

A Week in the Detroit Lions Training Camp: An Athletic Trainer's Perspective

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Saturday

Its 10:30pm Saturday night as the game clock ticks down to zero. Our preseason game against the Pittsburgh Steelers, our first of the 2004 season, has just come to an end. But, in some sense, our work week is just beginning. That's because as the medical staff for the Detroit Lions, we immediately begin preparing for our very next game, which in this case is on the road against the Cleveland Browns.

Following the game, post-game injury evaluation occurs with players making their way to the training room. First aid is given to players with varying types of injuries such as muscle strains, joint ligament sprains and contusions. For more serious injuries, such as one that occurred in this game, a player is transported to a local hospital for further diagnostic testing. One of our staff athletic trainers accompanies the player to the hospital.

After the post-game injury care, it's time to pack up the medical supplies and equipment to leave the stadium. We use compartmentalized trunks to store and safely transport all our supplies, ranging from bandages, tape and over-the-counter medications to ultrasound units, crutches and emergency kits. After 16 hours of working, the day comes to an end at 1am.

Sunday

The next morning begins at the Detroit Lions Headquarters and Training Facility in Allen Park, Michigan. The training room fills up early with players getting treated for their bumps and bruises from the night before. These treatments include ice and heat packs, hot and cold whirlpools, electrical muscle stimulation, ultrasound, cold compression units for swollen ankle and knee joints, stretching, massage and therapeutic exercises. Athletic trainers and doctors are on hand to continue assessing injuries and deciding on the proper treatment protocols to follow. The doctors may order X-rays, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), diagnostic ultrasounds or other special tests to further evaluate the severity of an injury. Although there is no practice today, the status for the injured players needs to be determined for the upcoming week. The coaching staff is updated of a player's injury status through daily injury reports.

The coaches and players spend much of the day reviewing game film and preparing for Cleveland. As for our staff, treatment sessions continue throughout the day and night, coming to an end at 10pm.

Monday Morning

Monday comes with two practices on the schedule. The training room opens at 6am for treatments and players also stop in to have their ankles taped before the 8:45am practice. The practice fields are set up with plenty of cold water, Gatorade and ice towels to keep the players hydrated and cooled off while practicing in the summer heat. Other precautions to help prevent and deal with heat-related illnesses include large cold tubs, a cooling tent and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) on site to help if needed.

For the morning practice, the team is in full pads for contact drills. During the practice, we had a player sustain a severe calf muscle strain. Initial care for his injury included ice, compression wrap, immobilization in a walking boot with crutches, an orthopedic exam and a diagnostic ultrasound.

Between the morning and afternoon practice, the players rest, eat lunch and get more treatment for injuries. The team chiropractor also pays a visit.

Monday Afternoon

The afternoon practice in helmets and shorts is lighter in the sense that there is no full contact drills. However, the heat is more of an issue and keeping the players hydrated and cooled down is more challenging. Frequent rests breaks and plenty of Gatorade and fluids help keep the players going. The players spend the rest of the day reviewing film, eating dinner and getting one last treatment before heading back to the team hotel for the night.

Tuesday-Thursday

Over the next three days, the team practices five times with a schedule similar to Monday's. A group of massage therapists provide a session on Tuesday at the training facility and many players use this opportunity to help get their bodies feeling better.

Friday

With our game at Cleveland only a day away, the team holds a light walk-thru practice. After practice, we do additional treatments and then load our athletic training equipment on the moving truck that will drive to Cleveland. The whole team flies into Cleveland later that night and we all settle into the hotel.

Saturday: Game day

Saturday morning starts off with breakfast and pre-game meetings. Meanwhile, a group of athletic trainers and equipment managers are at the stadium preparing for the players. As the player's equipment is being laid out in their individual lockers, the training room is being set up with taping stations, treatment tables and anything else they may need. Prior to the game, the medical staffs also meet to go over stadium procedures in case of an emergency.

Once the team arrives and completes the pre-game warm-up, it's time to head out to the field for the game. There is a unique excitement to the beginning of every NFL game and for us as a medical staff, there is also the realization that all of the week's long hours and hard work has paid off to help get the healthiest team possible on the field for game day.

The game goes on with only a few injuries (one ankle and two shoulder sprains and one concussion) being sustained by our players. As the game clock ticks down to zero, you realize that another work week in the NFL is just beginning.