

[Guest Editorial]

Tips for Transitioning To and From International Soccer Camps

Every year, as elite soccer seasons roll on, National Federations face a familiar challenge: managing players through the demanding transitions between club and national team duties.⁶ These transitions are more than logistical nightmares; they require careful consideration of recovery, player wellness, and performance, especially when long-distance travel and intense match schedules come into play. Eastward travel, in particular, complicates matters, often leading to poor sleep, jet lag, and reduced performance within the first 72 hours of arrival.⁸ Although clubs benefit from continuous player monitoring,¹⁰ national teams often have limited time with their players. This lack of regular interaction adds another layer of complexity when preparing for competitions. In this editorial, we aim to offer practical solutions to help clubs and national teams navigate these challenges more effectively, ensuring smoother transitions for players, and reducing the risks of injury and performance issues (Figure 1).

Players at the Club

Tip 1. Invest in Strategies to Build Trust

Players spend most of their time with their clubs, making communication essential before transitioning to national team camps. Trust, both internally with players and externally with staff (e.g., team staff or personal trainers), is key to success.¹³ It isn't built overnight. The trust equation defines trust as the sum of credibility, reliability, and intimacy, divided by self-orientation.¹³ Credibility reflects staff competency, reliability relates to delivering consistent performance support, and intimacy involves safety and security experienced when entrusting someone with something important. However, high self-orientation lowers trust, so building strategies such as club visits, knowledge exchange, and shared experiences is crucial for setting expectations and standards.

Tip 2. Develop a Good Data Infrastructure

The sports industry is experiencing rapid growth in resources, professionalism, and data generation.¹⁶ Practitioners must now integrate data, technology, and machinery to improve performance.¹⁶ Establishing a data infrastructure within performance departments or organizations is essential for optimizing data access, sharing, privacy, and decision-making. National teams should curate players' data throughout their careers, as they remain the constant in a player's professional life. Sharing this data with clubs during transfers can help onboard players more efficiently. To build such infrastructure, consulting a data engineer with experience in large multinational organizations is recommended, as existing processes can often be adapted without needing to reinvent the wheel.¹⁶

Tip 3. Player Monitoring

Sports science and medical staff use various tools to track players' daily external and internal load, whether the players are tolerating the workload, and overall readiness for training and competition.¹⁰ Although workload is the primary factor manipulated by coaches to achieve desired outcomes, understanding activities off the field (outside the club) is valuable. Wearables, such as activity sensors or sleep monitors,⁷ can provide insights into players' wellbeing, while respecting privacy. These data become even more important during transition periods, such as the weeks leading up to national team camps. Collaboration with clubs is essential to ensure players are exposed to training loads that align with national team demands.

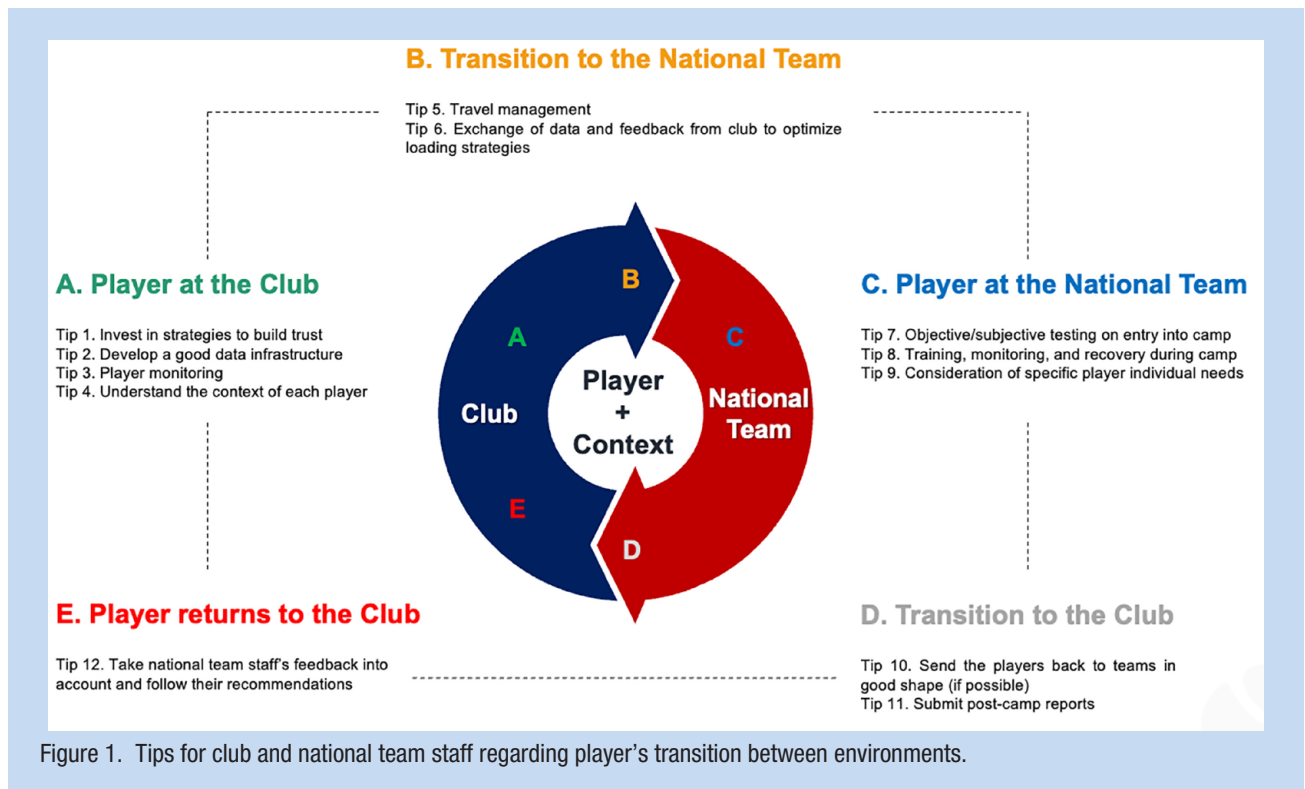
Tip 4. Understand the Context of Each Player

Top players for national teams come from different leagues, each with unique demands and schedules.^{1,5,11,14,15,17} National team staff

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must understand differences in playing style, position, and environmental factors to ensure smooth transitions.¹² Conversations with players and their support staff help align any specific guidelines, activation protocols, or strength training programs during camp. This reduces uncertainty in decision-making.

