



eBook

Perfect Pre-Season

A football coaches guide to building
a fit and fresh team for round one.



Jacob Tober

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has worked in sport knows that "perfect" rarely happens. Interruptions, injuries, and bumps in the road inevitably disrupt whatever we as coaches plan.

This book is designed to help you build a plan that can withstand these hiccups and deliver the best possible pre-season. Our goal is to give you the resources you need to deliver a robust strength and conditioning approach to have your team in the best possible shape by round 1.

It is worth noting this book does not make any recommendations regarding football skills training. I am the first to admit this training a football team for the actual playing part is not my area of expertise!

At Core Advantage our speciality is helping athletes develop specific qualities to become top performers in their sport, as well as increasing their physical durability.

The plan we lay out in the following chapters has been designed for a typical footy team: training together three times a week in pre-season, and twice a week in-season.

You might read our recommendations and think it is not enough work! Keep in mind we take into account the football specific work you will already be planning for each training session. All those drills, activities, and small sided games help develop aspects of speed, agility, and fitness.

Alongside this book you have access to several important resources via your coaches hub on www.coreadvantage.com.au:

▶ **Biggest Pre-Season Blunders**

A short eBook detailing some of the most common problems we see coaches and teams make in their pre-seasons. Many of the problems we explain in that book are solved through the structure of our 15 week training plan.

▶ **Training templates**

Includes more details for your training plan with instructional videos, print-friendly templates, pre-built training progressions, example sessions and plenty more to get your team training hard.

▶ **Resources**

This section of your web portal contains video instructions for many of the drills shown in the program.

BUILDING A PLAN

This book details a complete pre-season training plan appropriate for a senior sub-elite football team.

It works for both men's and women's teams, and could even be adjusted for junior teams.

The complete 15 week session-by-session training plan that accompanies this book can be used exactly "as-is", or you may take suggestions from it to build your own plan with the blank templates.

WE BREAK UP OUR 15 WEEKS INTO THREE TRAINING BLOCKS.

Each block is five weeks long and ends with a slight taper week. We recommend timing your pre-season by working backwards from round one to determine how each week will line up. You may also like to adjust the exact timing of your taper weeks to align with key practice matches. There are templates and planning tools provided to help you do this.

VERTICAL INTEGRATION

Through each of the training blocks you will work on all physical qualities simultaneously, training for speed, strength, anaerobic and aerobic fitness. This is known as a "vertical integration" approach to training; stacking all physical qualities vertically in your training plan.

Each training block emphasises certain physical qualities, but no quality is ever completely neglected. This is incredibly important

for football, as it is sport that requires so many different attributes of fitness.

DISTANCES AND PACES

Distances

Throughout this program you will need to mark running tracks with cones for your sprint and tempo running work. The exact distances don't matter too much, but you should be within a few metres for all of your sprints.

For the longer interval sessions distances are rough guidelines only. You should simply match these distances to line-markings already set on your training ground. Use the following as a guide instead of actually measuring out the meterage. It won't be the same on every ground, but using fixed football markings makes these sessions consistent for your team on your oval.

- ▶ **For 100m:**

Use the goal line to the opposite side of the centre square.

- ▶ **For 150m:**

The distance from goal line to goal line.

- ▶ **For 200m:**

From the point post to the next point post around the boundary.

- ▶ **For 400m:**

A full lap of the boundary.

- ▶ **For 800m:**

Two full laps of the boundary.

For longer distances you may want to use a GPS application on athletes' watches or head to a track, but you can also just continue adding 400m laps to reach roughly the total distance.

Pacing

You will use an RPE system to control effort on all of your running work.

RPE stands for Rating of Perceived Effort. It gives an athlete a rough idea of how hard they should be pushing relative to their maximum speed for that distance.

As an example,

- ▶ 10/10 RPE for 400m is the fastest you could possibly run for 400m.
- ▶ 10/10 RPE for 100m is the fastest you could possibly run for 100m.

So the 100m run will be a faster absolute speed because it is a shorter distance, but the athlete should be equally exhausted by the end of each because they put in the same effort for both.

This means every distance has its own 10/10 pace. Athletes will need to base their level of effort off of this maximum effort for that distance.

In the early stages of the program much of the running is done in the 6/10 to 7.5/10 range, then it gradually builds until most speed and interval training is done in the 8/10 to 9.5/10 range for effort.

