

How to get match fit again!

SUPER-TRAINER LUKE WORTHINGTON HELPS
A SQUAD OF MIDDLE-AGED EX-PRO
FOOTBALLERS TO HIT THEIR FITNESS GOALS

words: J Harry Dawson



LUKE'S 4 TIPS TO FITNESS HEAVEN

1 FIGHT BOREDOM AND PAIN

'Mix your training,' says Luke. 'You're more likely to get bored doing the same thing and unbalanced training increases injury risk.' Start with one low-intensity cardio session (a swim or cycle) and one careful weights session.

2 AID ACTIVE RECOVERY

'Just 15 minutes of stretching and mobility exercises on days off,' says Luke, 'will improve results in training and also aid recovery. One session with a personal trainer can be very helpful in this regard.'

3 GET UP 10 MINUTES EARLIER

Small changes in habit, lifestyle and diet can lead to big changes in body shape, fitness and overall wellbeing. Luke recommends a slight tweak to your alarm, so you have the time to make eggs (poached or scrambled) on brown toast for breakfast.

4 MODERATE DRINK'S HIDDEN CALORIES

'A large slice of takeaway pizza has the same calorie count as a pint of lager,' says Luke. Several of his England players got their biggest health boost by moderating their alcohol intake.

Luke advises mixing your training – start with one low-intensity cardio session and one careful weights session per week

As one of the UK's leading fitness trainers, Luke Worthington enjoys a challenge, and here is one of his biggest yet: get a bunch of middle-aged former England football legends back in shape for a match against Germany. In just 12 weeks. And all of it on film for a new ITV1 show, *Slimming for England*.

'In their heyday, these guys were world-class,' says Luke, 'but now they're middle-aged blokes with middle-aged blokes' issues: dodgy knees, dodgy ankles and dodgy lifestyle choices.'

Managed by Harry Redknapp, with John Barnes as his assistant, the squad contains some of the best England players of the previous generation: David Seaman, Chris Waddle, Neil Ruddock, Mark Wright, Mark Chamberlain, Lee Sharpe, Matt Le Tissier, Paul Merson, Rob Lee, Ray Parlour and Robbie Fowler.

From day one, Luke knew he would have his work cut out to get the players match fit for the big game. Some of them, it's fair to say, were more physically fit than others. Their average weight was 100kg (15st 10lb), with the heaviest at a scales-straining 153kg (24st 11lb).

'There was a big weight-loss element to the fitness and diet plans I devised for each of them,' says Luke, 'but, ultimately, they had to play a football match at a high level, so we couldn't just make them as thin as possible. They needed to perform against Germany.'

'These guys are all ex-athletes,' says Luke, who is too. A former dual-code rugby player for Harlequins (union) and London Broncos (league), he retired due to a back injury aged 24 in 2004. Having already worked part-time in gyms, he gained qualifications in fitness and biomechanics and became an in-demand personal trainer and conditioning coach. Quite a different retirement plan, especially when compared with some of his England football legends.

'You might think former footballers have a bit more time on their hands,' he says 'and a bit more disposable cash than other people their age, but their lifestyle issues and health issues are exactly the same. We didn't send them to personal trainers or give them personal chefs for three months. They learned how to make healthy food and how to start, and continue with, realistic exercise plans that they could carry on with after the show finished.'

The players met with Luke once a week; otherwise they were on their own (although his mobile never stopped beeping with text messages from them!). Each player had an individual fitness plan, but there were common aspects. In the beginning, the fitness routines were low-impact and weight-supported – a lot of time on bikes and in swimming pools. The harder stuff – runs, sprinting and weight



“Small changes in habit, lifestyle and diet can lead to big changes in body shape, fitness and wellbeing”



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LUKE'S TOP 4 DIET TIPS

SUSTAINABLE CHANGES

'Don't be draconian, thinking only about that beach holiday (or that England game...). Think long term: make changes that fit with your lifestyle, that you can live with on an ongoing basis.'

DON'T FEAR CARBS

'Carbs are the main source of energy for your brain as well as your body. You need carbs to metabolise fats so cutting them out can hinder your progress if dropping body fat is the goal.'

EAT SLOWLY

'Taking your time when you have a meal means the signals to your brain that you are "full" actually have time to arrive there!' says Luke. 'You are less likely to over eat when you eat slowly.'

REMEMBER YOUR PROTEIN

'Protein is super important. The players were each targeted to eat 2g of protein per kg of body weight, per day. This means you have to make sure you get protein at every meal.'

LEARN TO COOK

'Cooking makes you aware of what is going into a meal. Buy fresh ingredients and learn new life skills at the same time. Cooking your own meals may take more time but it's quite therapeutic too.'

PIMP YOUR WATER

'Hydration was something we had to address with the players, especially with the hot weather in the summer. Sugar-free cordials were useful for increasing water uptake.'

training – came later, when their fitness levels had started to improve.

The player's nutrition plans also were driven by the idea of gradual change. The slow-and-steady method is exactly what Luke conveys to his personal training clients, who include current pro footballers, rugby players, boxers, MMA fighters and celebrities.

'I tightened the strings on the diet little by little – going too hard too soon is exactly why people get fed up and stop a fitness plan,' Luke says.

'People always ask me, "What's the best exercise programme?" and I tell them: it's the programme that you can follow. Be realistic about how much time you can give to training. Start gradually, and then build up as you feel better and stronger. These guys started with two sessions a week. By the end they could train every day, whenever they wanted. It's a slight mind shift to start with, but anyone can do the same.'



From left, back row: Redknapp, Sharpe, [who is this?], Wright, Seaman, Waddle, Ruddock, Chamberlain, Barnes. Front row: Merson, Fowler, Le Tissier, Lee, Parlour.

Slimming for England comes to ITV in XXXXX. You'll find more healthy eating ideas at waitrose.com/recipes