Transition to the National Team

Tip 5. Travel Management

Jet lag and fatigue can negatively impact physical performance and athlete wellbeing.^{4,8,9} Understanding the travel volume and nature of travel undertaken by national team players is key to optimizing schedules and mitigating travel-related impacts. Travel demands, especially for players located far from national team camps, such as those flying from Europe to the US and vice versa, can significantly affect preparation. National team staff should plan optimal travel conditions.⁶ Selecting a comfortable seat (e.g., business class), giving preference to travel in charter flights, reducing the number of stopovers, finding the optimal flight times, providing the players with personalized trip plans, supplement packs, blue light filtering glasses, and other commercially available devices that stimulate blood circulation and prevent jet lag are highly recommended travel management strategies.

Tip 6. Exchange of Data and Feedback From Club to Optimize Loading Strategies

To manage a player's training during an international camp, 3 key strategies can be used: collecting 4 to 6 weeks of club training load data, using a camp training load planning and

prediction tool, and a load optimizing tool. National team staff work in direct collaboration with club performance staff. Clubs share 4 to 6 weeks of recent training load data through a secure exchange, allowing the national team to process it into player-specific thresholds and fill any missing data using algorithms that estimate weekly training patterns.

In turn, the national team staff can share predicted training loads based on historical drills from international camps, outlining what a player would undertake if participating in all sessions and games. By combining club data and these predicted loads, calculations using principles of training, overload, and recovery can be performed to optimize player management. These calculations include some of the following: acute:chronic workload ratios, percentages of the hardest single previous day, percentages of the hardest multiple day sums relative to the current multiday sums, z-score calculations, and others. While no single metric provides a complete view of an athlete, this system allows for multiple perspectives to assess their 'training tolerance' for the upcoming camp. In cases where club demands differ significantly from national team needs, special programs may be required to ensure players are in optimal condition (e.g., playing qualification games during club preseason or having limited club minutes but facing a high match density with the national team).

Players at the National Team Camp

Tip 7. Objective/Subjective Testing on Entry Into Camp

Based on game schedules, performance testing (e.g., submaximal endurance test, countermovement jump, hip

abduction/adduction strength test, or hamstring strength test) is typically done on the second or third day of camp. In addition, medical personnel should have a checkpoint with the athlete the moment they arrive at camp. It should be noted that any data collection performed on the day of arrival into camp or the day immediately after travel may be influenced significantly by the travel experience.

Tip 8. Training, Monitoring, and Recovery During Camp

Daily morning screenings (e.g., questionnaires, fatigue tests, hydration tests) provide insight into the players' readiness to train and/or play. Then, target loads are calculated for each training/game. Real-time load monitoring should occur at training to ensure players are not deviating significantly from their target loads. Differences in training and match exposure between clubs and national teams highlight the need for load monitoring during transitions.² Recovery recommendations should be based on response to a given load. Daily monitoring data must be shared with club staff. Modifications (i.e., neutral/target player, sitting out a repetition, changing dimensions/time) can occur if there is any concern with specific players.

Tip 9. Consideration of Specific Player Individual Needs

Players may have specific injury prevention plans, strength training programs, or pre-session activation protocols, which are part of their daily routines performed in their local/club environment with physiotherapists or strength coaches.³ National team staff should understand that this might need to be continued during international duty as these individual plans might be linked to the player's injury history or profile.³ In addition, special attention to nutritional strategies are important to understand if any dietary habits and restrictions are in place. Again, communication is key when taking these considerations into account.

Transition to the Club

Tip 10. Send Players Back to Teams in Good Shape

Top-ups/postgame training can be completed after the last match of a cycle to give players with lower training or game loads a stimulus before heading back to their club environment. In this regard, practitioners are encouraged to look at the players' postcamp calendar to determine the appropriate stimulus to ensure they are in an advantageous position to play in their club's match in a few days' time. In addition, similar to entry into camp, this tip includes anything related to travel management (Tip 5) to ensure the player returns to the club environment in a healthy state.

Tip 11. Submit Postcamp Reports

Communication and data sharing continues after camp. Performance and medical reports should be shared as soon as the camp is over (<24-48 hours depending on the last game and clubs' schedule). Performance reports should include game minutes, physical workload, and daily monitoring data. Medical

reports should cover player availability, treatment history, medication, and injuries. These reports should also add postcamp activity recommendations with special focus on the first few days following camp (e.g., day 1, rest; day 2, regeneration; day 3, re-entry session with light work; day 4, full training/match).

Player Returns to Club

Tip 12. Take National Team Staff Recommendations Into Account

Once players return to their club, they have to adapt to another (new) environment and the club needs to have as much information as possible regarding the players' readiness to train. Since the national team should have sent a postcamp report with postcamp activity recommendations, club staff are encouraged to follow the recommendations of the national team. If these recommendations are not feasible, having a discussion internally involving both parties (national team and club staff) would be the ideal scenario to make a decision about how to proceed with the player returning to the club setting.

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