



OMAHA PHYSICAL  
THERAPY INSTITUTE, P.C.

## **“PREPARING TO PLAY”**

This is a general guideline for coaches and players for a safe and appropriate warm-up and cool-down for all ages. A warm-up takes place before training and games in order to prepare players **physically** and **mentally** for playing. A cool-down (also known as warm-down) occurs within 5-10 minutes from the end of a training session or game and allows for the player to slowly return to a resting heart rate and breathing rhythm. This document reflects the most current research on soccer-specific warm-ups and cool-downs as well as input from national level players and coaches.

The goal of the soccer-specific warm-up is to “wake up” the nervous system and warm up the muscles to allow for optimal reaction-stabilization in order to protect the joints and maximize muscle output and control. This in turn will enhance performance levels and reduce the risk of injury. Instead of going through a one-time injury reduction clinic, implementing the components of an injury reduction program into a warm-up could be more effective. The following is an outline of activities that need to be included in a warm-up with the coach’s choice on what specific drills they would like their players to perform within each category.

- 1. Multidirectional low intensity running with and without the ball**
- 2. Dynamic stretching regime** (make sure you include stretches involving the back)
- 3. Technical soccer-specific skills with introduction into light jumping** (coervers, juggling)
- 4. Soccer-specific jumping/landing/turning/cutting/balance** (headers, jump turns, zig-zags, skipping/leaping forward/sideways)
- 5. Change of pace/speed drills with ball**
- 6. Passing/kicking/shooting/long balls progression**
- 7. Small Sided Games:** (involve tackling) short 2-3 minute intervals with more dynamic stretching in between if needed
- 8. Running/shuttles progressing with speed and distance** (work up to 100% intensity from 5-30 yards)
- 9. Static Stretching Regime (OPTIONAL):** Short duration, increased repetitions (10 second holds). Can place static stretching in between or during above activities as desired.

## Specifics

- A. Make sure everyone is moving 90% of time. If in line or waiting for turn, should have ball at feet performing touch sequence, stretching, or maintaining light jog in place
- B. If one chooses to use static stretching during warm-up/cool-down, stretches only need to be held for up to 10 seconds performed 3-5x each. When stretching a limb, muscles are not the only tissue being stretched. There is also tension on nerves, arteries, veins, which when held too long can cause stress and strain to these tissues.
- C. Verbally cue players when they start any type of jumping exercise to “pad” their landing. Direct them by telling them to make their landing as “quiet” as possible and to land with knees bent. Also, make sure their knee alignment is safe by directing their knees over the middle to outside portion of their feet to avoid having the knees come together (towards middle) when landing. Obviously, players are unable to think about landing every time they do it in a game so being consciously aware and reminded by their coaches initially will assist with sub-conscious protection during practice drills and game play. This type of alignment is applicable to lunging and squatting as well.
- D. As a coach, make sure you see a nice progression of intensity throughout the whole warm-up both physically and psychologically, working up to 100% intensity before the start of the game.

## Halftime

Halftimes can vary in length but typically last between 10-20 minutes. It is important as a coach to encourage players to perform 50-75% intensity running (across field 3-5x) after the halftime discussion and before the second half begins to make sure their muscles are not “cold.” Dynamic and static stretching can also be performed.

## COOLING-DOWN

A cool down can last from 5-15 minutes in duration and should be performed within 5-10 minutes from the end of a training session or game. It is hypothesized that cooling down properly will decrease the amount of immediate soreness felt after a training session or game.

1. Low intensity multidirectional jogging (across field 5x)
2. Light dynamic stretching progressing to short static stretches (10 seconds) to all muscle groups

**Omaha Physical Therapy Institute, PC is a preferred provider of physical therapy services for the Nebraska State Soccer Association. If you have any questions regarding specific warm-up or cool-down activities/drills, injury reduction activities/techniques, or would like to have one of OPTI’s physical therapists discuss or observe your teams warm-up/cool-down by attending a training session or game, please contact Katie Reisbig Cordery, PT, DPT at 402.934.8688. OPTI continues to provide free sport injury screening as well! Good luck and have fun!**