

Recovery Methods in the NHL

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During the course of an NHL season, the ability to recover from games is crucial. There are multiple instances of back-to-back games as well as situations where a team may play up to 5 games in a seven-day span. With the fact that each team plays 82 games with the possibility of advancing to the playoffs, recovery becomes a key component for success. Recovery can easily become an after thought when you are busy playing games, practicing, and participating in a strength and conditioning program. What we've found to be the most beneficial for our players is a blend of different methods that are quick and efficient and have helped us succeed. It is important to note that without proper nutrition, hydration, and rest, the application of these methods would be a waste of time.

The methods that we will always use on practice days and game days are:

Self Myofascial Release- We encourage our players to use tools such as the foam rollers, tennis balls, tiger tail massage sticks, and yumani balls to give themselves self-massage. Our guys get to know where they might have some tightness and spend as much time as they need trying to address it. We make sure that we always have these available to our players on the road as well.

Flexibility- In hockey players, the muscles that can become tight include the hip flexors, hip rotators, adductors, quads, and hamstrings. We spend a considerable amount with our guys working on their flexibility. The stretching techniques that are used post-practices and games include partner assisted P.N.F., Active Isolated, and Static stretching on training tables. The athlete develops a preference based on his individual needs.

Flush Rides- Hockey players have been riding stationary bikes after games for decades with the belief that it will help remove the lactic acid accumulated during the game. My current thought on the practice of this method requires more research to determine if it is beneficial or not. Until I've been proven that it is detrimental to performance, we will continue to flush ride after games. Twenty players rehashing what happened during the game while riding the bike can help build team unity.

Cold Tubs We have our players sit in a cold tub after every game, practice, and workout. We now have 3 tubs at our arena and it isn't uncommon for us to have 3 players in one tub at a time. The water temperature is set at 52 degrees and we encourage our players to plunge for 5 minutes. In an ideal situation, we may do some hot/cold contrast methods. However, it is simply not practical, especially when only 1 tub is provided for us on the road.

I would consider the following techniques as "nice to have" and are used by our athletes on an as needed basis:

Massage- We are fortunate enough to employ a full-time massage therapist. He will work on individual players as needed every day before and after practices and games.

Since there is only 1 therapist for 25 players, we rely heavily on the previously mentioned methods.

Active Release Technique (A.R.T.)- A.R.T. has become a great tool for us over the last couple of seasons.. Many of our players make a stop at an A.R.T. practitioner's office on the way home from the rink. He has become an integral part of the recovery process for our team. There is a constant stream of communication between him and myself regarding the players' needs.

Throughout the regular season the main objective is to win enough games to hopefully qualify for the playoffs and have a chance to win the Stanley Cup. To give us the best chance, our players have to be fresh every time that the puck is dropped. The diligence of our players and their attention to detail on a consistent basis has allowed us to have success and keep our players in the game.

Sean Skahan has been a strength and conditioning coach since 1998. During that time he has worked with several athletes who are now playing in the NHL, NFL, and MLB. Sean received his Bachelor of Science degree (B.S.) from U-Mass Boston in 1998. After that, he received his Masters in Kinesiology (M.Ed.) from the University of Minnesota in 2000. He became a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (C.S.C.S.) in 1999. Check out his Blog at <http://www.SeanSkahan.wordpress.com>.