

El Baloncesto es Vida: A Look into Strength and Conditioning, Physical Therapy, and Coaching During My Internship Abroad

Jessica Doublesin

CB L'Horta Godella (Valencia, Spain) and University of Arkansas (Fayetteville, AR)



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

College of Education & Health Professions
Honors Program

ABSTRACT

Introduction: An experience abroad can help a person grow in confidence and knowledge and allow them to immerse themselves in a new culture. During my time in Valencia, Spain, I was able to work at a youth basketball club, CB L'Horta Godella, alongside the club's strength and conditioning coaches and the physical therapist and be a coach for the young athletes. The fact that I lived with a Spanish family and had an open mindset towards making friends and exploring new things allowed me to grow closer to the culture in Spain. By using my knowledge and passion for sports and my desire to want to become a physical therapist I was able to grow as a person during my eight weeks abroad. **Internship:** My internship provided the main research for me as I was able to explore my job tasks deeper in order to show the importance of coaches and trainers. I ran exercise sessions for teams both by myself and with the strength and conditioning coaches. We also conducted testing on the athletes to help determine their off-season workout plans. By comparing these tests with supporting literature, I was able to see how the role of the strength and conditioning coach truly shapes the athlete. With the physical therapist, I shadowed as she assessed injuries, had some hands-on experience, and talked through treatment plans. Again, I compared my work with her with some supporting literature and back to the work done with the strength coaches to prove that the physical therapist also plays a critical role to athletes. Finally, I was the coach for the youngest athletes at the summer basketball camp. Each day, I would teach them basic skills, play games, have fun, and try to teach them of all of the positives that sports can bring. I was motivated by certain life and coaching books that helped me show a different side of coaching. In the end, it was the kids that made my whole experience. **Conclusion:** During my time in Valencia, I grew in confidence, found new ways to communicate, and gained knowledge from my job and of a new culture. My internship was a perfect combination of all of my passions, and it opened my eyes to the importance of coaching. It was truly a once in a lifetime experience and something I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

INTRODUCTION

Sports are such a fundamental part of shaping a young athlete's life. Participation in sports teaches one teamwork, leadership, communication, determination, and true grit. I have experienced this firsthand in my life and had a chance to further learn about the importance of sports during my study abroad experience. I knew that studying abroad had many benefits such as growing closer to a culture and experiencing new things, but I had much personal growth in communication, knowledge, and confidence. During my 8 weeks in Valencia, Spain I was able to live with a Spanish family to fully immerse myself in the culture, and I made many new friends as we explored together. For my internship I worked at a youth basketball club, CB L'Horta Godella, alongside the club's strength and conditioning coach and physical therapist and also got to coach at a camp. My job truly combined all of my passions and it allowed me to grow more than I could have ever imagined, this was the best experience of my life.

INTERNSHIP

Before starting my internship, I was only given only basic ideas of what my job tasks would be. I knew that by working with athletes as their strength coach, physical therapist, and skills coach, I would be able to gain a holistic look at what makes a strong athlete both mentally and physically. The time of the year for basketball was right at the end of the season, so teams were either preparing for final tournaments or testing for summer workouts. Upon meeting my boss, the owner of the club, I learned that he did not speak any English. I knew this would add another level of difficulty, so I had to think of different ways to communicate and express myself. Despite our language differences, I noticed that everyone there was just like me, passionate about sports and willing to do whatever it takes to have their athletes be the best.



“The most important thing is to try and inspire people so that they can be great in whatever they want to do.” -Kobe Bryant

STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING

The two strength and conditioning coaches I worked with were named Luis and Guillermo. They both have had experience either coaching or playing in America, so they were good at providing their insight and thoughts of Spanish athletes. I would watch as they ran exercise sessions, making note of and learning different techniques and exercises they used. One day, Guille had me lead a core strengthening session for a 14-year-old girls team. The quick 30-minute circuit I came up with included: Russian twists, plank, dumbbell swings, mountain climbers, sit-ups (with plate across chest), bicycle, and letters (holding out plate in hands and tracing letters in air). The communication was tough, but through demonstration and “Spanglish,” I discovered that this team was just like any teenage girls team in America, chatty, yet hard-working.

