Weight Room Safety Strategic Planning—Part 5

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THE PRIOR 4 ARTICLES HAVE completed the development of Loss Chart 1. We will now discuss the mechanics of developing a strategic plan: The forming of a team, the mechanics of the meetings, writing a mission statement, and conducting a SWOP (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, threats, and Problems) analysis.

Developing a Strategic Plan

Do not begin the sequence of meetings to develop your strategic plan until you have Part 6 of this series of articles. If you are waiting for it to be published, assemble and read the articles already published, read the book on conducting meetings (referenced in the Meeting Mechanics section), assemble the Combined Loss Chart described in the SWOP Analysis Preparation section, and begin some of the preliminary planning.

Forming a Team

The first step is to form a safety team of yourself as head strength and conditioning coach and all of your assistants. You will also need two athletes at the first SWOP analysis meeting. No need to select them until that time. If some members of your staff are familiar with spreadsheet and word processing programs, get them to publish the minutes and make the graphs. All the work can be done by hand if necessary, but it looks more professional if you can utilize a basic computer system. Inform your staff of the creation of the safety team and their membership in it. Tell them you value their input, and encourage them to attend the meetings.

Meeting Mechanics

The entire process of developing a plan and having it ready for implementation will typically take about 6 to 8 weekly meetings spread over 2 months. To be productive, the meetings should be away from the weight room, with some refreshments and in a relaxed atmosphere. Schedule a classroom with a large blackboard and bring some treats. Perhaps a local hotel will allow you to use one of their conference meeting rooms.

Distribute a complete set of this series to each safety team member early enough so that he or she will have time to read it before the first meeting. Encourage everyone to attend all the meetings and to be prompt. The meetings will cover a lot of issues; if you have to stop and bring late attendees up to date, it will reduce the effectiveness of the meetings. Let your assistants know this program is important to you. Tell them it is an opportunity for them to learn new skills they may need later.

Try not to dominate the meetings. Use an outside meeting facilitator if you can. If you need some guidance in running meetings, I strongly recommend a paperback titled How to Make Meetings Work, by Michael Doyle and David Straus (Jove Books, New York).

Mission Statement Meeting

Try to identify in a few words what you hope to accomplish with the overall strength and conditioning program. The mission statement is for you and your staff, it is not for the athletes. Some representative mission statements are listed

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below and all begin with "Our mission is . . .

- to safely provide each athlete with the best physical conditioning possible.
- to provide superior physically conditioned athletes and reduce injuries.
- to safely build strong, well-conditioned athletes.
- to make sure each athlete is available for every competition and operates as close to his or her genetic potential as possible.
- to provide the football coaching staff with healthy, well-conditioned athletes capable of physically dominating our competitors.
- to help our athletes "be all that they can be."
- to build confident, strong, powerful, injury-proof athletes.
- to transform the boys we are given into men capable of dominating our opponents.
- to optimize physical capabilities of our athletes for their positions on the field.

Ask your staff what they feel their mission is. The mission statement for your facility can be assembled by combining your thoughts, ideas from your staff, and the representative mission statements. It should describe your mission, be inspiring, contain some reference to safety or injury reduction, and be easy to remember. This is an important part of your safety program; do not take it lightly. You want thought-provoking ideas to surface.

It takes time to develop a statement your entire staff can buy into and take ownership of. Once you have drafted a mission statement, have it printed on signs for your office and for the supervisor's station.

**SWOP Analysis Preparation**

To prepare for the meeting, photocopy Loss Charts 1 through 7 from the earlier articles. Use poster board, cover it with white butcher paper, and place Loss Chart 1 at top center and Loss Chart 2 at top left. Cut Loss Chart 5 in half horizontally, separating Professional Development and Vigilance. Place the remaining Loss Charts in numerical order (3, 4, 5 top, 5 bottom, 6, 7) across the bottom of the poster. Draw lines joining the top box of each Loss Chart back to the same box on Loss Chart 1. Loss Chart 2 should be placed just a little lower than Loss Chart 1 to allow a horizontal line to join the two FITNESS ACTIVITIES boxes. Now the poster is referred to as the Combined Loss Chart.

Choose two athletes to help your staff with the SWOP analysis. They can provide vital insights into hazardous areas both inside and outside the weight room. Try to select talkative individuals who will speak their minds. Athletes who have transferred from another college can bring a wider perspective to the group. Be sure the athletes you have selected can attend the meeting, as their presence is very important.

The SWOP analysis is best performed in two sessions. In the first session you attempt to develop a roster of your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and problems. In the second session you rank the items listed in the first session in order of their relative importance to reduce losses in your facility.

**First SWOP Analysis Meeting**

Welcome your staff and the two athletes and review what has been accomplished. Share your new mission statement with them. Explain that you will use the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and problems identified today to develop a plan to make your facility safer and reduce losses.

Go around the room listing the strengths of your safety and loss reduction programs. Get the athletes to list strengths too. Look at the large Combined Loss Chart for additional strength areas. Do not criticize any suggestions; this is a brainstorming session, and you don't want to discourage anyone from making suggestions. Any that do not fit can be removed later.

