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NFL Training Camp – Is It Too Long?

By Jay Nault

The demands on NFL teams have grown exponentially over the past couple of decades. It wasn't too long ago that many NFL players, even starters, felt the need to get or hold a "regular" job during the offseason, and used the time spent in training camp to get into playing shape for the regular season. It also used to be that teams played up to six preseason games as opposed to the current four or maybe five exhibitions.

Boy, how times have changed. The NFL has transformed into what is now nearly a year-round, full-time job for players, coaches, staff members and management. The degree of specialization and detail accounted for is simply stunning. For instance, relatively new developments include:

Minicamps

The "minicamp" is much more than a few players on a team gathering during the offseason to jog around in shorts and play a few games of flag football. Teams with returning head coaches have two minicamps per offseason, usually held just after the draft and in May or June in order to build a foundation for training camp in July. Teams with new head coaches have three minicamps, and for many teams, these gatherings are spent installing the new offensive, defensive and/or special teams' schemes.

Practices are run like many in the regular season, in that the pace is fast, the schedule is meticulous and the standards are high. Even though it's technically against league rules to either have too many offseason sessions or to have contact present in any drills, coaches are constantly pushing the envelope, and it seems that every year there are complaints made both internally and to the NFLPA regarding some of these tactics. Regardless of one's perspective, all would agree that these minicamps are far more demanding than a game of flag football.

OTA's

OTA's, or Organized Team Activities, are also held by every team, usually between minicamps. These are generally seen as less structured, more relaxed training sessions, although once again, many

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players would disagree. They are also technically voluntary, although that may be nothing more than a term of art either, as players around the league can and have lost their starting jobs for failing to attend these "voluntary" sessions.

Personal Offseason Training

At this point, the few players who don't spend any time in the offseason training are generally out of work by the time the regular season starts. Every training camp starts with team fitness tests, and fines and being waived are potential consequences if those tests aren't passed.

As a result, nearly every player has a regiment that can include weight training, running, plyometrics, yoga, system cleansing, or any combination of these disciplines. This doesn't even take into account all the players who need to spend hours per day rehabbing from injuries.

What all this means is that (a) you need to train and stay focused all year long to keep your place on the team and (b) players and coaches are busy all year long. Therefore, why does training camp need to last at least six weeks?

Training camp is useful for team chemistry and to get players battle tested for the long season. However, four or five preseason games make almost everyone associated with the game unhappy. Players despise the long preseason because every practice and ultimately meaningless preseason game only exposes them to injury. The list of star players lost for the year during training camp is too long to detail here. Fans don't like having to spend money on preseason tickets or watch games that will be forgotten in a matter of weeks.

With all the offseason work put in by teams, perhaps a wiser decision would be to shorten training camp to one month and two exhibition games. Players would be fresher to start the season and would generally finish stronger. Fans wouldn't be forced to buy as many preseason games as part of their season ticket package, and television networks wouldn't have to tease the public with exciting game promotions for contests that are completely uninteresting by halftime.

Overall, the product on the field would be better, as there would be fewer injuries and a higher degree of anticipation for the "real" games to start. It's time the NFL recognized the year-round obligation of its members and protected their biggest assets.

Written by Jay Nault sponsored by

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Choosing the Right Camp For Your Kid

By L. C. Peterson

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Camps have long been a rite of passage for children. It's never too early to research productive and fun activities for our kids. These explorations help develop confidence in our children.

Here is a Top 10 checklist to get started. Find answers to these questions by writing, calling, visiting the camps, seeking referrals, or surfing the camp's website.

1. Director: Does the director seem to care about and understand kids? What are his or her qualifications and experience?
2. Staff: Does the camp have enough staff members to back up the counselors? What are the staff and instructors' qualifications? Do they support the objectives of the camp? Can the teachers relate to the students? What training occurs for staff and counselors before the camp opens? How long is the training period? Are there pre-camp training opportunities for staff and counselors during the year?
3. Counselors: What is the camper to counselor ratio? How old are the counselors? Are there any special qualifications required to work at the camp? Does the camp have a junior counselor or counselor-in-training program?
4. Objectives: What are the objectives of the camp? Are the objectives carried out in the activities of the camp?
5. Flexibility: Are the camp's programs flexible? If your child has already had a particular course or activity, is it possible for him or her to attend an alternate activity?
6. Balance: Does the camp allow for a balance between learning and fun? How is the camp structured for the hours after classes or activities?

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7. References: Do campers who have been there before recommend the camp? How about parents of campers who have been there? What do they say?

8. Resources: Does the camp have a nurse, EMT, or doctor on-call? Are emergency procedures taught to counselors and staff?

9. Orientation; Do the campers get a chance to know each other and their counselors a little before the camp moves into full swing?

10. Accreditation: Is the camp accredited by the American Camping Association or another camping association?

L. C. Peterson is a freelance writer and web marketing consultant. More writer's tips are at <http://www.salesandtales.com> and <http://www.lcpeterson.com>.



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