

Power Circuit Training for Peak Performance

A well-designed circuit training program is one of the most efficient training modes to improve sport-specific strength and endurance. When are professional players most likely to use a circuit training program? More often than you think. During the Off-season or transition phase, it's critical that you avoid doing nothing - especially if you've worked hard to build up your strength and conditioning levels over the previous season.



Remember, maintaining 50-60% of your peak fitness level takes less effort than starting from scratch. And if you do nothing for just 5-6 weeks you will be starting from scratch. Off course rest and recuperation are equally as important, and the right circuit training program can provide an ideal balance between the two.

Nearly every sport, by its very nature, unbalances the body's posture and musculature. The right side becomes stronger than the left for example. Certain muscles groups become over developed while smaller, stabilizing muscles are neglected.

Every player, at every level of competition will benefit by taking the time to rebalance their body during the off-season period. And what better way to build low-intensity, functional exercises into your week than through a couple of well-designed circuits?

In-season training also lends itself well to a circuit training program. During this period the emphasis is to maintain power and strength endurance rather than maximal strength. Few sports (aside from the likes of weight lifting) place demands on absolute strength during competition. Sports such as soccer, demand high levels of muscular endurance.

Circuit training programs can be used to convert maximal strength into sport-specific strength endurance. One of the biggest mistakes keen amateur players make is to strength train exclusively with weights. If all you lift is the typical 3 sets of 8-12 repetitions all year round, you are doing yourself and your game a great disservice.

Below are 2 sample circuit training programs - one for functional strength and one for strength endurance. As ever, Warm up thoroughly before each session with 5-10 minutes of light aerobic exercise and stretches to all the major muscle groups.

CIRCUIT TRAINING PROGRAM #1

Functional Strength

This circuit is ideal for off-season training. Intensity should be low with prolonged rest periods between circuits. Bear in mind this phase of the season is about rest and recovery. Perform this routine 2 days per week with at least 24 hours between. You could do 20-30 minutes of aerobic exercise - swimming, cycling, cross-trainer or running following the circuit.

- **Reps:** 15-20
- **Rest between exercises:** 30 sec
- **Rest between circuits:** 2min
- **# of Circuits:** 2-3

Lower Abs In and Out

1. Sit in a seated position and place a stability ball between your legs.
2. Straighten your legs and then bring your knees to your chest and lift the ball off the floor.
3. Return to the starting position.

Overhead Squat

1. Grasp kettlebell/dumbbell and hold it over your head.
2. Start position: Stand with feet slightly wider than hip width apart. Knees should be slightly bent.
3. Lower body by flexing at the hips and knees. Upper body can flex forward at the hips slightly (~5°) during movement. Be sure to "sit back" so that knees stay over the feet.
4. Once thighs are parallel to floor, return to start position.
5. Remember to keep head and back straight in a neutral position - hyperextension or flexion may cause injury. Keep weight over the middle of foot and heel, not the toes.
6. Change arms every set.

V-Ups

1. Start position: Lie back onto floor or bench with knees straight, both hands extended behind your head holding a medicine ball. Keep elbow back and out of sight. Head should be in a neutral position with a space between chin and chest.
2. Leading with the chin and chest towards the ceiling, contract the abdominal and raise shoulders off floor or bench. Extend arms and also raise legs up toward ceiling.
3. Return to start position.

Stability Ball Press Ups

1. Lie face down with chest on flexaball.
2. Take your hands and walk forward allowing the flexaball to roll under your body until the top of your feet are supported by the flexaball.
3. Start position: Place your hands slightly wider than shoulder width, fingers pointing straight ahead, and aligned at the nipple line. Remove one foot and suspend it 4-6 inches above the flexaball.
4. Lower your body (legs, hips, trunk, and head) 4-8 inches from the floor.
5. Return to the start position by extending at the elbows and pushing the body up.
6. Remember to keep the head and trunk stabilized in a neutral position by isometrically contracting the abdominal and back muscles. Never fully lock out the elbows at the start position and avoid hyperextension of the low back.

Weight Back Extensions

1. Position body face down on apparatus placing hips and ankles on respective pads.
2. Place hips (and not stomach) on pad. Place lower leg or achilles tendon area on pad. Place a weight plate behind neck and hold with your hands.
3. Start position: Back should be parallel to ground with knees slightly bent.
4. Lower body until legs and hip are approximately at 90degrees.
5. Return to start position.
6. To increase resistance, place arms behind head holding weight plate or weighted object across chest.

Straight Arm Trunk Rotation with Kettleballs/Dumbbells

1. Start by sitting on a stability ball and holding two kettleballs out to the side. 2. Holding the kettleballs in this position rotate your trunk so that you turn about 90 degrees. 3. Return to the starting position and repeat to the other side. Keep your body upright and abs stay tight.

