

Why your team should use FootyFirst

Lower limb injuries—particularly hamstring and groin muscle strains/tears and knee and ankle ligament sprains/tears—are the most common types of injuries in Australian football. Not only do they occur most frequently, they are often the cause of players being unable to complete games, missing training and being unavailable for selection for matches. Treatment for these injuries can also be costly for players and the long term consequences, such as instability or osteoarthritis of the knee and ankle, can be very debilitating.

What the research evidence says:

Injury prevention

A review of seven high-quality studies of neuromuscular training programs like FootyFirst in sports with similar movement patterns and lower limb injury profiles to Australian football (basketball, volleyball, soccer, team handball, hockey and floorball) found a:

- 39% reduction in the risk of lower limb injuries
- 54% reduction in the risk of acute knee injuries and
- 50% reduction in the risk of ankle sprain injuries.¹

A trial of a neuromuscular training program (PAFIX) that underpinned many of the FootyFirst exercises found that community Australian football players who participated in the program:

- reduced the rate of knee injuries by 50%
- reduced the rate of lower limb injuries by 22%²

Research evidence indicates that participating in neuromuscular training programs like FootyFirst can protect against both acute and overuse or gradual onset injuries, and reduce the severity of the injuries that are sustained. These programs are more effective in preventing injuries with players with a history of sports injuries.

A trial of the Nordic hamstring exercise program — the same exercise that is included in FootyFirst — among professional and amateur soccer players, found a:

- 70% reduction in acute hamstring injuries (new injuries and re-injuries)
- 85% reduction in re-injuries alone.²

The relationship between reducing injuries and improving team performance

A study in European domestic and champions' league football (soccer) showed that injuries had a significant influence on team performance with:

- Lower injury burden and higher match availability associated with higher end of season league ranking, and increased points per league match.
- Teams with both decreased injury rates and injury severity compared with the preceding season more likely to improve team performance.³

A study in Qatar first-division football (soccer) found that clubs with lower injury incidence showed a strong correlation with:

- More games won
- A higher league position (and total league points)
- More goals scored (and a greater goal differential)⁴

What the expert says:

“Implementing a structured warm-up enhances injury prevention. FootyFirst is based on the best available research evidence and it is designed specifically for community Australian football. The exercises included in FootyFirst, and the progressive loading and technique-focused training principals underpinning the program are similar to those used extensively across the AFL with appropriate adaptations to suit community football players, coaches and clubs. As a high performance manager at an AFL club I would strongly encourage every community football club and coach to embrace FootyFirst. FootyFirst will help build fitter, stronger and more resilient footballers”.



David Buttifant (PhD in sports physiology)
Sports Science Director, Collingwood Football Club 2001–13
including 2010 premiership and Grand Finals in 2002, 2003 and 2011
High Performance Manager, Carlton Football Club 2014–15

What community football coaches who have used FootyFirst say:

“We used 42 players (in the seniors) in the last 2 years, 43 one year, 42 the other and I think we are up to about 34 at the moment (after using FootyFirst for a season). So we are definitely well down on injuries from that point of view.”

Senior coach
Ocean Grove Football Club
Bellarine Football League, 2012

“Actually, we have had one player, XXXXX who is sort of 6' 4" really athletic player, but solid. He's been here and this has been his 3rd year. In the first 2 years he's played 8 games, but he has played every game this year.....with one legged squats, controlled jumps, and all that sort of stuff. I call it hamstring lay downs, you know how they hold the ankles and go down. He's played every game. Now, if you were going to do a case study on not doing it and then doing it, he would be a perfect example.”

Senior coach
St Mary's Football Club
Geelong Football League, 2012

“Look, I can only tell you from our point of view that, from the point of view of keeping players healthy, and playing football, doing what they want to do when they come there, it has been a success in the last two years and hopefully we can take it through to 2014 and have the same effect. It has been a very easy thing to adopt. It is not out of left field. There is there no extra time added to it. It has been put into the training regime as a segment of training that we are doing, players didn't know any different, they were just doing it.”

Head trainer
Ocean Grove Football Club
Bellarine Football League, 2013

References

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