

## A Key Training Component Coaches Often Neglect ~ The Cool Down~

One of the most neglected training components to any quality soccer practice or soccer game is the cool down. Many coaches finish up an excellent training session and dismiss their players for the evening without having their players go through a proper “cool down”!

### **Why Cool Down:**

The main reason for the cool down is to promote recovery of the muscles used in training and to restore the player’s body to a pre-practice or pre-game level (core body temperature, heart rate and blood pressure). During a game or training session, the body goes through many different stressful demands. Muscle fibers, tendons and ligaments get damaged plus waste products are built up within the player’s body.

The cool down actually helps the body repair itself and gets itself ready for the next practice or game. First off, when training at a high level, tiny tears called “micro-tears” develop within the muscle fibers of the player. These micro-tears cause swelling in the muscle tissues. The swelling puts pressure on the nerve endings which causes pain in the area where the micro-tears occurred. A proper cool down helps to decrease the swelling, which in turn causes less pain to the player.

Additionally, when a player is working at a high tempo or rate, the player’s heart is pumping large quantities of blood to the muscles that are working the most. When the blood reaches the muscles, oxygen and nutrients are used up. While you are exercising hard, this is not a problem. However, when you stop exercising, the force of contracting muscles is reduced, and all of the blood doesn’t get back to the heart quickly enough so it is not re-oxygenated. This oxygen-deprived blood, which is now also carrying waste products like lactic acid, stays in the muscle longer which can also cause swelling and pain to a player.

The cool down helps both situations by keeping the blood circulating, allowing for waste products to be removed from the muscles as well as allowing the oxygen-rich and nutrient-rich blood to get to the muscles, helping with their repair.

A proper cool down for most players can be completed in just 10 - 12 minutes. A player should go through some mild cardio exercise (light jog, shuffles, and backward runs) for 3-5 minutes and then stretch statically (stationary) for 5 – 7 minutes. The last important part to a proper cool down is to re-fuel and re-hydrate within 15 minutes of the practice or game.

During the winter months, cooling down outside can be a challenge, so coaches may want to consider moving their players inside for this last key training component to their practice.