You will do all of your easy continuous session at a 5/10 or 6/10 effort throughout the entire program.

CUSTOMISING THE PROGRAM

The pre-built training plans provided in the resources are a guide to help you construct your pre-season.

You can follow this to the letter and get great results, or you could tweak the plan a little to meet your needs, maybe adjusting the exact length of the program, or lining up the taper weeks (week 5, 10, and 15) to align with your practice games and round one.

You may also need to slightly extend or shorten the program based on your schedule. If you have to do this try and take weeks from each block evenly, to keep the plan balanced:

- ▶ **15 week plan**

Complete all of the planned training weeks.

- ▶ **12 week plan**

Remove the middle weeks of each block: 3, 8 and 13.

- ▶ **9 week plan**

Remove weeks 3, 6, 8, and 13 as plus remove the taper weeks from block 1 and 2.

- ▶ **6 week plan**

Remove weeks 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15. Be warned that six weeks is a very short preparation for a competitive football season!!

PRE-CHRISTMAS TRAINING BLOCK

This block of training is not as vital for developing fitness as many teams make out. What is important here is to get the ball rolling on a variety of qualities introducing the speed, strength and interval work.

For your conditioning during this period the simplest approach is to start from week one of the 15 week training plan and complete as many weeks as you can before breaking for Christmas. The only change would be to drop back to three conditioning sets per week during this block: dropping the Fartlek sessions and also cutting the secondary acceleration session each week will do the trick. Replace these minutes with extra skills and tactics work.

While your athletes are away over Christmas have them repeat the sessions you completed in your last week together as a team. Completing three conditioning sessions per week (one or two speed session, and two strength workouts), will help them hold onto their fitness before returning to team training.

DEALING WITH INJURY

Injuries can throw a spanner into even the best planned pre-seasons. If you have a player suffer an injury they should work with a Physio or other allied health practitioner and follow their plan for a return to play. Once cleared they will likely have missed a few weeks from the training program so might not be up to the same level as the main training group.

One remedy is to have them complete every second week of the program starting from the last week they missed until they catch up with the main group.

For example, say an athlete gets injured during week six and misses three weeks of team training before being cleared for full training. The progression back to main training might look like the following:

Week:	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Main group	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Injured player	–	6	8	10	12	14	15

It's important to say that every injury is different and will require unique modifications so be sure to work closely with the athlete themselves and their health practitioner before diving back into a broad training plan like this one.

WARM-UP 2.0

Every training session a team has to complete a warm up.

The warm up period is a great opportunity to reduce injury risk and improve performance in both the short and long term while simultaneously working on important physical qualities like speed, agility and footy skill.

With a scientific and structured approach, we can better use warm up time as a chance to make a small but significant contribution to our athletes performance and durability each and every session.

Think of warming up as the superannuation of sport, boring but essential. It can provide us with compounding returns.

BUILDING A WARM UP

Sequencing in warm up is important, the idea is to progressively move from small to big actions and slow to fast activities as athletes become warm and switched on.

You can find video examples of these activities and more on our YouTube channel, plus images and a printable example warm up routine in the resources section of your online portal.

Fight the cold - 3-4 minutes

In summer, you can probably skip this step as body temperature is already elevated. In colder months a good plan of attack is a few laps around the oval: one easy lap first, followed by one at tempo is our recommendation.

Mobility - 3 minutes

This ideally starts with a foam roll. Providing rollers to have a quick loosen off before training starts can be incredibly beneficial, and we would strongly encourage your athletes to be regularly rolling their glutes, lateral thighs, quads, calves, and upper back.

A team stretch is all but a non negotiable to start every training session and match day warm up. The crouching three stretches are our absolute favourites for footballers, this series will open up the hips, releasing any tightness from the day allowing your players to run faster and move freely. 25 seconds in each position per leg is all it takes, the whole routine is done in under three minutes.

Activation - 1 minute

This is a short sharp section, primarily targeted at getting the glutes switched on. Perform five glute bridges and 10 body weight squats.

Running technique - 3-5 minutes

Drills and skills to improve your efficiency and speed. As a bonus these will elevate heart rate, open up the hips further and get the nervous system firing. Finish this section with a few accelerations, curved sprints or change of direction efforts.

