3 Tips For Screening Athletes

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Welcome to the ProSport Academy - 3 Tips For Screening Athletes.

Screening athletes can be a BIG WASTE OF YOUR TIME! Yes, you heard me right! One thing you will begin to understand about the ProSport Academy is we are going to tell it as it is. This academy is based on REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE. We are going to tell you it, as it is, in everyday professional sport.

When I first started working as a physiotherapist in professional sport, I wasted nearly 8 hours of my life physically screening every player individually, another 6-8 hours, looking at all these fancy tests and to be honest it nearly killed me! By the time I was finished putting it all in a fancy excel spreadsheet, I was ready for the off-season again! And, that was only 3/4 of the squad with Internationals to still return to pre-season training. I now screen my squad of 30 players in less than 2 hours and realistically, another 2 hours max of analysing, typing up into a spreadsheet and have a clear focus on what my prehab/movement prep sessions will be for the next block of training. More on this in a bit…

First, let’s get started with your three tips;
TIP. #1 Have A Clear Goal For Screening

Be real honest with yourself here. Are you screening your players to ‘tick a box’ (there is plenty of ‘box ticking’ in professional sport by the way) or have you a genuine reason for screening athletes? Is it injury prevention? Is it to improve their ability to move better in the gym? Is it to improve their performance? Is it to identify potential injuries or a particular injury? Keep is simple!

Having a clear question you want answered and a clear goal which will allow you to then filter out any tests that will not give you an answer to the question you want answered by your screening. I have a clear reason for my screening personally and it is not to prevent injury. My injury prevention focus comes in a different section in my own personal system.

When I screen my players in pre season, 6 weeks later, throughout the season and the end of the season, I have one big question I want answered. Most people’s screening actually loses focus before the set of tests has been decided on. It is a culmination of physiotherapy and s and c tests thrown together with the hope of preventing injuries. With the greatest respect to systems such as the FMS, the literature is average at best with these tests that have been put through the mills; therefore, realistically if we throw together a bunch of tests or movements together, it may not be that accurate at predicting injuries or identifying an athlete's ability to get injured. Some of my most durable and less time consuming athletes are the worst movers in the gym and in these screens.
TIP. #2 Don’t Get Distracted With Fancy Tests

Don’t use tests and movements your athletes don't do on a daily basis. Make sure your screen reflects your athletes daily routine. Using movements that they do, day in, day out is a great place to start. For instance, all my athletes have to squat, deadlift, press overhead consistently throughout the year. These are great starting points for me as a physiotherapist to start screening these movements to actually check if they can do these correct in the first place. Don’t get side tracked with all the fancy tests and software coming out these days.

I get emails, letters, brochures every single day from companies trying to sell me the latest software, test and equipment to help me ‘prevent injuries’ or ‘improve performance’. This is all well and good, but some of my players can’t even squat to 90 degrees or lift their hands overhead without arching their lower back. Putting my energy and attention into actually getting my hands on the player rather than having fancy data to start with is much better use of my time. Once I have the basics done ‘extraordinary’, then we can look at taking it to the next level. But honestly, you will probably be just like me, especially if you work in amateur sport, will not have the time or resources, or even access to the players for long enough. Therefore, we need to do the basics to the best of our ability. You get the basics right and you will start seeing results based on what your goal was (tip number 1) very soon.
TIP. #3 Before You Even Start Designing Your Screen, First Design Your Implementation Strategy

First, get permission or get clarification you will have access to your players/athletes for a set period of time before you even write down your first test. If realistically if you will not have time or energy to implement changes based on the results then I would spend my time and energy on more productive things that will help you in the long run. Most screens are ‘ticked boxes’ shoved into the filing cabinet for another year. If the coach or other staff won’t give you the actual access or time with the players/athlete to implement action plans with the athlete(s), then why bother screening them? If anything, putting negative thoughts in the athletes head about areas of weakness may be counter productive to the process. “Yes, we’ve identified you need to improve on X,Y and Z”, and then you leave that comment in the back of their subconscious mind and not do a thing about fixing these issues? What does that do to the athletes state of mind?

If realistically, you have 5 minutes a day or week with an athlete, then focus on one to two tests to focus on, designed on the back of the action plan and implementation strategy. Go after the big bang for your buck movements which I speak a little about below. Be a sniper with your implementation strategy. Think more, treat less and intervene with the stimulus that will give you big changes quickly.
Why Do I Screen And What’s My Own Implementation Strategy?

Ok, it’s easy for me to sit here and tell you to do this and don’t do that! Well if you’re interested in seeing what I actually do in REAL LIFE, what my implementation strategy is, I am putting together a webinar for you in the coming weeks called ‘Essentials of Movement Screening Athletes’. In this 60 minute+ webinar you will learn:

- My Implementation Strategy For My Screening Results
- My Own Personal Goals For My Screening
- What Questions I Want Answered From My Screening
- How I Decide My Tests And How Many Tests I Need
- How I Actually Set Up My Screening To Test 30 Players In 2 Hours
- The Top 6 Movements/Screens I Use And What They Tell Me
- How I Analyse And Design My Action Strategy
- Problems And Barriers You May Run Into, In The Real World
- 3 More Tips To Get Great Results
- And so much more…

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About the Author:

Dave O’Sullivan is Head of Medical at Huddersfield Giants Rugby League Club and has 8 years experience working in the professional sporting environment. He is a chartered physiotherapist and has a masters in strength and conditioning. Dave has also worked with Munster Rugby Union and Leeds Rhinos and has consulted with professional athletes in a variety of different sports. Dave regularly writes for Athletics Weekly and SportsRehabExpert.com.

Essentials of Movement Screening Athletes

90 MINUTE ONLINE WEBINAR + PRESENTATION HANDOUT

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