Walking Lunge With Dumbbells

1. Start position: Stand with feet hip width apart. Hold a Dumbbell in each hand.
2. Step forward 2-3 feet forming a 90° bend at the front hip and knee. DO NOT allow front knee to extend past the big toe - may cause injury.
3. Push body up and move the back foot beside the front foot. Alternate feet and repeat.
4. Remember to keep head and back upright in a neutral position. Shoulders and hips should remain squared at all times.
5. Watch for proper knee alignment - do not let front knee extend past big toe or deviate laterally or medially. Back knee should not come in contact with floor.

Rear Deltoid Raises on Stability Ball

1. Begin by stabilizing yourself on top the ball using your lower leg.
2. Start position: Hold DB in each hand with neutral grip (palms facing each other) and let arms straight down (perpendicular to floor). Lean forward slightly.
3. With elbows slightly bent and facing the ceiling, raise DB's to shoulder level in semi-circular motion and squeeze shoulder blades together at top of movement.
4. Return to start position.
5. Remember to keep head in a neutral position.

CIRCUIT TRAINING PROGRAM #2

Strength Endurance

This circuit can be used in-season and is much more intense than circuit #1. You get more benefit from a routine like this if you previously developed a good maximal strength base.

- **Reps:** 30sec per station
- **Rest between exercises:**10-20sec
- **Rest between circuits:**90sec
- **# of Circuits:**3

Fast Feet on Box

1. Stand behind box and place one foot on top of box, heel close to the closest edge.
2. Push off the box and explode vertically to bring the other foot onto the box.
3. Step back down with your feet reversed.
4. Repeat with other leg and continue according to prescribed number of repetitions.

Diamond Pushups

1. Lie face down on the floor with hands palm down, fingers pointing straight ahead, and aligned at the nipple line.
2. Place hands in the center of your chest and form a diamond shape with your index fingers and thumbs. Feet should be at hip width with toes on floor.
3. Start position: Extend the elbows and raise the body off the floor.
4. Lower your entire body (legs, hips, trunk, and head) 4-8 inches from the floor.
5. Return to the start position by extending at the elbows and pushing the body up.
6. Remember to keep the head and trunk stabilized in a neutral position by isometrically contracting the abdominal and back muscles. Never fully lock out the elbows at the start position and avoid hyperextension of the low back.

V-Ups

1. Start position: Lie back onto floor or bench with knees bent and hands extended towards ceiling. Head should be in a neutral position with a space between chin and chest.
2. Leading with the chin and chest towards the ceiling, contract the abdominal and raise shoulders off floor or bench. Also raise legs up towards ceiling and attempt to touch your hands to your feet.
3. Return to start position.

Dumbbell Lunge Crossover

1. Start position: Stand with feet hip width apart. Grasp DB's and hold out in front of body.
2. Step forward 2-3 feet forming a 90° bend at the front hip and knee. DO NOT allow front knee to extend past the big toe - may cause injury. As you are lunging swing dumbbells across body towards the hip.
3. Pushing off front foot, return to start position with legs and dumbbells. Continue with same leg or alternate as prescribed.
4. Remember to keep head and back upright in a neutral position. Shoulders and hips should remain squared at all times.
5. Watch for proper knee alignment - do not let front knee extend past big toe or deviate laterally or medially. Back knee should not come in contact with floor.

Dumbbell Pullovers

1. Lie on your back on a flat bench forming a table top with your body.
2. Place dumbbell on chest with handle perpendicular to chest. Grasp DB as shown.
3. Start position: Extend elbows and raise DB even with the eye-line.
4. With elbows slightly bent, lower DB back even to slightly below head level. Return to start position.
5. Remember to keep both feet flat on the floor at all times and keep the lower back in a neutral position. Hyperextension or arching of the back may cause injury. Never lock out elbows. If maintaining stability is difficult, lower hips below parallel until stability is established.

Jumping Jacks

1. Start with your legs side by side and your arms by your side.
2. In one motion jump and spread your legs out to the side while your arms raise out and up over your head.
3. Land in this position and then return to the starting position and repeat.

Alternating Split Squat

1. Stand with feet hip width apart. Take left leg and step back approximately 2 feet standing on the ball of back foot.
2. Feet should be positioned at a staggered stance with head and back erect and straight in a neutral position. Place hands on waist.
3. Lower body by bending at right hip and knee until thigh is parallel to floor then immediately explode vertically.
4. Switch feet in the air so that the back foot lands forward and vice versa.
5. Prior to takeoff extend the ankles to their maximum range (full plantar flexion) ensure proper mechanics.

Alternate Supermans

1. Lie face down on floor with arms extended overhead. You may place a rolled towel under forehead to clear face from floor.
2. Raise right arm and left leg 4-8 inches off floor.
3. Lower and raise alternate opposite arm and leg.
4. Remember to keep head and back in a neutral position. Shoulders and hips should remain squared throughout movement.