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GET TO THE "CORE" TO IMPROVE YOUR SOCCER SKILLS

By Peter H. Edwards, Jr., M.D.

Power, strength and the ability to avoid injury are all closely related to the least trained area of a soccer player's body: the core musculature. This area includes the low back abdominal and pelvic muscles as well as the adductors. These central stabilizers control balance and body position as well as improve the soccer player's ability to overcome potential injuries.

Since targeting this muscle group is not recognized as an essential element of training, most coaches devote little effort to strengthening this area. Similarly, few injuries affect this group directly, resulting in the assumption that training/strengthening the core won't really prevent injury.

Benefits of Core Strengthening

If injury prevention is not enough to warrant core strengthening, improving strength, shooting power and the athlete's ability to better shield defenders should further emphasize the benefits. The power generated by a soccer player's core muscles allows for a stable platform to generate increased leg speed and strengthened shooting. In ball shielding and holding off defenders, the core stabilizers allow for better strength with the body leaning off balance. This strength allows for better ball control when a soccer player is shielding and playing the ball on the stance leg.

Training Techniques

Soccer players can start strengthening their core muscles through a simple training routine. This program requires only a physioball, which is a large thick rubber ball. The program starts by having the soccer player support his/her body on the elbows on the ball with their legs extended parallel to the floor. Players also can alternate raising one leg off the floor then the other. Another simple exercise involves having the soccer player balance his/her legs on the ball with the hands on the floor. As the athlete's strength improves, he/she can balance a single leg on the ball while flexing and extending the non-supporting leg.

Peter H. Edwards, Jr., M.D. is an orthopedic sports medicine specialist at the Ohio Orthopedic Center of Excellence in Columbus, Ohio. He specializes in lower extremity sports medicine with an emphasis on soccer injuries.