

TONI KRASICKI CHATS WITH PETER HARDING, THE STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH FOR THE QANTAS WALLABIES, TO GET THE LOWDOWN ON THEIR PREPARATION AND TRAINING SCHEDULE FOR THE UPCOMING RUGBY SEASON.

HOW TO TRAIN LIKE A WALLABY

This year is a big year for Rugby Union. So we went behind-the-scenes to find out exactly what sort of training and prep is involved at this level of competition.

2011 is gearing up to be a big year for Rugby Union fans. It started in February, with players representing their states in the super-expanded Super Charged Rugby Tournament. Once Super Rugby wraps up, the Qantas Wallabies face off against Pacific Island heavyweights Samoa, before getting into one of the most highly anticipated Tri Nations Series in recent memory, which includes the highly sought after Bledisloe Cup. For the fans, it'll be a corker of a year for rugby; for those not yet swept up in the excitement – it's only a matter of time!

The 2011 Qantas Wallabies Test season starts with the Sydney Festival of Rugby on 17 July, with a Test Match against Samoa at ANZ Stadium followed by the first Tri Nations match against South Africa six days later on the same ground on 23 July. The Samoan game is a 2pm kick off and a great day for the family with a fan day starting at 11.30am, which includes a range of Wallabies past and present and loads of activities for the kids. Tickets go on sale for both Sydney test matches on 31 May at 9am through www.ticketek.com.au or by phoning 132 849.



'IT'S NOT LIKE A CLUB TEAM WHEN YOU'VE GOT THE WHOLE YEAR; YOU'VE GOT TO BE READY TO HIT THE GROUND RUNNING STRAIGHT AWAY AND YOU'VE GOT 30 BLOKES AND STUFF GOING ON EVERYWHERE AND YOU'VE JUST GOT TO GET THEM ORGANISED!'

FF: DESCRIBE WHAT YOU DO, AS THE STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH FOR THE QANTAS WALLABIES?

PH: We begin planning out what we are going to do during the year in January. So because we are a travelling team and there are logistics involved with lots of different people, it tends to be far more specific; a six-monthly plan, then a monthly plan, a weekly plan, right down to a daily plan. During the first quarter of the year I put a skeleton plan together for everyone to see, and when that's in the diary I start planning the actual sessions that we are going to do. Once the season gets started there's not much time to write programs as it gets pretty intense and time is precious. I also do a monthly visit to each state team so I can talk to players and see how their training is going.

The work I do during the season is done at the front end of the week, with the last session on a Thursday. On game-day you have game-day roles, but the work is done at the beginning of the week.

Since May last year we introduced GPS units, which we use during training sessions. So a new aspect of my role includes at least two to three days of data interpretation. We have 50 GPS units out on players at the moment, so when we get the information, another guy analyses the data and I interpret it. It helps me follow what the players are doing and see how they are going.

The GPS is attached to the back of a player in a pocket in their SKINS GPS A400 compression top, and a heart rate monitor is attached. The system picks up every possible movement the player is making. It's a whole new paradigm in training people, because you can actually look at the game and what the individual is doing in the game. It's a hard sell for the game as it's changing people's habits, but in two or three years' time, every single person will be wearing one in a game.

FF: HOW HAS THE GPS SYSTEM CHANGED YOUR TRAINING METHODS?

PH: I used to do some speed training and some weights, beach running and then give them a stretch, recovery and get the supplements ready. Now I'm sitting at a desk and poring over a computer! You still need to do the basics, but now you've got this extra layer of information to work with, which I find fascinating. This, no doubt, is the way of the future; the way we'll be looking at conditioning and what you need in a game. The data allows us to see what players are doing while playing for their states, so when we get back together as a team we can work out what we need to do. The game data also gives us an outline on how to arrange the training to be specific for the game. Previously, you watched and did your best, but now we know exactly what's happening physically. In a team sport there are so many variables involved, so it's good to have information to make the training far more specific. ▶

To win two general admission tickets to the Qantas Wallabies vs Samoa game on 17 July 2011 at Sydney ANZ Stadium, email 50 words or less to editor@fitnessfirst.com.au before 6 June 2011, and tell us why you want to win this prize. Remember to include your delivery address. *Note: Prize includes admission tickets only. Travel expenses, transfers, and any additional expenses are the responsibility of the prizewinner.*

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'I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO THE WORLD CUP BUT THERE'S A LOT OF WORK TO DO BEFORE WE GET THERE. I TRY NOT TO GET TOO FAR AHEAD OF MYSELF. I PLAN FAR AHEAD BUT I DON'T LET MYSELF GET TOO FAR AHEAD.'

FF: DOES THIS PUT PRESSURE ON A PLAYER TO PERFORM?

PH: No, it tends to be the younger guys who have gotten in to it straight away, as they are interested in figures and technology. The older guys have habits, so on game-day you don't want to mess with people's habits!