In addition to running conditioning sessions, Guille and I conducted testing to determine the athlete's abilities in order to form a summer workout plan for them. We discussed the multidirectional nature of basketball and how it is important to train in all planes of movement, especially focusing on the overall ability of the player's ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, and core. In basketball, it is important to have flexibility, range of motion, and yet, stability of these main body parts. The three tests we recorded data for were sit-and-reach, dorsiflexion, and displacement of ankles, knees, hips, and shoulders. After obtaining the results, I researched and suggested some exercises to be included in their summer workouts, so the numbers can improve.

- Sit-and-Reach: This was measured by having the athlete's sit down, bend one leg while keeping the other straight, and then reaching as far forward as they could, measuring the distance. Flexibility is an important key to the accelerating and decelerating nature of basketball, so I suggested that simple stretching exercises should be incorporated each day.
- Dorsiflexion: The athletes stood on a small magnetic platform with their feet in a staggered position. There was a grid for measuring distances and a metal pole sticking out of it. As the athlete bent forward on their leading foot, it pushed the pole and thus determined their dorsiflexion ability. Basketball players need strength, yet, mobility of their ankle joints in order to cut and jump. In order to improve their abilities, I thought the athletes should do exercises in the sand, taking advantage of the Valencian coast.
- Displacement: Once again, the athletes stood on the platform with the pole now centered with their body. Now, they completed a single leg squat with their arms across their chest. When they went down in the squat, we were able to see the displacement of their ankles, knees, hips (core), and shoulders, based on deviation from the centered pole. Because many of the athletes became off balance during this, we determined that core exercises would be the most beneficial in improving their levels of displacement.

PHYSICAL THERAPY

CB L'Horta Godella's physical therapist that I worked with was Andrea. She was very good at explaining what she was doing, most of the time in English, and wanted me to be hands on in assessing injuries. Working with her was very interesting because I want to be a physical therapist and I was able to experience situations that I could be facing in the future. Due to basketball's fast-pace and multidirectional nature that is played on a hard surface, we saw a multitude of foot and ankle injuries.

- Extrusion on outside of foot: Andrea explained that 80% of the body's balance comes from the exterior side of the foot, so it is important there are no abnormalities. She massaged the player's foot, the fascia on the bottom, and his Achilles. This all will help with circulation and support, which will lead to quicker healing. Because the athlete was almost ready to return to play, he was instructed to warm up to his full potential and as long there was no *dolor* (pain) and he wrapped his ankle, he would be able to play.
- Quad pain/ tightness: The main thing to do was to test to make sure there were no tears, which was done through a series of manual muscle tests. After ruling out a tear, Andrea again began massaging the player, explaining to me that she likes to close her eyes so she could get a heightened perception of what she was feeling. She told me that she was separating the head of the *gemelos* (gastrocnemius) in order to relieve some pressure building up in the quad and hamstring. Due to the fact that it was the end of the season, the player could have been experiencing *sobrecarga* (overload), so rest and simple stretches were prescribed.
- Ankle sprain: This player was about three weeks out and almost ready to play. Once again, Andrea tested the strength of the ankle through different resistance exercises and gave it a massage. The player needed to work on dorsiflexion by standing up against a wall and lunging forward, pumping the ankle, and stretching so he gain back full ability.



COACHING

The most rewarding and unexpectedly favorite part of my job was being a coach for the youngest kids at the summer basketball camp. I was tasked with coaching the 5-7 year-olds and the only instruction given was to teach them basic skills and to have fun. I knew the language barrier would make it difficult, but I wanted to be that leader to teach the kids not only basketball skills, but important life skills as well. This was my first time being a coach, so I was a bit apprehensive. I turned to literature to inspire me and give me some ideas on what to do. During my time abroad, I read a book called “Burn Your Goals” (2015) by Jamie Gilbert and Joshua Medcalf, a main theme was that one should put ‘first things first,’ focus on what really matters in all aspects of life. By focusing on the little things and the people around you who matter, that is how you will truly succeed, and that is what I wanted to pass on to these kids. I knew I wanted to share my passion and love for sports with these young kids, and for all of us to have fun. For the technical side of things, I turned to “Successful Coaching” (2004) by Ranier Martens. From this I learned there are four steps to teaching technical skill (Martens, 2004, p. 199):

- 1) Introduce the technical skill
- 2) Demonstrate and explain the technical skill
- 3) Have the athletes practice the technical skill
- 4) Correct the errors

