

Proper Pre-Game *By Tim Bishop*

Tim Bishop is the former Baltimore Orioles Strength and Conditioning Coach.

Most people, including baseball players, think that simple stretching exercises provide a sufficient warm-up prior to a game or practice.

While stretching can – and should – be one component of a pre-game or pre-practice routine, it is probably not the most important. In fact, it may be the least important.



The ultimate goal of a warm-up, to raise the temperature of the body and specifically the muscles that will be used during the game or practice session, is much more important than performing stretching exercises.

Raising the temperature of the muscles allows them to be more pliable and to contract more effectively. This allows your muscles to perform more efficiently and should help reduce the chances of developing a muscle-related injury.

There are three stages of a proper pre-game or pre-practice warm-up.

1. General Warm-up

This can include a very light jog, jumping rope, riding a stationary bike, or any light activity that raises the heart rate and increases blood flow to the muscles.

2. Performing Functional Movements

The second phase of a proper warm-up is to perform functional movements.

These consist of multi-joint movements in which the muscles and joints are used in a manner similar to how they will be used later on in the game or practice.

Some examples of a functional warm-up might include body-weight squatting, lunging, lateral low walking, high-knee drills, shuffles, etc.

3. Sport-specific Phase

This is where you actually use movements from your specific sport or activity, performing them at a lesser intensity to “get loose.”

Examples of these types of drills would be batting and fielding practice, long toss, and running the bases.

A light stretch can be done following any of these phases, but only after the muscles are warmed up properly.

Athletes with flexibility issues should work on these areas during training sessions in the off-season and not necessarily during a pre-game or pre-practice warm-up. This time should be used to prepare the muscles for how they will be used during the ensuing game or practice, not to address deficiencies that a player might have.

A team warm-up is also a good way to create good habits athletes can fall back on for any sporting activity they will participate in throughout their lives. It also promotes interaction between the players, serves as a time to focus on the upcoming game or practice and provides an opportunity for a coach to address the team about the practice plan for the day or the day’s opponent.

The most important point to take away from this article is to avoid confusing a proper warm-up with stretching. While they can be used in conjunction with one another, in reality they serve two completely different purposes and should be viewed that way.