games have the potential to turn a dreaded conditioning session into a competitive, sport specific, and fun diversion. Alter the components of these games to specifically address the energy demands of your sport. Review the article entitled “Interval Training” in the *NSCA’s Performance Training Journal*

(4.2) to review the basics of energy system development and how to best modify these games to meet your performance needs.

About the Author

Tracy Morgan Handzel, CSCS is the owner and head Performance Coach of Train for the Game in Atlanta, GA. She currently trains elite and professional tennis players and writes training related articles for various trade publications. Tracy has served as assistant director at the International Performance Institute and assistant strength and conditioning coach at the University of Washington, San Diego State University, and the University of California San Diego. ▲