

THE ORGANISATION OF REHABILITATION AT TOP EUROPEANS CLUBS: ARSENAL FC

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Arsenal Football club is a London based Premier League club. As well as Premier League competition the club has been competing in the UEFA Champions League every season since 1998-99 and so the demands on the playing staff are significant. The medical staff at the club has also contributed to the UEFA injury study in each of those years.

As with all clubs, the organisation of the day, the week, the month and the planning for short-term and long-term injured player rehabilitation needs to be efficient. The medical staffing with the first team squad consists of four physiotherapists, a doctor, three massage therapists and part time input from facets such as Nutrition, Osteopathy, Podiatry, Psychology and Yoga. Three full-time Strength & Conditioning (S&C) staff along with analysts also work closely with the medical team. The training facility is based in Hertfordshire and was built in 1999 and in 2011 a new medical/rehab facility was added. We consider rehabilitation to encompass not only the injured players return from both short and long term injury but also the addressing of the fit players areas for improvement and their long term athletic development. The player's contracts state they should undertake any rehabilitation with the Arsenal medical team at our training facility but occasionally players are allowed to have a short period of their rehab, especially when it is long term, at another facility internationally. We have used centres in USA, Qatar, France, Germany, Holland and Spain and the relationships with the clinicians in these centres are crucial. A change of scenery, a new motivation and sometimes even just the warmer weather are all considerations when the rehab plan is established and the knowledge that the injured player is attending a good facility with trusted clinicians is vital. Fortunately, being based in London we have convenient access and close relationships with some of the world's best specialists in many fields and so wherever possible any intervention takes place in London, though clearly the world's best is sought in all cases. Wherever possible, objective data and robust return-to-play markers are used and our initial player screening and on-going monitoring methods allow this to develop. Global Positioning System (GPS) data is also collected for training and also for field rehab sessions and used to ensure benchmarks are being reached. Radiological milestones are also utilised and we have a good understanding with our team of radiologists. In-house Dual X-ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) scanning is also used to monitor player's individual body composition throughout the progression.

Communication during the process, with all interested parties, is also important in the organisation of the rehabilitation. Clear messages to coaching staff, S&C staff, agents, families and of course the media are all essential. Daily morning meetings with the medical team to discuss the day, the injured players and other issues are then taken forward to a meeting with the management/coaching staff to ensure that everybody is kept well-informed of player activity and progress.

Of course, the process brings with it some challenges. Having a squad with many different nationalities, the relationships with the National team's medical personnel are important. Whilst improving yearly, some of the relationships could improve.

Other issues include occasional player requests to use external therapists, advice from players' native countries and the natural urge to seek advice from their own country, social media and injury websites with false data.

The challenge of dealing with the problems whilst ensuring a smooth, efficient return to play for the injured player is one that is shared by all clubs and Arsenal FC has always had a good relationship within the medical team.

Employing the right people and using their strengths is key to a well run team.