

You Call That A Facility?

By Steve Mandl – George Washington HS (NY)

I've been hearing for years those teams in the Northeast are at a disadvantage during the winter. Well maybe we are in some ways, but here at George Washington I think we have made the best of a terrible situation. Below is a typical day, during the winter, indoors, in a space your cat would feel claustrophobic in.

We do all our workouts/training/practice in an area called "boy's square" and it is just that. It is an area in front of the boys locker room that is about 25 feet by 50 feet with a slight wing a few feet longer, it's shaped like a square hectarectangocta triangle, in other words it's a weird shape with dividers in the middle. The walls are made of brick and the floors concrete. It is an area that's can clearly handle 20 student/athletes, we usual carry 45 in the winter until final cuts in the Spring but this year due to Hurricane Sandy, we were forced to shut down fall ball and resume indoors with twice that amount. As you can imagine it is crowded as a New York Subway car during rush hour, the proverbial sardine can.

Here is just one day in the litany of days and workouts. Again, we work as hard as humanly possible, our core workout/training stays basically to this formula but the exercises, and drills/skills change daily. Conditioning and mental toughness a prerequisite to what we do, the formula stays the same but on any given day we can change to exercises usually depending on what we did the day before, but there is no formula to which skills/drills or chosen exercises we do.

We start with a large "circle" in the shape of the weird shaped "square," it's difficult to call it a circle because kids are in every nook and cranny, but when our season starts and we are blessed to be outside on our beautiful turf field, we actually do form a huge circle, so the term has always been, "get in the circle."

We start with a slow short run around the basement up the stairs around the cafeteria and back to "the square" to get the muscles warmed, the blood flowing and our total body and mind ready for the barrage. We do a lot of old school, along with new school stretches, incorporating static and explosive stretching. Our stretching session usually lasts about an hour, which will also include series of various types of pushups, with wide hands, close hands, hands inward, outward, fingertips, fists, and diamonds in a few-set sessions. Usually this is followed by the same routine for triceps from a sitting position, also with various hand placements. We do abdominal work almost everyday also with a variety of different crunches, crossovers, leg lifts and throw downs. We work our abs extremely hard and will do at least 5 different exercises, usually 5 sets of 25 reps for each exercise so the abs get burned to shreds. We also incorporate wall jumps with crunches in a set of these going from 12 reps to 3 reps and back up to 12 again. If someone's abs are not burning at this point, they are not working. Almost every day we do a lot of arm circles from small to large and back again. Arm exercises are not just arm circles we do a large amount of various arm exercises. There are days when we do two partner stretches for both arms and legs, slow and long.

Just about every day we break into three groups and do the following to finish up... One group does suicides in the straight away attached to the "square," one group does stairs jumping one, two and then three at a time and going back down, backwards. The third group runs the five flights of stairs and jog down; the groups rotate after each station. On other days we might add plyometric or a long cross fit session on top of, or instead of any of the above. We will throw in core work and hip explosion exercises every couple of days.

There is no reason why any team in any area cannot find a space as we do to do any kind of stretch/warm-up. We have been very fortunate, lucky and blessed to have all our players buy into this rigorous training. In my 30 years at GW I have been fortunate and I believe, due to our training regiment, to have very, I mean very, few players who have ANY kind of injury not including "in game" injuries, but fortunately due to this routine we have been lucky as well to even have very few of those. A broken ankle last year was probably the worst of our injuries at GW. When our college kids and minor league former players come home for the holiday or off-season they look forward to our workouts, they know it will get them ready for anything.

