

# European Approach to the Warm-up in Soccer

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At the beginning of a practice in Soccer or any other sport, it is necessary to reach a certain physiological readiness through a process that experts call the warm-up. The use of the term warm-up comes from the fact that body temperature rises up to 10° F and, as a result, the body gets warmer. This process needs some time to take effect, and that's why players need to complete a number of activities with gradual intensity in order to ready themselves for the high physical requirements of a soccer game.

Warm-up for soccer, as in all team sports, is more complicated than for the individual sports because not every player acts with the same intensity during the entire game. Occasional stoppage time for medical help, combined with the weather factors, can be a reason for completely losing the effect from the pre-game warm-up.

The situation is even more difficult when the coach has to make unexpected substitutions, such as when a player from the bench has to enter in the middle of high-intensity soccer game. Additionally, what about the beginning of the second half when teams come straight from the locker room and don't have time for any warm-up? That's why the warm-up period has been an important part of numerous studies, which show certain tendencies we have to consider:

- Pre-game warm-up is getting shorter;
- Pre-substitution warm-up is getting shorter as well;
- Players have to be at a high level of physical and mental readiness almost through the entire duration of the game;
- Ineffective warm-up can be a reason for a number of injuries; and
- Inappropriate warm-up will deplete the effectiveness of the player who substitutes at any time after the game has started.

In the final game of the European Championships 2000, the players who came in the last minutes gave France victory over Italy. Sylvain Wiltord and David Trezeguet not only scored to tie and win the game, but also had a major impact on intensifying the power of the attack. This made France look good in the final minutes of the regulation and the duration of the overtime. The question is how these players could be this effective after they spent most of the game on the bench?

The science of the sport teaches us that the warm-up can be divided in two parts - passive and active. The passive part is the kind of warm-up the player can do without physical effort. It can also be divided in two parts: internal and external.

The internal part includes drinks that the player can consume to increase their heart rate and blood circulation. The most common formulation for this purpose used by more than 90 percent of the teams in the world is hot tea with lemon, sweetened with honey. It can be a reason for a long lasting effect in keeping the players on a high physical level for a couple of hours. A vast majority of the teams drink the same thing during the half-time for partial recovery and to keep their readiness at a high level. Tea contains caffeine, but also a large number of supplements, which positively influences the player's physical condition.

The external part of the passive warm-up is when parts of the body are rubbed with heating ointments, with the purpose of increasing the blood flow in usually poorly-circulated areas like ankles, knees, lower back, and shoulders. This has to be combined with massage for major muscle groups, important for the game of soccer, such as the legs. It is very effective because it can keep up the readiness of the connective tissue (tendons, ligaments) and the joints on the

highest level for hours. The importance increases especially in cold weather. This process is very simple and doesn't need much assistance. The players can do that by themselves or help each other for areas they cannot reach.

The active warm-up is also divided in two parts: general and specific. During the general warm-up the players need to complete a number of simple physical exercises like jogging and sprinting in different directions, and elementary gymnastics exercises with varying intensity for all parts of the body. Include different kinds of soccer movements without a ball. Special attention has to be paid to neck muscles, lower back, and inner thighs because they are delicate and behind the strength level of the other muscles of the soccer players. Therefore, these muscle groups can easily be injured when playing soccer, if the above mentioned is not considered.

Drills with a soccer ball are applied during the specific part of the active warm-up. This part is the most important, not only because of the physiological influence, which also can be achieved by the previous parts, but also because of elevation of the soccer skills to the requirement of the game. This part of the warm-up is irreplaceable and will always be an important factor for the quality of the soccer.

The following are some recommendations for a simple, and effective, total approach to the warm-up of the soccer players:

### **Passive warm-up**

#### **Internal:**

Drinking 6-7 ounces of good quality hot tea with a piece of lemon in it, sweetened with two teaspoons of honey 30 min. before the game and after the first half. Usually, tea is prepared earlier and players carry it with them to the sidelines.

#### **External:**

Rub the ankles, knees, all the muscles of the legs, lower back, neck and shoulders with heating ointment. The most common ointments are the ones that don't have odor and are not very hot on the skin. The rubbing also works like massage, which is an important and effective part of the external passive warm-up. This routine needs to be applied one hour to 30 min. before the game.

### **Active warm-up**

**General:** Jogging 6 - 8 min. Neck, shoulders, lower back, abdominal exercises. Two-three different routines with 10-12 reps each. Legs: hamstrings, hip flexors, abductors, adductors, quads and calf muscles - 2-3 standard routines with 10-12 repetitions, increasing the speed every next set. Varying-intensity sprints done in different directions. At the end of this part the pulse rate that has to be reached is 160-170 beats per minute.

### **Specific warm-up**

**Low intensity:** Various kicks of the ball with both legs, various technical moves with ball, dribbling, stopping the ball.

**Medium intensity:** Repeating the same activities with a partner and in combination with switching of the spots.

**High intensity:** Playing in a group with more than one partner, with all technical arsenals, with the highest possible intensity and speed.

If you follow the recommendations given you'll be better prepared for practice and game,

you'll increase your effectiveness and most importantly you'll stay away from injuries, helping yourself to reach the potential of a professional soccer player.