

First Step **An Injury Prevention and Performance Enhancement Program**

by Ian Barker
MYSA Director of Coaching

If injuries to the youth soccer player can be prevented then care protocols become unnecessary. At the same time if the youth soccer coach is able to prepare the players better for the specific demands of soccer on the players' bodies then performance will improve.

To achieve these objectives MYSA is endorsing and distributing to member clubs an excellent video and manual resource. First Step is a program developed by the Institute for Athletic Medicine (IAM) and was designed by health care professionals and professional soccer players and trainers.

The athletic demands for the soccer player including, jumping, pivoting, cutting, kicking and changing direction at speed place significant stress on the body, particularly to the knees and ankles. Injuries occur and it is currently estimated that 1 in 10 youth players will be injured badly enough to stop their return to the game. However, it is clear that most soccer injuries can be prevented with pre-season and in-season sport-specific training. If not preventing every injury then at a minimum proper conditioning can diminish the impact of an injury and hasten the return to training and competition.

The IAM program comes in two parts; a very well made video and an easy to follow, photo rich companion manual. The video features MYSA players training on artificial turf at Augsburg College under the supervision of former Thunder star Pierre Morice. The video proceeds at an easy to follow pace and demonstrates clearly each activity designed to prevent injury and enhance performance. The players demonstrating come straight from MYSA teams so the requirements of each activity are clearly achievable for the players most MYSA coaches work with.

The step-by-step program is divided into six sections,

- Warm-up
- Core Strength
- Agility and Balance
- Leg Strengthening
- Plyometric Jump Training
- Flexibility

Each exercise is introduced at a novice level and then developed. The placing of activity within the seasonal and weekly training cycle is also suggested to help coaches introduce the training at the optimum time to achieve results. A heavy emphasis is placed on the proper technique to ensure that the time spent is well used.

MYSA reviewed the First Step Program and were very impressed with its' objectives, its' presentation and the fact that it was produced in Minnesota using MYSA athletes. In working with IAM, the MYSA will be able to offer one copy of the video and manual to every member club. Copies will be distributed at the Winter Symposium in Richfield, February 28, 2004. At that time, IAM will also be conducting an introductory clinic explaining ways to use the program and how to develop it to fit individual player, team and club needs. Additionally, MYSA coaches will be able to purchase for their own resource collection the First Step Program components from IAM at a significantly reduced price.

The First Step Program is enthusiastically endorsed by MYSA as a truly valuable contribution to better serving the youth soccer coach and youth soccer player in the prevention of injury and improved performance. It is highly recommended viewing and reading for everyone in MYSA.