FF: HOW HAVE THE TRAINING METHODS IN RUGBY UNION CHANGED OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS?

PH: It's been a natural progression. Strength and conditioning coaches are getting better at their job as they know more about rugby, so we're getting better prepared athletes from a much earlier age. The rules are engineered to make the game faster and keep the ball in play more often, so it's quite basic that people have to be bigger, stronger, more powerful and fitter these days. You have to be strong and fit just to get through a game! I don't think people have changed how they train, it's how they apply it.

FF: DESCRIBE AN AVERAGE TRAINING WEEK

PH: The average Wallaby would do about 18km to 21km of running a week, which includes two to three kilometres of sprinting. They do three to four weight sessions on top of that, where we cover core exercises; when I say 'core exercises' I actually mean what it is, I'm not talking abs, I'm talking about squats, bench presses – exercises that challenge the nervous system.

FF: WHAT DOES A TYPICAL TRAINING SESSION LOOK LIKE?

PH: I divide the players into their four positional groups. In a one-hour session we probably end up doing about 20 to 25 sets of proper multi-joint core exercises. Included are a few warm up sets, with three work sets in each. We also try to move everything fast. We don't go slow unless we have a specific slow strength day and we measure that speed with devices we put on the bar. During the weight sessions we do five exercises: squat, bench, chin, deadlift and powerclean. You're talking basic training that people have been doing for the last 50 or 60 years and getting results from. The guys need to be challenged all the time, so there's a lot of dumbbell training as well but it's still basic training. The type of session we do depends on where we are in the training cycle, and what game we've got coming up on the weekend. On the Thursday before we play we do an explosive session, of about 40 per cent maximum weight. We try to get three exercises going, such as squat, bench and snatch, and just go as fast as possible without technique breakdown.

FF: DO THE PLAYERS FOLLOW ANY SPECIFIC DIETS?

PH: One of my initiatives was to get a dietitian on board because it's a fundamental part of training. We're in hotels a lot, so we control the food as much as we can. If a person wants to go out and eat something different, they do it. That's an individual choice and it's up to their professionalism on how they handle it. The majority of the players know what they have to eat.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR RUGBY FANS

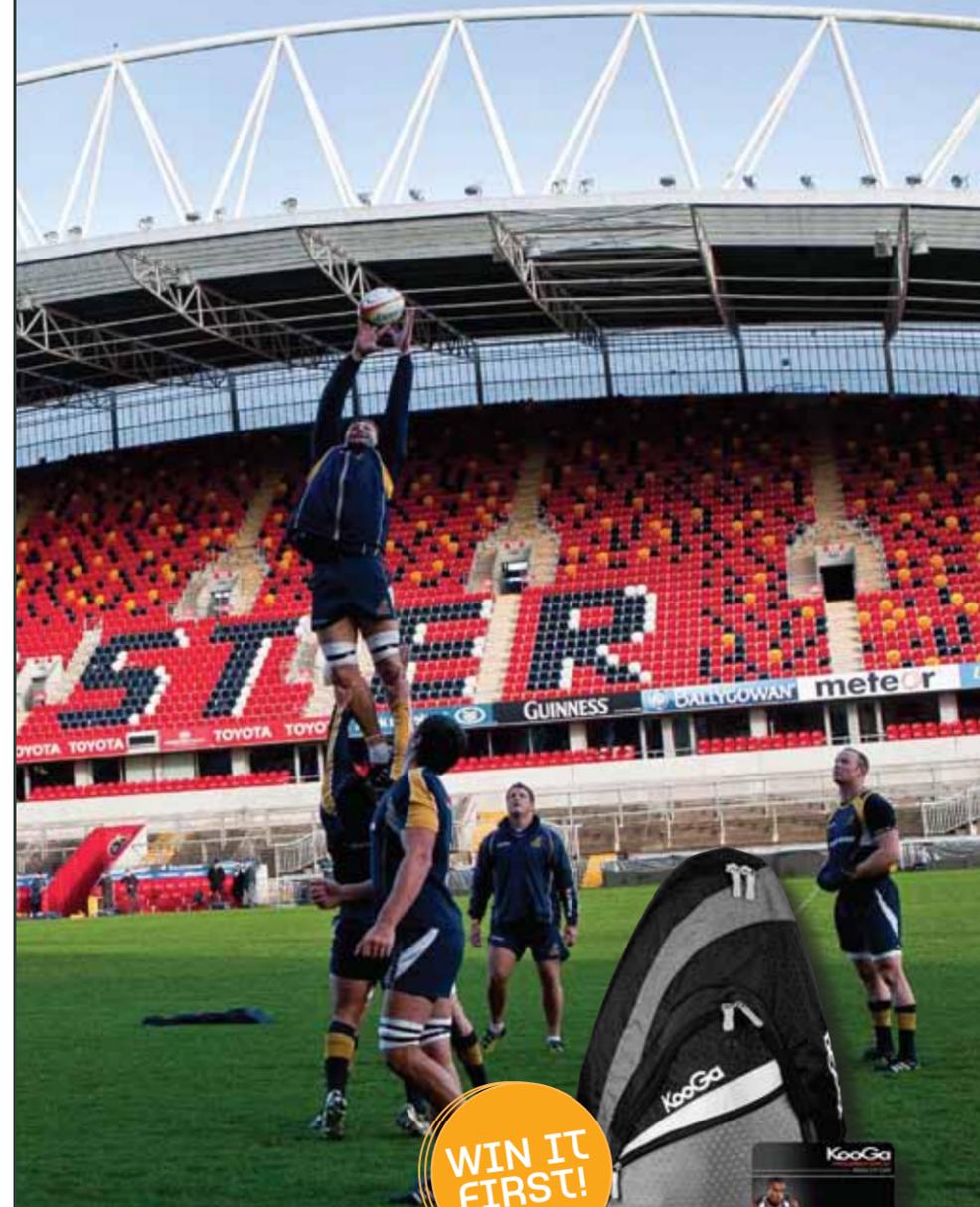
- ✦ The Qantas Wallabies' first match of the season kicks off against Samoa on 17 July at the ANZ Stadium in Sydney.
- ✦ The Tri Nations series of six Test Matches commences 23 July at ANZ Stadium Sydney against the Springboks.
- ✦ The first match of the Bledisloe Cup is on 6 August at Eden Park, Auckland.
- ✦ Rugby World Cup 2011 in New Zealand runs from 9 September until 23 October 2011.

