



## BASKETBALL STRENGTH TRAINING ABROAD—FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

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**T**he sport of basketball is constantly changing, which means that strength and conditioning programs at the National Basketball Association (NBA) level have had to adapt and adjust with the changing times. Whether it is working with players in team facilities or working with them in foreign countries, a strength and conditioning coach must be willing to go the extra mile when trying to cull the most out of an athlete's potential.

With the explosion of money and media exposure in the NBA, there is more pressure than ever on athletes to reach their maximum potential—both for the good of the individual player and for the overall team performance. Team owners, general managers, and coaches want that improvement to come sooner, rather than later, because of the often volatile nature of professional sports and the “win-now” mentality that persists. For instance, it's commonplace that the day after the final game of an NBA season, players conduct exit interviews with management, coaches, and the sports medicine staff in order to get their evaluations and expectations for the following season. In the NBA, there is a lot of pressure on athletes to be their best, and some of that pressure falls onto the shoulders of the strength and conditioning coach. Success or failure often rides on an athlete's improvement and a strength and conditioning coach's ability to maximize their talent. Therefore, the strength and conditioning coach is tasked with getting the most out of the athletes at all times of the year, including the off-season regardless of location.

### TRAVELING ABROAD

One challenge to training NBA players occurs when the athletes return to their respective homes during the off-season. Rather than simply trusting that the athletes will follow the strength and conditioning program as planned, strength and conditioning coaches often have to travel far to visit players to make sure that they are using the off-season as time for improvement. For example, Bar, Montenegro is a city off the coast of the Mediterranean Sea with no direct route from Orlando, FL (location of the Orlando Magic NBA franchise). Traveling to Bar Montenegro during the summer can take approximately 12 hours of connecting flights and driving. However, working in-person with the athlete is invaluable to a strength and conditioning coach so I have made this trip overseas. By making this trip, I was able to experience the benefits of communicating directly with the athlete, seeing firsthand what training options were available to the athlete, and supervise proper training sessions. I found that despite the difficulties involved with traveling, the entire experience can be very beneficial—for both the strength and conditioning coach and the athlete.

Planning and communication must take place before traveling abroad to be efficient. Before making a trip abroad, there should be communication in regards to the upcoming training sessions and scheduling. One goal should be for the strength and conditioning coach to answer as many questions in regards

to training before their arrival. One of the most common training limitations is the size of the equipment compared to the equipment at the team's training facilities. Other limitations include language barriers (including reading the equipment displays), hours of operations in which nutrient timing/intake can be affected, and facility size. All of these obstacles can present a challenge for the strength and conditioning coach to overcome, yet they are conquerable obstacles.

## COMMUNICATION

If the strength and conditioning coach is unable to travel to an athlete's home, then they can still communicate with the athlete in various ways. In this situation, strength and conditioning coaches often must rely on certain apps or programs that allow them to communicate via text or video. Apps such as Whatsapp®, Skype®, and Visualcoaching® Pro can allow the athlete and the strength and conditioning coach to communicate from any place in the world, without any expenses. These are great tools to bridge the gap between the strength and conditioning coach and the athlete because they help strength and conditioning coaches prescribe individualized, sport-specific programs remotely. These programs can be easily followed on a smartphone or tablet with an internet connection. For example, the program can be queued to notify the athlete of the specific training program for that day. For any questions they may have regarding the prescribed program, there are illustrations and videos that can help explain the exercises. If the athlete has any concerns such as limitations with certain pieces of equipment or time of the session, the strength and conditioning coach can simply go online and make the adjustments, which are then updated instantaneously on the athlete's smartphone or tablet.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the usefulness and convenience of being able to communicate at all times throughout the world with cutting-edge technologies, nothing can compare with face-to-face interaction. For this reason, most strength and conditioning coaches in the NBA visit their players overseas to monitor their training. Traveling overseas to administer a strength and conditioning program can be an immensely beneficial experience for both the strength and conditioning coach and the athlete. It can help build a strong rapport between the strength and conditioning coach and the athlete, which can ultimately build more trust and adherence to the training program. Even though there may be some challenges involved with traveling, the experience may help the strength and conditioning coach to make better decisions in the future, thereby improving athletic performance.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Bill Burgos is currently in his third year with the Orlando Magic National Basketball Association (NBA) team. This is his 5th year as the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach, including working for the New York Knicks NBA team. He is responsible for the design and implementation of strength, conditioning, flexibility, and team nutrition programs to optimize the health, performance, and overall fitness of the players. Prior to his time with the Knicks, Burgos completed a two-year stint with the Magic as the Strength and Conditioning Coordinator working alongside current National Basketball Player's Association Director of Science and Research, Joe Rogowski. Burgos also served as an Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach with the Pittsburgh Pirates Major League Baseball (MLB) club for two years. With the Pirates' minor league team, Burgos was in charge of overseeing the design and implementation of all strength and conditioning activities from the Major League to Rookie Ball levels at their spring training facility in Bradenton, FL. Burgos has a Master of Science degree in Exercise Science from Austin Peay State University, where he also obtained his undergraduate degree in Exercise Science. He obtained his second Master's degree in Human Movement from AT Still University. Burgos also served for a combined 13 years in the United States Army and United States Air Force in which he deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.*