Each day, I would come to work with a basic plan in mind and use these four steps to help the young athletes learn the skills of the game. I would have them do passing, shooting, and dribbling drills, starting out with the simplest form and progressing as the camp went on. I kept in mind these four steps and knew I played a vital role to the kids because this was potentially the first time they have played basketball. The communication was once again the hardest part, as I had to improve my nonverbal communication and listening skills. Being able to demonstrate the drills helped, but I also would smile, give them high-fives or hugs, and clap for them when I wanted to praise their work. I actively worked on learning a few key phrases like “¿listos?” (“ready?”), “¡salto!” (“jump”), and “*cambio*” (“change/switch”) to be able to get their attention or say during drills. Of course, we did have a lot of fun together, smiling, laughing, and playing games. Two games were played many times; *Panuelo* (handkerchief) and *Bomba* (bomb), however, their favorite thing to do was play a scrimmage. They always wanted me on their team, I guess being 5'1” is an advantage when playing with five-year-olds. Coaching these young kids at basketball camp was the most rewarding part of my internship. My favorite moment of the whole time I was in Spain came one morning when I was arriving to work. The kids would always be playing around on the courts outside before camp started and when the ones in my group saw me walking up to the building they came joyfully screaming and yelling my name. Right in that moment, I knew I had made an impact in their lives, just as they had made an impact in mine.

CONCLUSION

My internship in Spain was the best experience of my life. During my time abroad, I got to experience a new culture and live just as they do in Valencia. I loved getting to live with my Spanish family and making new friends and exploring with them. My internship at CB L'Horta Godella combined all of my passions and turned it into one job where I grew and became more confident each day. By working with strength and conditioning coaches and a physical therapist, I was able to see their importance to athletes and how their jobs align to better the kids. I will be able to use my knowledge learned in my future profession. The hardest part of this whole experience was the language barrier. I had to find new ways to communicate effectively. I picked up on new Spanish words daily, my favorite being *fleciones* (push-ups), and I know I will never just call them push-ups again. The best part of my experience was getting to coach the kids, they made me smile daily and provided me with a big confidence boost. My eight weeks in Valencia flew by, but I know that it had a lifelong impact on how I work, communicate, interact with kids, play sports, and live overall. I absolutely loved working for CB L'Horta Godella and getting to be in Valencia during this time, it was the best experience in my life, and I cannot wait to return to Spain.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to The University of Arkansas Honors College, The University of Arkansas Office of Study Abroad, and International Studies Abroad for providing funding for this experience.



REFERENCES

- Blom, L., Brook, K., Cookley, J., Lauer, L., Sawyer, T. (2013). Maximizing the benefits of youth sports. *American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance*, 84(7), 8-13.
- Caparrós, T., Casals, M., Solana, A., Peña, J. (2018). Low external workloads are related to higher injury risk in professional male basketball games. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 17(1), 289-297.
- Carvalho, H.M., Leonardi, T.J., Gonçalves, C.F., Paes, R.R. (2017). Influence of coaches on sources of enjoyment in youth basketball. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, 26(1), 143-148.
- Chen, Y., Li, J.K., Hong, Y., Wang, L. (2018). Plantar Stress-related injuries in male basketball players: variation on plantar loads during different maximum-effort maneuvers. *BioMed Research International*, 2018, 1-7.
- Hernández, S., Ramírez-Capillo, R., Álvarez, C., Sánchez-Sánchez, J., Moran, J., Pereira, L.A., Louro, I. (2018). Effects of plyometric training on neuromuscular performance in youth basketball players: a pilot study on the influence of drill randomization. *Journal of Sports Science and Medicine*, 17(1), 372-378.
- Martens, R. (2004) *Successful Coaching: America's Best-Selling Coach's Guide*. Human Kinetics.
- Medcalf, J., Gilbert, J. (2014). *Burn Your Goals: The Counter Cultural Approach to Achieving your Greatest Potential*. Lulu Publishing Services.
- Sasaki, S., Tsuda, E., Yamamoto, Y., Maeda, S., Kimura, Y., Fujita, Y., Ishibashi, Y., (2019). Core-muscle training and neuromuscular control of the lower limb and trunk. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 54(9), 959-969.
- Tyner, E. (2013). International cooperation: the study abroad experience. *Michigan Academician*, 41(1), 377-388.
- Quinn, E. (2019, July 26). How to Perform the Sit and Reach Flexibility Test. *Very Well Fit*. <https://www.verywellfit.com/sit-and-reach-flexibility-test-3120279>