

Trusting the experience of the experienced athlete

Jermain Defoe

IMPORTANCE OF LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

When I was young I never used to go out, I never drunk, and I always had a good sleep. My Mum was strict with me and I always used to eat the right things leading up to games and stuff like that. As the years go on, you take these things to another level, and you understand your body a lot more. For me this isn't something that has started now, but some players get to a certain point of their career and think 'I have to start looking after myself' and maybe that's too late?

That is something they should be doing as soon as possible in their career. I mean now I literally do everything I can to help myself—Yoga, Pilates, I eat well, and I know how important sleep is too. You have to have a little bit of luck with injuries too, a lot of players I played with, from my generation, are not playing anymore. It's not easy to keep playing at the top level and it is a challenge to keep competing in your 30s in elite football.

CULTURE CHANGE AND POST-MATCH RECOVERY

The culture in sport is completely different to when I started. When I first started playing, after training everyone used to sit in a big hot bath and that was it. Now there are ice baths, hot and cold contrast which is important, cryochambers and swimming pools for recovery sessions, all these things that the players have now we didn't have growing up. We just didn't know about it. The sports science side of things has moved on so much! It's a completely different level.

I think cryotherapy is massive, especially after games. The game is so quick now, and you have to recover to be able to perform again. For me the hardest thing is to be consistent throughout the season. Putting in those 8–9/10 performances week after week, and it's all linked to your recovery. If you can recover and go again then that's the

most important thing. And I find that with cryotherapy it helps you get that recovery in.

DESIRE

I think it helps the younger players when they see a player in the squad that is coming to the back end of their career and is still fit. So instead of waiting until later in their careers to look after themselves, they can do it from day one. I think if they do that they can easily play into their late 30s, easily. I feel like now, the players are 'getting it' and understand it more, so they can play until later in their career.

Nutrition, Pilates, all these things are details but at the end of the day desire is the main reason why I'm still playing. You can do all of the things we've talked about but at the end of the day if you haven't got the desire then you're not really going to want to go out and perform. I love watching other sports and other great athletes too. One of my favourites is Floyd Mayweather and at the age of 40 he is still able to train at the level he's always trained at. To be able to still perform like that and make it look easy... it's all mindset.

IMPORTANCE OF PSYCHOLOGY

Being an athlete and playing at the top level, using psychologists is key. A lot of athletes in a lot of sports have tapped into psychologists, we've got one here at the club. We have a weekly presentation and I think it's important to help have a positive mindset. With the England squad things are different now, you have a lot of meetings and the manager will get a lot back from the players. Now players will talk more in meetings, some players don't like to and some hate it but a lot of others do like it. I think that doing these things and getting athletes out of their comfort zones is important. It's no different to a game really, you might get to the semi-final of a World Cup and then all of a sudden you have to take a penalty and millions of people all over the world will be watching. Working with a psychologist could play a major part in that by giving you a positive mindset before then.

IMPACT OF NUTRITION

With a nutritionist coming in and talking to the chefs and helping the chefs, that's huge. They communicate and he tells the chef what to put out on certain days, when you need to carb up, when you need more protein, stuff like that. That's completely different from earlier in my career, as a lot of players never really understood what they needed to eat going into games. Here at the club now it is spot on, with fish oils, vitamins, everything we get in our recovery shakes is what you need and is tailored for you.

I'm a pescatarian now too. A lot of people made a big deal about me still playing at this level and doing well and I always used to get asked what my secret is and what I do—it was a nice feeling! So I thought: 'what could I do to get to another level and get even fitter and keep playing?'. I started watching a lot of documentaries about food, my girlfriend Rachel is a vegan too. I wanted to see how I felt, and see if I've got more energy from leaving meat out. I love fish though! Instead of having fish all week, Rachael would make vegan meals at home. I didn't feel lethargic, I still felt like I was getting what I needed to perform every day in terms of protein. I adapted and now I understand food a lot more.

THREE BITS OF ADVICE FOR A CLINICIAN WORKING WITH THE EXPERIENCED ELITE ATHLETE

1. Trust the player. A lot of times in elite sport the Physio and Doctor may get pressured by the manager when players are injured. With an experienced player though, they will know their body more and it is important to trust the experience of the experienced player.¹
2. Make sure that everything you do is tailored and specific to what you need, including supplements and things like that. As you get older, your body changes and you need to look after it.
3. Rehab is so important in the Premier League now and you have to be a real athlete to cope with the demands. Players need to be patient and that's where the doctors and physios are so important to be strong and not rush the player back. You don't want to come back from injury and get another injury because as a player that is so frustrating, to have a stop start season. You can't get any rhythm and that's the worst thing for players.

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