Special needs of the semi-professional player

The ambition of most young semi-professional players is to become a full-time player. Most teams at this level will include a mixture of older players who have played at a higher level with younger players wanting to move up. This combination of youthful ambition and experience gives these teams a unique set of opportunities and challenges.

Within the team, there may be very different approaches to training, depending on the demands of other employment and on individual perceptions of the need for training to maintain fitness. Experienced players with proven skills may not be able - or may not feel it necessary - to train as hard as the younger players. Any nutrition strategy developed for the team must take account of these individual differences as well as the individual food preferences of the different players.

Training issues

Semi-professional players typically must balance two competing demands, that of their work/career and that of the football team. Schedules need to be flexible so that the player can competently handle both responsibilities. Each will have their own daily demands, travel schedules, and time requirements that may, at times, conflict with each other.

The demands of training (intensity, duration, frequency) are likely to be less than that of full-time professionals. Training times are most commonly after the work day meaning the player has had a full day of some other activity prior to training. The time demands of two jobs means limited opportunity for adequate nutrition.

Competition issues

Semi-professional teams vary a great deal in the level of support available to their players. Some clubs might offer a high level of support while others offer little. Each player needs to take responsibility for his or her own food choices to ensure they are as prepared as possible for competition.

A semi-professional club usually has a fixed schedule of matches, most commonly one match per week. The number of Cup matches is likely to be fewer than for professionals. It is not unusual for these players to have a match on some midweek evenings after their regular daily activities.

Players still have a fluid requirement and should follow the guidelines for the professional regarding timing, type, and volume of replenishment. All players should strive to minimise fluid losses to 2% BW.

The scheduling of matches and training at this level is probably not as dense as the professional meaning the player has more time to refill the muscles of depleted glycogen. Muscle is most receptive for glycogen refuelling immediately after exercise and the player should still strive to eat some carbohydrates after a match following choices outlined for professionals. Alcohol after the match should be limited as it may affect rehydration and food selections.

Strategies to help with planning meals for the week

Plan the weekly menu around matches and training sessions. Note the days that the meal plan must be altered to suit this schedule.

Use days with light or no football commitments to get on top of the nutrition plan. Do the shopping, and cook meals ahead of need. Refrigerate or freeze one-portion servings of meals for a pre-game meal at work, or a quick meal after training or matches.

If you live in a shared household, work as a team to share these tasks:

- If you are struggling, consider seeking advice from an expert in nutrition or time management.

The match is played at a lower absolute speed and the amount of work is less due to lower levels of fitness, reduced training demands and other reasons. Yet players are still very committed about their play and should do everything possible to ensure they can play at the levels they desire.

Special issues and eating strategies

Semi-professional players are unlikely to have the dietary support that a professional will receive and will have to make all their own purchasing, preparation, selection, and timing decisions. This is further complicated by try-