

Cool-Down and Core Exercises for Lacrosse Officials

Incorporating a formal cool-down routine into your post-game can help with physical recovery and may alleviate some discomfort. As with the pre-game, the purpose is to allow the body to transition between a less active state to a more physically engaged state and to help with flexibility. The core exercises presented below include a few basic techniques for proper form and play a role in injury prevention.

Post-Game Jog As able, spend several minutes jogging at a low key pace. If need be, walking back to car can serve as a slowing down period. Check heart rate as a measure of recovery status.

Static Stretching Start with upper body, neck, arms, chest, mid-back, and Achilles/calves. Transition to low back, hips, and legs when there is a chair or the floor available. Hold stretches 30-40 seconds, repeat. Breathing should be rhythmic. Allow relaxed muscles to stretch but not to the point of pain. Consider packing a long belt or yoga strap to assist with holding stretches and reaching a greater range of motion. The hamstrings, hip flexors, and calf muscles are the key groups which may benefit from such a tool. Propping heel onto a chair and/sitting in a chair can allow for optimal positioning for stretching muscles that cross the hip joint and the low back, when a firm surface is unavailable.

Tools for Self-Massage Consider investing in products that can help target areas of tightness. Foam rollers, massage sticks, lacrosse, tennis, and golf balls are all commonly used devices. Freezing water in a paper cup can be used for rubbing over smaller areas of soreness and inflammation for a period of 3-5 minutes.

Key Core Exercises Increasing awareness of one's posture, including low back and pelvic positioning is critical for spinal health and athletic performance. Perform the basic exercises at least 3x per week. The use of a stability ball, aka Swiss ball, can increase the intensity and allow for more variations.

Engaging the Transverse Abdominus muscle, aka TrA. This deep core muscle acts to stabilize the spine. Lie on your back with knees bent, arms at your side. Draw your belly button back and up towards your spine, thereby flattening the curve in your low back. The pelvis will undergo a slight tilt. Maintain normal breathing rhythm. This tightening action shall be done prior to performing crunches, planks, and other athletic activities. Practice holding for 30 seconds. *Variation:* Add "marching", alternate raising one foot off ground a few inches, while maintaining steady pelvis. Practice for 30 second period.

Basic Crunches: On firm surface, lie on back with knees bent. Arms at side or place fingertips in contact with head. First, engage the TrA, then flex trunk, raising your upper back and shoulder blades off the floor. Slowly lower to start position. Do not simply pull up head or neck. One set equals the number of quality repetitions until sensation of fatigue in your abdominal muscles. Perform 2-3 sets. Head may need support from hands, to alleviate tension in neck muscles.

Glute Bridges: Assume basic crunch position, with arms at side, head resting. Raise toes up, so heels are main point of contact with surface. Engage the TrA, then raise hips up, feeling tension in glutes and hamstrings primarily. Hold for up to 30 seconds. Important that the area from knees through hips to shoulders is held in alignment. Repeat 3x. *Variation:* Add alternating leg extension (straightening), while holding hips level for 15-30 second periods. Repeat up to 3x.

Planks: Assume push-up position. Prop upper body on forearms, with elbows positioned under shoulders. Raise hips, holding a line from ankles through shoulders, keeping the TrA activated. Keep neck in neutral position. Maintain normal breathing rhythm. Hold for 15, 30, up to 60 seconds. Inability to maintain alignment from shoulders to ankles indicates the end of the hold period. Build up to 1 minute. Repeat 3x. *Variations:* Add single upward leg raise. Tighten glute and lift toes off ground a few inches. Repeat, alternating sides, for 15-30 second periods. Side or Lateral Plank. Prop on one elbow, resting weight on one side of foot, with top leg resting on other. Hold for 15, up to 30 seconds. Alternate sides.