

Can I Train in Season?

Alex Williams

You spent all off season training, getting ready for the new year. You've become a stronger, faster athlete in preparation of taking your game to the next level. The season starts and now the very thing that got you to this point is no longer a part of your routine. As a parent, you ask if training throughout the season is worth it – the resounding answer is “Absolutely.” In general, most athletes should be performing some sort of maintenance work through their season. This includes late middle school, high school, and college athletes. The only group of athletes where it's not as much a priority would be elementary and early middle school.

As a Performance Coach, my role for an in-season athlete is to manage their fatigue. I use the example of “filling the empty buckets”. If an athlete did a lot of running at practice, I surely wouldn't want them to do more with me. If they've done a lot of squatting and their legs are sore, we're going to attack the movement patterns they have yet to.

When their practice and game load is at its highest, the priority is placed on making sure they're ready to play at their best. This means an emphasis is placed on low training volumes and utilizing modes of recovery. This could come in the form of foam rolling, flexibility or mobility work, as well as compression modalities.

In 2017, the New England Patriots notoriously were found to be squatting up to 80% of their heaviest squat during the week of the Super Bowl. If Tom Brady is training leading up to a Super Bowl, it's probably not a bad idea to prioritize training as a middle school or high school athlete. This doesn't mean we want kids squatting all the time; it does mean that, in order to maintain their progress and competitive advantage, you have to keep working on the things that gave you that advantage in the first place.

I'll never forget when I evaluated a group of volleyball girls after their freshman high school season had ended. The results were eye-opening. These girls played on a very competitive high school volleyball team. They had won 12 state titles since 2009 and were chasing their seventh straight in the season of 2021. There were high expectations for these freshman who'd be getting minutes for their varsity team.

Three of these girls started training with us in June 2021. Through the summer, five of these girls trained 3 times a week, sometimes a fourth day. Heading into the season, they had all made progress in their vertical, broad jump, and sprint times. Once the season started, we only saw two of those girls throughout the season. When they came back after the season, almost each of them was jumping a half-inch to an inch lower than their pre-season best. All except the girls who trained consistently over the season. One even improved her broad jump. The two that trained over the season only came in once a week on average, but that was enough to ensure they didn't lose their edge.

The idea of adding another event to an already busy schedule can seem daunting for many parents who have athletes that are already tasked with practices and games seemingly every day. Think of in-season training as a recharge for their battery, not another practice that drains their battery further. This is what solid in-season training should do. It's meant to optimize and restore the athlete so that they can perform their best on game day. The coach in

this situation should manage an athlete's stress, not add to it. If all is done well, this allows the athlete to hit the ground running in their off-season one step ahead of their peers. An athlete who trains in the offseason, stops training during the season, and resumes in the offseason typically takes 2 steps forward, one step back. An athlete who trains in a proper fashion, takes two steps forward and stays on that second step.