Movement & skills - 3-5 minutes

Continuous activity to really get into training, at this point, it would be hard to tell this warm up drill apart from actual training. Incorporate football skills starting with small stationary drills and build into more dynamic, explosive activities. This could be evasion and touch/tackle games, handballing and

ground ball gathers or the kicking accuracy game described below:

Sharp shooters:

This game involves equal amounts of left and right footed kicking, building from short to long over a 3-6 minute period.

Break your playing group into teams of 6-8 athletes with two balls per group. Have the groups standing 10 metres away from a stationary target (empty wheelie bin, tackle bag, goal/point posts etc). Each member of the team takes it in turns with stationary left footed kicks at the target, the aim is to be the first team with five total hits on the target before swapping to the right foot for five more hits as a team.

After completing both feet (10 total strikes) from the 10 metre mark, that team then moves back to stationary kicks at 15m and has to make four hits of the target each foot. This continues with a one step kick from 20m for three hits each foot and finally a two step kick from 30m with two hits per team. First team to finish all their hits wins and penalties for the losers!

It's competitive, it's progressive in its intensity and the players will be running to collect their own kicks (must run, take a bounce and then handball the ball back to their group).

Improving ground ball pick ups, bouncing, handballing and most importantly kicking on both feet.

You can scale this drill up or down with less or more hits, or longer distances based on your teams age and level, but this drill is a much better way to warm up your kicking on both feet than a few half-arsed leg swings.

Get creative

This is just one example of a competitive skills game disguised as a warm up, get creative and find ways to transition your warm up activities from physical preparation into sporting prep, while having a little fun, developing communication skills and increasing mental focus before the work of training gets going.

You can find a specific warm up plan plus some instructional videos in the resources section of your online portal.***

STRENGTH

There aren't many higher value spends of time than to build some strength. Not only are stronger athletes less likely to get hurt, they also tend to be faster, fitter and harder to tackle.

The best thing to do would be getting in the gym 1-2 times a week and following a strength and conditioning program (not a bodybuilding program - they're different). If you can't make that happen, the next best thing would be to add a 5-10 minute strength block onto the end of your team training sessions. This short dose of strength is one thousand percent better than doing nothing.

Why the end and not the start of training?

Strength training leads to isolated fatigue in the worked muscle groups. It would be reckless to give these muscles a targeted dose of strength training before then going out and running, kicking and tackling with these same muscles that are now fatigued.

Best to do your strength activities at the end of a training session for the longest amount of time to recover before your next training session.

The remainder of this chapter has some example exercises that can be done anywhere with little to no equipment and have a huge pay off for keeping footballers strong and healthy. Recommended progressions, sets and reps for these exercises are incorporated into the 15 week program templates.

HAMSTINGS

Nordics



Nordics are brilliant for developing strong resilient hamstrings and have a strong scientific backing as being able to significantly reduce the risk of hamstring strains.

To perform a Nordic the athlete begins kneeling with a partner holding their ankles and pressing all their bodyweight down to anchor the athlete's feet to the ground. The athlete begins to slowly lower their body forward, controlling the speed of the drop with their hamstrings and glutes. At the point they lose control they then fall forward to the ground, catching themselves with their hands.

NOTE: Keep sets short, a maximum of six reps per set.

NOTE 2: These can be quite intense, so take it easy for the first few weeks as you become familiar with the exercise. Make them easy by falling earlier.

Single leg Romanian deadlift (SL RDL)



The single leg RDL is a great movement for developing ankle stability, balance, along with hamstring and glute strength. It's particularly good because it doesn't require any weights to still be challenging.

Start by standing on the right leg with the right knee slightly bent (soft). From this position hinge over at the hips, reaching the left leg backwards as the body tips forwards. Then return to the top position. Repeat all the repetitions on the right leg before repeating on the left leg.

NOTE: be sure to keep the standing leg's knee soft throughout the movement.

NOTE: Aim to keep your spine as straight as possible and the toes of your back foot pointed to the ground.

CALVES/ANKLES

Standing calf raises



Calf strains are a common injury in older footballers and recreational athletes. They often stem from a lack of consistency in running (particularly high speed running) and a lack of strength in the calf.

We will talk more about high speed running in the next chapter but building calf strength is as easy as the humble calf raise. A highly underrated but super valuable exercise.

Start by holding onto something stable for balance, with feet flat on the ground. Perform the movement by rising up onto your toes, holding for 1 second and slowly lowering your heel back to the ground. Without resting in the

bottom position, immediately rise back up on to the toes and continue.