Today for example we will do what we call "power stretches" as well, yet sometimes we will extend this and forego some of the other stuff. There are lines on the floor that form boxes so we will use those as a guide to do jumping and hopping at various lengths. If we have to we will use the radiators for explosion exercises (we have to make sure the custodians aren't around when we do those exercises because when the players jump up onto the radiators which are covered in a metal casing the noise resonates a long way.) There is a metal railing that goes down to the cafeteria, which we use for leg stretchers and balancing exercises. We like to do a lot of balancing exercise as often as possible. One of the great things is that each day myself and the coaches "get ideas" we see something or think of something and add it into the workout, whether its a part of the school building or just an idea, modify, expand, add, subtract. We are very open minded and innovative. We always think "outside the box" or square hectarectangocta triangle, that's what keeps everything fresh. You don't have to have elaborate equipment or large open spaces. All you need is motivation and conviction and the student/athletes have to believe in you and what you're doing. We have always had great results so it's no problem to buy into anything we introduce. And as yesterday when a minor league former player came from Winter Ball in Dominican Republic and worked with us saying "we work harder here than in Spring Training, and this has kept me from injuries in my short pro career so far." This goes a long way.

When our warm-up/exercise part of the day is done we will break up into usually three groups, pitchers/catcher, infielders and outfielders. In brief, our outfielders go into either "the dungeon," a long straightaway in the hall and work on pickups, footwork, some medicine ball work, ladder work or short throwing. Other times they go into the pool that is actually condemned (please don't tell anybody) which obviously has no water. It's a large Olympic sized pool so it goes from shallow to deep, they can run up and down hill and throw a little. At different times they work on balls pinballing off the wall, (angles,) going back on balls different turns, fly ball communication and other various wall drills.

It's so dark in there that they also get to work on night time drills since our field doesn't have lights either.

The infielders go into the lunchroom, where we move all the lunch tables to give us some room to catch grounders and throw in this very small area since here too brick walls divide the area so long or wide areas are not available. To our great relief, after thirty years the dividing walls that separated the cafeteria into three sections were taken down this year so we actually will have a little extra space, but there are still brick post all over the place, which makes a great outfield drill if we can hit the ball off the wall and have the outfielders play it like a wall. It doesn't do much for the infielders though; I don't know many fields that have a brick post at shortstop!

All three groups, all our kids, throw "every day" We are a strong believer in throwing every single day. We have 5 kids this year that will touch 90 mph and we feel this is a result of our training, care for the arm and throwing all the time

The infielders go through a series of throwing drills from, upper body, one knee, both knees, sitting, regular throwing and quick hands/ feet. We also use what we call long toss, which really isn't very long toss at all in the natural sense of the word, but for indoors it is, its about 85 feet on an angle where we throw hard and quick but concentrate on accuracy. That's about as long as we can get. The ceiling is low and the back walls are made of plaster and there are vending machines against the back wall which we try to cover with some of the folded lunch tables, so we have to be accurate to not break a light, vending machine or put a hole in the wall. After the throwing session the infielders get into some glove and footwork with their gloves, paddles and barehand. We have a routine that includes partnering up and throwing short hops, long hops, backhand and general footwork. When the short distance glove work is done we form a line and do fungo work in the 85 foot area and work on going in the hole in both directions. Even though the area is short, we put them on the far side of the area to increase the distance they have to go to get to the ball in either hole. We also do a long series of barehand plays and work on paddle work for soft hands. Each day we add or subtract drills to change it up. Once in awhile we also make it competitive whether individual competition or group competition, but we try to add some fun element into the grind. The cafeteria floors are hard but we do a lot of diving, balls hit in the hole and fielded by diving most of the time. We then set up two lines in a very small area with one base. All infielders except lefty first basemen go to either line, we work on footwork for double plays from 2B to SS and then in reverse, players switch lines after they make a play. The infielders work on the various flips as well at this time. We work on this at twice-game speed and with that speed still work on accuracy and mostly, communication. When we get into a real good groove and working well we then split up into groups of three where we have a tosser and two middle infielders working on the same, but getting over 200 reps. Even in this small space we can get 7 groups of three. They rotate as tosser and middle infielders, working ate breakneck speed but stopping if it gets sloppy or done incorrectly. We make sure we communicate and use the same language and get to know each fielder's strengths and weaknesses regardless of who plays what position during the season.