When you have exhausted the list of strengths, begin the same process with weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and problems, doing each group one at a time. If you reach a dead end, have the group take a short break to clear their minds.

Opportunities are things your program could take advantage of. Some examples might be attending a talk on safety at an NSCA conference, or getting a local athlete who just came through major rehabilitation to speak to the athletes about recovering from an injury by working with the athletic trainers and using the off weeks prior to a bowl game to rehabilitate injuries.

Threats are things that might happen. If the university is currently under NCAA investigation, probation is a threat. If the new university president slashed athletic spending at his old institution, reduced funding is a threat. If the NCAA is currently considering a new rule further limiting training time hours, the loss of weight training time is a threat.

You usually cannot totally remove the impact of a threat, but you can lessen the blow by prepar-
ing for it. If your football program is under NCAA investigation, the program might be placed on long-term probation. This typically results in reducing the physical caliber of recruits, some of whom will have had much less strength training than your current athletes. This means they will have more chance of being injured on the field and require more supervision in the weight room. Therefore probation is a threat to your efforts at loss reduction.

Problems are difficulties that already exist in your program. Some may be typical issues faced by many strength coaches, others may be unique to you. Some industry-wide examples are the easy availability of steroids, playing on artificial turf, and foul weather games. A more local example would be a school in the north having to deal with snow cover and very cold weather for practices, which can increase slip and fall injuries and increase the incidence of coughs and colds.

When you have completed listing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and problems, make sure the items are in the correct categories; delete any items the group feels do not belong on the lists. Be sure you have an accurate list of the groups' decisions, and thank everyone for their assistance, especially the two athletes.

**Preparation for Second SWOP Meeting**

Distribute the list developed in the first SWOP meeting to your staff so they can write any major items that were overlooked and bring it to the next meeting. Create a set of 5 ballots, one for each SWOP category, similar to the Strengths Ballot.

### Strengths Ballot

Please cast your votes for the greatest strengths of the safety and loss prevention program. You have 100 points to vote with and you must use all 100 votes. You must vote for at least 3 items. No more than 50 points for one item. You must vote in increments of 5 points.

1. We have good, safe, heavy duty weightlifting equipment.
2. We have well trained professional staff.
3. Recruits arrive in excellent condition with good basic lifting techniques.
4. Staff are NSCA members and have access to NSCA training materials.
5. Our new spacious weight room prevents overcrowding problems.
6. We have excellent visibility in the weight room from the supervisor's station.
7. Our assistants have CPR training.
8. The utility system provides adequate ventilation, lighting, and temperature control.
9. We teach each athlete the proper way to perform and spot each exercise before adding it to his or her workout schedule.
10. There were no major injuries in the weight room last year.
11. There is an ongoing weight room safety inspection program in place.
12. The athletic trainers facility is next door for rapid treatment of injuries.
13. Specific exercises have been included in the program to help athletes build joint strength to reduce on-the-field injuries.

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### Second SWOP Analysis Meeting

At the second SWOP meeting, discuss the idea of considering both the frequency and severity of loss. A less frequent but very severe loss should be addressed before a more frequent but minor loss. For example, if your building is a serious fire hazard it only has to burn once to cause a major loss. The fire hazard should be addressed before you concern yourself with more minor issues. Also remind everyone that during this safety analysis your competitors are not other teams or conditioning programs. Your competitors are risk, injury, and loss.

Pass out the Strengths Ballot and review the strengths listed earlier. If the group has identified any strengths they feel are important but were missed earlier, have them write these on the blank lines at the bottom of the ballot. Be sure everyone writes the
new items on the same numbered line (this will help in the tally later). Spend some time discussing the strengths so that everybody understands each item listed.

Discuss the voting method described on the Strengths Ballot and make sure everyone understands the procedure. Have everyone write their votes down. Collect the ballots, tally the scores, and announce the ranking of the strengths to the group. Then use the same process to rank the weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and problems. Be sure you have a list of the items and the votes.

**SWOP Data Analysis**

List the strengths in decreasing order of the number of votes they receive. Use a spreadsheet program or some grid graph paper to draw a bar chart of these results. Typically 3 to 5 of the items will get the most votes, with a significant dropoff in votes to the remaining items. These 3 to 5 items are your major strengths. The graph helps you see where to draw the line between these and the other items on the list. Graph 1 is a sample of how these strengths might be charted.

Graph 1 clearly shows the 5 major strengths. There is a significant drop-off in the number of votes beginning with the "No Injuries" item. Repeat this process for the weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and problems. Identify your cutoff points to determine the major items in each category. Remake the graphs showing only the significant items, using the same vertical scale on each graph to allow relative comparisons between categories. Identify the individual items by a descriptive word or two. Make each graph of the significant items on a piece of 8-1/2 x 11-in. paper. Model it after the individual graphs in Graph 2.

Using poster board, place the strengths/opportunities graphs on the left and the weaknesses/threats/problems graphs on the right, as in Graph 2. The horizontal descriptive words are easy to read and will help you in later planning sessions. This combined graph will now be referred to as the SWOP Graph. It provides a vi-
ual representation of the results of your SWOP analysis. In the next and final segment of this series, I will discuss identifying and selecting goals, and writing and implementing the strategic plan. ▲

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