For a single leg calf raise the technique is the same with the non-working leg held up in the air.

NOTE: Be sure to control the tempo on these movements, no bouncing at the top or long rests at the bottom, you should be able to build up to doing 25+ double leg raises and 15+ full range single leg raises.

NOTE 2: When rising up, push your weight onto your big toe, avoid rolling out on the outside of your foot.

SL balance

Ankle sprains aren't as common in footy as they are in court sports like basketball or netball, but they do still happen. One easy thing to work on that can reduce the risk and severity of ankle injuries is balance and proprioception. It can be shocking how poor the static balance ability is for even some of the most elite athletes, so don't discount the benefits!

To do this exercise it's as simple as standing on one foot, hands on hips and eyes closed. The goal is to reach 60 seconds of continuous eyes closed balance without moving the foot, falling over or the hands coming off the hips.

GROINS

Adductor Bridge

The adductor bridge (also known as a Copenhagen) has been rising in popularity in recent years due to its ability to build hip strength, reduce the effects of groin soreness and even mitigate the risks of developing OP.



To perform an adductor bridge, have a partner start in a 1/2 kneeling position, rest your top leg on your partners thigh and lift yourself up into a side planking position. Both legs should be straight and the bottom leg is

hovering in the air.

Hold this position starting at 10 seconds and building to 30+ seconds for each leg over the weeks.

Side plank

To complement a strong set of adductors, football players should also build strength through their core and hips. Specifically the obliques and glute medius.

To perform the side plank stack your feet and place your elbow directly under the shoulder. From here, extend your top arm straight up to the sky and lift the hips to form a straight line with your body from ankles to nose.

Hold this position for 20 seconds each side, building to 40+ seconds each side over the weeks.

SHOULDERS

Push Ups

A well done push up is great for building core and upper body strength.

Unlike the push ups commonly used as a penalty (that are often done fast and sloppy), these push ups should be completed with control and discipline.



Start in a front plank position, arms straight, wrists under shoulders, core engaged. The body should form a strong straight line with very little arching or rounding in the spine.

Begin by lowering your body to the ground, maintaining this straight spine and neutral head position, pause in the bottom for 1/2 a second, before pushing yourself back up and away from the ground.

Athletes (male and female) should be building up to 20+ controlled smooth reps, with no loss of body alignment.

NOTE: Do not allow athletes to have their arms too wide or too high relative to their chest. The wrists should be directly under the shoulders in setup.

W raises

A great compliment to push ups, the W raise will help build strength through the upper back and shoulders.

Lying face down on the ground, begin with the arms out to the side of your body in a W position. Initiate the movement by squeezing your shoulder blades together, then lifting your collarbones and nose off the ground by 1-2cm. Hold this position for 2 seconds before reversing the action and relaxing back down. Repeat for 6-10 repetitions.

NOTE: You do not need to lift up very high at all, just enough to activate the muscles of the upper back.

All of these exercises have a progression detailed in the pre-season plan.

SPEED

Speed is so often the most poorly planned part of a football teams training plan.

Low intensity, not enough rest and too much volume are just some of the problems we see when programming speed work.

Through the 15 week training plan we prescribe different types and styles of speed work, designed to build explosive, efficient runners. Much of the work done in the speed sessions is built on top of the skills practiced in the running technique component of your warm up, because of this, it is recommended to include your speed sets early in the training session while these drills are front of mind and athletes are still fresh.

All of these modes of sprinting call for a walk back recovery and plenty of rest between efforts. It is also important to be smart about pushing individuals who have any level of hamstring, calf or quad tightness / awareness might trigger some easy stride outs or even a complete rest day from the top speed work.

As irreplaceable as speed training is to build explosive robust athletes, do it wrong and it can be problematic so proceed with caution for your more fragile athletes or those with low exposures to speed work.

ACCELERATION

Acceleration will be the first aspect of speed work included in the program, working from distances of 10-20 metres.

These efforts are aggressive, intense and efforts will build to as close to 100% as possible. Early in the off-season avoid having athletes race directly side by side and over extending themselves in the heat of competition, but in the mid and later stages of the pre-season this flips as competition is encouraged to keep speed and banter high.