At the same time the outfielders are in the pool and the infielders are in the cafeteria, the pitchers are in the actual locker room. Fortunately several lockers were taken out a few years ago so we now have a 55-foot straightaway where two pitchers can throw bullpen at the same time. We do bullpen twice a week but as stated throw every day, so if a pitcher is not doing his pen work he is throwing 11 inch softball in between the lockers, doing throwing drills similar to what the infielders did in the above stated workout. We do not have an indoor mound so all work is done on flat ground. In addition the pitchers are doing their cord work, balance work, core work, medicine ball and weight work. We have sit down sessions every so often with pitchers and catchers so all are clear about our mission, game plan and pitching game day and off day and bullpen routines. Our pitchers are general lean and extremely flexible and strong. Any pitcher that comes to us overweight or with excess baby fat, usually losses it in a few short weeks with all the work.

Catchers have a few days every couple of weeks where they go with one of the coaches and work like dogs on blocking, framing, release, transfer, sign giving and setting up among all other things catchers need to do. The catchers on these days are soaked through and through by the end of the workout. They are doing all their work on hard concrete floors, with gear on.

The few areas we work in, on first look, if you were told what we do, you would not believe the amount of work, reps, training we do in them, but upon watching us you will realize you too can improvise and do any aspect of the game in the smallest of areas, you have to innovative and the kids, as ours have to be motivated. Creativity=Motivation=Success.

I've been blessed to have great players who buy into the program and come back as coaches or just come back to help out during their off-season or holidays, it makes the job of all of us easier since they have been part of the program and know what it takes to be a Washington Trojan. The only coach I have that has not played for me is Nick Carbone who has been a godsend; he has the work ethic and determination as anyone I've been around. He is a great coach and will be a tremendous head coach as he was in 2011 winning a championship in my short absence. This is something you can't create; you have to be lucky as our program has been with him. Our coaches, all of them donate all their time since there is no position in NYC as assistant baseball coach. This can only work with innovation, love for the game and your kids and great coaches who will do anything for you and the kids.

We hit once a week and this too is done in the "square" and in part of the weight room. We have room for about eight stations and have about 15 different stations in all. Most of the eight stations remain the same each time we hit, we change up about two or three stations each time. The area is small and safety can be an issue so each coach, all hitters must be very aware of their surroundings. All drills except bunting and golf whiffle balls and water caps (for curve balls,) dry drills (various mechanics) are done into screens so they are contained into a small confined area.

There is no talking during our stretching and a lot of the drills, you usually can hear a pin drop except for the person (s) leading the activity, but, when we are just about done, before we brake up into groups the team does 3 sets of 25 jumping jacks in total, complete synchronization and lots of chanting and motivational yelling by the team. We look like an Olympic synchronized swim team and as loud as two football teams. We do this before each home game as well and feel it motivates us and psyches out the opponent who doesn't know what hit them even before the real barrage begins.

Our weight room is out of the 1980's but sufficient as we have enough free weights pull up/chin up bars and machines to get a good workout in. All our coaches, fortunately have very strong weight lifting backgrounds so the team is well schooled in adequate and related workouts to specific positions and needs.

While most of the team is in the weight room, some remain in the "square" and work on any number of things from mechanics, footwork, glove work, more throwing or anything that needs to be sured up individually. Many of the infielders use one of the walls with "Incrediballs" and do wall drills with each other and have created a very rigorous, but highly competitive fielding game which also requires a lot of throwing, quick reflexes and a strong arm are need to be champ that day.

As stated, we work in very small areas, dark hallways and stairwells, crowded cafeterias where people are going in and out all the time, dirty, dingy, condemned pool area, outdated weight room, very little equipment, but this is was carves and creates our toughness and I know that any program, large or small, in any environment, as long as you have walls, floors, stairs and much innovation and determination you can make a 25 by 50 foot area become a mecca for you.

I hope you enjoyed a short synopsis of what we do at George Washington High School in NYC. There is so much more and I could go into greater detail on each activity, as well as explain all the other skills/drills not mentioned, but my purpose was to show how even in the smallest of spaces with large groups, great effective workouts can be achieved. You must think outside the "box"

Please feel free to contact me with any deeper explanations or further info on any of this and more at....

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Keep on playing, but play hard
"Coach" Steve Mandl