FIND OUT MORE AT
WWW.RUGBY.COM.AU

THE LAST TEST MATCH before the Qantas Wallabies head off to New Zealand for the Rugby World Cup will be the second and final Bledisloe Cup game, against the All Blacks at Suncorp Stadium in Brisbane on 27 August. Tickets go on sale for the Bledisloe Cup Test Match on 19 July at 9am through www.ticketek.com.au or by phoning 132 849.

PETER HARDING'S TRAINING TIPS FOR STRENGTH

- ✦ Keep it basic.
- ✦ Use four core exercises: bench press, chin ups, squat, deadlift.
- ✦ Do abdominal exercises.



WIN IT FIRST!

FF: WHAT ADVICE CAN YOU GIVE SOMEONE WHO IS TRAINING FOR STRENGTH?

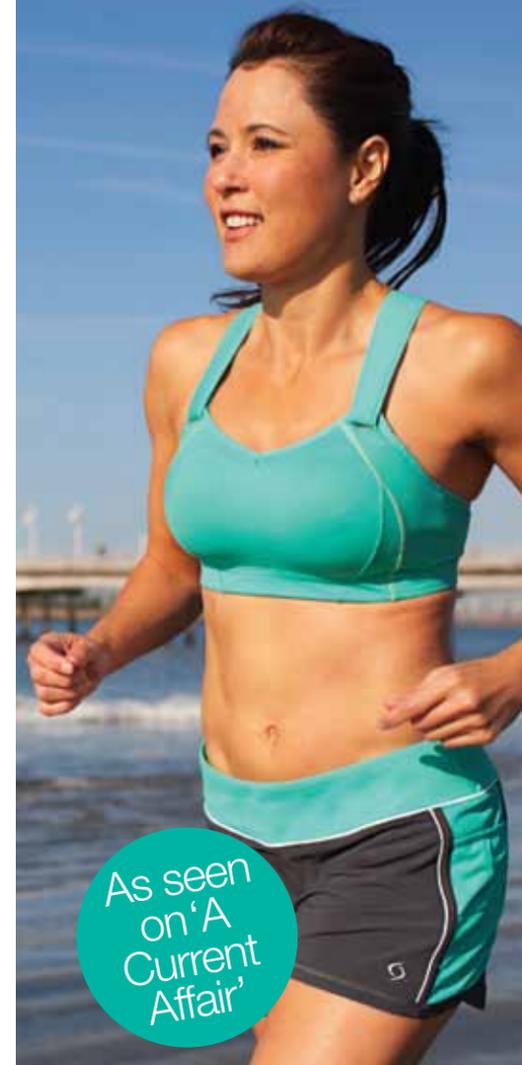
PH: Keep it basic! You could probably use about four exercises and a couple of little assistance exercises to get around it. Think of it this way; you've got to push so it's a bench or overhead press; you've got to pull something so preferably a chin up; you've got to squat if you can and you've got to squat well, so learn how to squat properly; and you've got to pull something up like a deadlift. Throw some abs in there, and if you want good arms do triceps and biceps. It doesn't matter what you are doing as long as you go hard. If you want to get big or change your body you have to lift weights. ■

WANNA GO TO THE RUGBY WORLD CUP? Easy done! Tickets are on sale right now at www.weloverugby.com

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