TOP SPEED

You will train top speed with flying efforts over distances of 30 to 60 metres. This type of sprinting calls for a smooth and gradual build up over 10 metres before then holding a high speed for the required distance of the sprint and an easy deceleration to finish. (So a 60m sprint has a 10m build up phase before the 60m starts.

Unlike acceleration training, flying efforts call for an emphasis on loose, relaxed movements to reach and maintain high speed and efficiency through their sprint.

CURVED SPRINTING

Footy isn't played in a straight line, so learning to move at speed around bends is also an important quality to build.

To do these sprints you will need a curved track of cones and have the athletes run a tight line around these at the desired pace and distance. Be sure to run equal amounts of sprints in each direction (leaning left and right).

Don't stress too much if your curve isn't exactly 30 metres and keep the curve gentle, the goal is to run fast with these.

For a demo, check out the resources page in your online portal.

STAMINA

It isn't actually that hard to get fit.

Generally speaking, for athletes who are in moderate shape the work required to go from average or moderately fit to footy fit isn't that big of a job.

Four short, focused conditioning sessions a week for twelve to fifteen weeks, plus a few practice games is more than enough to get match ready.

Yes, you can get even fitter with more time and more work, but there is always the trade off between squeezing every last drop of fitness out of a team and running the risk of higher injury rates and burning your team out before the season even starts.

Below are the specific conditioning session modes included in the program.

SHORT INTERVALS

These intervals are for any efforts below 200m with rest periods too short for full recovery. The goal is to work on maintaining a consistent and fast running pace throughout the reps and pushing hard when the fatigue kicks in.

These are done either around the boundary or straight up the middle of the oval. Split your team into 3-4 separate pacing groups to have them push each other on the efforts.

LONG INTERVALS

Similar to the short intervals except each rep is over a longer distance. These will burn in the legs and the lungs.

Run these around the boundary of the oval, usually by splitting your team into 3-4 separate pacing groups to have them push and motivate each other for pace.

FARTLEK INTERVALS

Fartlek is one of our favourite forms of conditioning training, it's not as precise as the other modes of interval training, but the chaos and random nature of the session is aimed at challenging a team of athletes both mentally and physically to push hard no matter what has come before.

Start by downloading the Core Advantage Interval Timer on your phone, it is free on all smart phones and has a Fartlek randomiser built in.

Open the app and set a Fartlek timer for the required duration. This timer will provide a random series of hard, moderate and easy efforts of varying distances. Every time you use it the workout is different and it is this unpredictability that is so valuable to match the chaos of sport.

Have the team spread out around the boundary, they are going to be moving clockwise around the boundary line continuously for the entire rep duration.

Start the timer and use a whistle to signal to the athletes what they need to do next.

- ▶ **Green = Go!**

- Three short whistle blows means a flat out sprint speed (80-100m sprint pace)

▶ **Orange = Moderate.**

Two short whistle blows means a tempo/threshold effort (400m pace)

▶ **Red = Rest.**

One long whistle blows means a recovery block with walking pace. Do not stop moving though.

The athletes continue moving in a clockwise motion at the three paces until the timer finishes. Take the allotted recovery and begin the next repetition but reverse the running direction, going anti-clockwise around the boundary.

These are good to be completed in the middle of a training session between drills for a mental and physical challenge. The goal is then for the athletes to come back to their skills training and still execute despite the fatigue.

EASY RUNS/CROSS TRAINING

Just like it says on the tin, easy extra volume for your athletes to build their aerobic fitness. This can be done with more running, cycling or swimming.

The distances recommended are just a general guideline, and may need to be adjusted for different individuals, but try to stick with a low, easy RPE on these, the aim is to achieve and maintain a moderate heart rate and not add more high intensity stress to the system.

You may like to have athletes do this outside of training as it can be time consuming and is something that can be easily done individually.

And that's it!

Good luck for your upcoming season, train hard over the coming weeks and you will hopefully have a team that stays healthy and achieves their potential.

In season, you will not need to be as aggressive in your conditioning or speed programming, as your players should get a healthy dose of this in game. Maybe a small dose of intervals and speed efforts mid week as a top up, or some extra conditioning programmed for players with lower game day loads.

I would also strongly recommend keeping up your warm up and strength training going during the season as these can be valuable qualities to maintain.

If you have any further questions about this program or anything else related to high performance, you can reach me directly jacob@coreadvantage.com.au.

Please continue referring to these resources as needed and continue to refine your teams training plan as they build to into and then beyond round one.