



Never underestimate the powers of preparing your body. Stretching is the first thing you should do ... the goal is to "get the blood pumping!"

Warm up to win!

Photo by SSgt Samuel Rogers

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Photo by TSgt Ben Bloker

**T**here I was at the base intramural flag football championship. It was the first quarter, very first play of the game. You could feel the tension in the air. It was a "has-been's" sports fantasy. It was the only time in my distinguished intramural sports career I have seen more than 50 people at an event. Everyone was there from the commanders to the civilians. As the Supply Squadron came up to the line of scrimmage, we broke our defensive huddle and readied for battle. I was playing linebacker on the left side. The quarterback barked "Hut! Hut! Hut!" The ball snapped and the championship was on the line. As the play unfolded, I noticed a suspicious amount of movement towards my side. "Oh no, first play and they were coming right at me ... bring it on!" As I sprinted forward full speed to heroically involve myself in the first great defensive stop of the game. I felt a sharp pain shoot through my left foot and I crumbled to the ground as Supply's all-star quarterback sprinted past me towards the end zone. I did not realize how serious my injury was until I got up and walked over to our sideline. Needless to say, I missed the rest of the plays in the game, which no doubt handicapped my team. What hap-

pened? How could an event have ended so painfully?

After performing a quick battle damage assessment of myself, I realized I needed medical attention. I limped over to my car and drove to the emergency room. X-rays revealed a broken navicular bone in my left foot. Unfortunately for me, this bone is very important. I had ended my intramural football days by breaking it. Two weeks later I was on an operating table having the crack in my left navicular bone repaired with a 6-inch surgical screw. What started as a recreational injury turned into 6 weeks in a cast, a new friend imbedded in my foot and 6 months of intensive physical therapy. It has been 3 years since that fateful fall evening.

My foot has survived, but will tragically never be the same. Due to the injury and the stress bones endure when they break, I have developed arthritis and occasionally feel pain depending on what activity I am involved in. I do consider myself lucky to have escaped with a normal lifestyle considering the seriousness of my

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injury. The ironic reality of the situation is my injury was 100 percent preventable.

As military members, we all lead very active lifestyles. Whether it is accepting the office racquetball challenge, your daily workout routine or even playing the Saturday round of golf, the possibility for injury always exists. The good news is there are many things you can do to prevent a similarly luckless event from striking you. The first thing I was asked by the doctors who treated me was "What did your warm-up routine consist of?" I remember thinking, "Warm-up routine? I am a warrior. Who has time for a warm-up routine?" But that was the fateful mistake that caused my injury.

Never underestimate the powers of preparing your body. Stretching is the first thing you should do before engaging in any physical activity. It loosens up the muscles and prepares your bones and joints for the stress they are about to engage in. It is very important and does not take very long. A proper stretching routine should last about 5-10 minutes. You want to make sure you can feel the stretches as you are performing them. The specific stretching exercises you do will be dictated by the type of activity you are preparing for. Hold each position for about 10-15 seconds

without bouncing to effectively stretch your muscles.

Your warm-up session should be intensive enough to raise your heart rate. The goal is to "get the blood pumping." Education is the key, and there is a lot of information available on



Photo by TSgt Ben Bloker

warm-up routines. Your local sports and fitness center, the health and wellness center and even the physical therapy clinic are the best places to start learning what you need to know concerning stretching and warm-up exercises.

Another neglected area of injury prevention is equipment. Thousands of physical enthusiasts become injury statistics each year due to faulty or outdated equipment. I know how much those 1977 Chuck Taylors elevate your game, but your feet and ankles will greatly appreciate the \$50 investment it takes to provide the proper support your body needs. Inspection is also an important preventive measure. How much sense does it make to spend all day at work inspecting equipment to ensure its credibility, then go home and take your bike for a

ride without looking it over? Take a few seconds to inspect the equipment you will be using whether it is a racquet, bat, club or weight bar. It may save you a trip to the emergency room. Take it from me, that is a trip you want to avoid.

A final tip is to always check your buddy's six. Always make sure your workout partner, opponent or teammate is effectively prepared for battle. I once ran a 5K race with a coworker and half way through I noticed that neither of his shoes were tied. It would be a pretty good guess that if he did not take the time to tie up his running shoes, that he didn't start with a warm-up routine first. Preventive measures like the ones I have discussed here do not take long, are not strenuous and can only help.

Although my intramural football days are over and my left foot will

never be the same, I remain very active. I now know what I did wrong and how to prevent it from happening again. At first, it was hard to believe that a few simple stretches could have saved me so much aggravation, but those are the facts. Not knowing this information cost me an activity I enjoyed, not to mention the championship football trophy for my squadron's orderly room. I share this story with you in the hopes that you will learn from my experience. Whatever activity you engage in, make sure your body is prepared and ready to go. Don't forget where you can go to develop a great warm-up routine, but then make sure you implement it. Maybe one day our paths will cross on an intramural battlefield ... I still play a mean third base! Game on! Be smart! Be safe! Most of all, warm-up! Your body will reward you with enhanced, pain-free and prolonged performance. ▶