



Dr Les Fabre - Specialist strength and conditioning coach with East Perth and the WA U/18 representative side.

Core Stability Training For Australian Rules Football

Summary: One of the hottest issues in professional football circles at the moment is something called ‘core stability’ training. It’s safe to say that every AFL club is incorporating it in their training regimes, along with other teams in professional state leagues around Australia. State representative teams in the junior ranks are definitely using it and it’s also a big issue in other sports such as rugby, cricket, golf and even sailing.

So what exactly is “core stability training”? We asked one of Australia’s leading experts in the subject for Australian rules football – Dr Les Fabre. Dr Fabre has a long history of involvement in the Western Australian Football League and with Western Australia’s state representative teams as the head fitness and conditioning coach.

Includes a sample program for juniors and seniors.

Background

The core (or trunk) are the muscles of your abs and back and their ability to support your spine and keep your body stable and balanced. Core stability is the strength and coordination of the muscles during a movement.

So why is core stability so important to footballers? The reason in mechanical terms is quite simple.

We decided to ask Dr Les Fabre. Dr Fabre is a strength and conditioning coach for the East Perth Football Club in the WAFL and the WA under 18’s State representative side.

He has also published two manuals on behalf of the WAFC titled ‘Building Physical Presence Skills (for Auskick, Junior and Youth Football)’ and ‘Building Balance, Agility and Strength for Juniors in Sport’.

He is a consultant to Junior and Senior football clubs throughout the Perth metro area and the South West including WAFL league clubs, PSA schools (Aquinas, Trinity, Guildford, Wesley) and regional squads (like Peel, Claremont and Swan Districts).

As a fitness coach he has planned and conducted pre-season training programs, all year round physical conditioning of Colts and Senior players, pre Match warm-up and cool-down exercises and drills, and specialised injury rehabilitation programs for individuals and groups.

His areas of specialisation include sprint training, weights training, agility and gymnastic training for mobility and flexibility, motivation and tackling in rugby and Australian rules football.

According to Dr Fabre, when your arms and legs move, most of the energy flows through the core. This means that your limbs need to have a strong and stable base from which maximum energy can be transferred during movement. The more stable the base, the more effective the transfer of energy to your limbs.

In football terms, improved core stability can mean:

=> Improved Performance

Improved core stability can translate into improved speed, balance and agility. This is because players with enhanced core stability means are able to apply force more efficiently when running and jumping, generate more power when kicking a ball, and stand up better when being tackled.

=> Injury Reduction

Several studies have shown good core stability reduces the strain on limbs, thereby reducing the potential for injury. This is only a layman's summary of how it can reduce injuries and more work is being done to discover the exact benefits.

But good core stability has been shown to reduce impact injuries, kicking related injuries (eg. groin strains) and twisting injuries. It's also been a major factor in preventing and treating Osteitis Pubis in young players.

=> Improved Development Of Young Players

Good core stability can also speed up a young player's transition from junior football to the seniors. For example, through his involvement with West Perth in the WAFL, Dr Favre has been involved with a number of young AFL draftees. Mark Lecras (West Coast), Nathan Van Berlo (Adelaide), Keppler Bradley (Essendon) and Michael Pettigrew (Port Adelaide) are just some of the players that under went Dr Lavre's 'Building Physical Presence' program at West Perth.

These players are obviously talented at what they do. However, one of the reasons why Dr Fabre believes they have been able to stand up to the high physical demands of AFL at such young ages is that they all have a highly developed core stability.

How To Incorporate Core Stability Training In Your Football Program

So now that you know what core stability is and what it can mean to you as a player or your team as a coach, how do you incorporate core stability training into your football program?

We asked Dr Fabre for some tips.

Firstly, Dr Fabre recommends that teams new to core stability training should undertake a training regime made up of at least one 10-20 minute session a week, for 6 weeks. The purpose of these sessions is to build up core strength

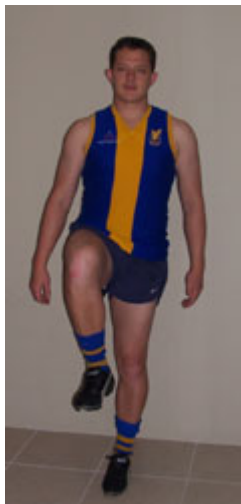
and coordination in players. After that, core stability training should be incorporated where possible for maintenance – albeit in a lessened role.

Exercises For Senior Players & Older Kids

There are a number of different core stability exercises that football teams can do for seniors and older kids. However, for the purposes of this article, Dr Fabre's has given us three basic exercises that teams can use. The beauty of these exercises is that they can be done during team warm ups/warm downs (add them to your sit ups and push ups) or by yourself at home.

The Crane

1. Start by standing on your right leg
 2. Bring your left knee as high as you can to your chest.
 3. Balance and hold for 30 seconds (or as long as you can do it)
 4. Change legs and repeats 3 sets on each leg
- * Variation – do the exercise with your arms raised as high as you can above your head.



The Crane



The Crane Variation

The Bridge (aka the Plank)

1. Lie down face-first and elevate your body off the ground using your elbows and toes.
2. Keep your body straight.
3. Hold for 30 seconds (or as long as you can do it)

4. Repeat for 3 sets

* Variation – Lie on your side and rest on one elbow and one foot.



The Bridge



The Bridge Variation

The Chair

1. Stand up with feet should width apart.
2. Raise your hands as high as you can over your head, with elbows against ears.
3. Squat down into a seated position and keep your back straight.
4. Hold for 15-20 seconds (or as long as you can do it)
5. Repeat for 3 sets.



The Chair

Exercises For Young Kids

Training core stability in young kids is slightly different to training adults. According to Dr Fabre, one of the biggest factors with kids is that they get

bored easily and can quickly lose interest. This is why Dr Fabre strongly recommends incorporating imaginative play into the exercises.

For example, a coach doing an Auskick session for 10 year olds could use exercises such as the 'crocodile walk', 'beetle crawl', 'swivel giant', and 'trotting horse' at the start of training (or in between or at the end) along with whatever is normally done. Besides enhancing fun, their inclusion will require players to exert themselves from the 'centre' and thereby develop this area of their bodies.

This way the player is getting regular (albeit disguised) all round 'core stability' formation. Players will then hopefully emerge from Auskick with a better developed 'core stability' upon which to progress their balance, agility and strength for football.

According to Dr Fabre, two easy exercises that can be incorporate into team training are the rabbit hop and the wheel barrow.

The Rabbit Hop

1. Place cones 10 metres apart.
2. Get players to sit down and hop like a rabbit from one cone to the other.
3. Try to get them to hop as far as they can by challenging them to see who can travel the distance with the least amount of jumps.
4. Hold for 15-20 seconds (or as long as you can do it)
5. Repeat for 3 sets.



The Rabbit Hop



Jumping and having lots of fun!

The Wheelbarrow

1. Place cones 10 metres apart.
2. Split players up into pairs.
3. Have one player get down on his hands and the other to support his legs from behind.
4. The person in front moves forward like a wheelbarrow while the person behind provides support.



The Wheelbarrow

Conclusion

Core stability training can provide significant benefits for players and teams, and is easy to incorporate into any training session. If you follow the exercises above, you'll hopefully be building a solid base from which your players can use to improve their physical performances and lessen injuries.

All coaches should include these vital exercises in their training programs, knowing that the benefits to the players later in life will be well worth it. Improving core stability represents the next generation of football training – and if it is good enough for AFL clubs, it should be good enough for yours too!