

Precision Nutrition
Off-Season
Training For
Athletes

Eric Cressey

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Program Considerations	5
Program Details	6
Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 1: Warm-Up	7
Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 1: Strength and Speed Training.....	8
Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 2: Warm-Up	10
Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 2: Strength and Speed Training.....	11
Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 3: Warm-Up	13
Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 3: Strength and Speed Training.....	14
About Eric Cressey	17

Off-Season Training for Athletes Designed by Eric Cressey

Introduction

Ask any elite athlete or successful coach, and they will tell you that we are at an exciting, unparalleled point in the history of sports performance. Athletes can no longer expect to be successful based on talent alone.

Major League Baseball will never see another Mickey Mantle devastate the record books, only to become as big a name at the local bar scene every night. The National Hockey League will never have another Wayne Gretzky because of the more physical nature of the modern game. Tennis has rapidly seen the disappearance of the technically-superior serve-and-volley players like Stefan Edberg and John McEnroe as more powerful baseline players and huge servers have taken over the sport. Monsters like Shaq and Amare Stoudemire predominate in the National Basketball Association; finesse players like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Kevin McHale, and George Gervin are nowhere to be found. And, the speed at which professional football is now played is nothing short of incredible; just being smart on the field won't cut it. You've got to be fast, strong, agile, mobile, durable, and metabolically conditioned.

Strength and conditioning has literally revolutionized sports – and this isn't just confined to the professional ranks. In fact, it's even *more* pronounced at the collegiate and youth levels where athletes don't have as much talent to "make up the difference" when they're less physically prepared than their opponents.

It's safe to assume that we aren't going to see any miraculous coaching revolution that takes athletes' technical proficiency to all new levels. As such, it's safe to assume that the fastest way to effect favorable changes in an athletes' performance is to physically prepare them more for the challenges they face on the field, court, ice, track, and in the ring.

Anyone who has been an athlete knows that the in-season period will never be an ideal time to really enhance performance. Competition takes a huge toll on athletes both physically and mentally, so training will always take a back seat to performing at these times of year. Therefore, it should go without saying that the off-season is of paramount importance to building the elite athlete; if one doesn't make use of this critical time period, he or she will automatically be behind the eight ball going in to the subsequent season.

Outlining the entire "who, what, when, where, why, and how" of the off-season is a book in itself – which is why I wrote one! For a detailed description of how to effectively program in the off-season, check my [The](#)

[Ultimate Off-Season Training Manual](#), a resource that includes several self-assessments, instructions on planning your training year, regeneration strategies, sample programs for different types of athletes,

With that said, though, the 12-week program that follows represents the middle of the bell curve; that is, the majority of you will see fantastic gains – even if they aren't optimal. Some folks will need more reactive training, while others will need more of a maximal strength emphasis. But for many of you, this program will get the job done better than what you're currently doing, that's for sure.

Program Considerations

Before we get to the meat and potatoes of this off-season training program, I think it's important to go over a few things.

1. The best training program in the world won't do a bit of good if you do not place tremendous importance on your nutrition and lifestyle habits. John Berardi's Precision Nutrition System provides you with some fantastic resources on both these fronts; if you follow his recommendations, you'll be in a good position to really reap the benefits of this program.
2. This program is not for beginners; many of the loading parameters are far too advanced for someone who is just starting out. If you're a beginner, check out my article, [Smart from the Start](#). If you follow the guidelines in this article, you'll be ready for advanced programming before you know it.
3. You'll need to have access to a fully equipped gym to perform this training program. I've made sure that the exercise selection can be accommodated by what you'll find in a typical gym, but you simply can't expect to see results if you only have dumbbells up to 15 pounds and a jump rope. If you train at home and have a pretty solid set-up (power rack and Olympic weight-set), you should be in good standing. And keep in mind, if you're at all confused, the folks on the Precision Nutrition forum will help you out with finding substitute exercises should you need them.
4. This program is not intended for someone with an existing injury. One of the inherent problems with pre-designed templates is that the lifter is fit to the template and not vice versa. Be smart; don't do an exercise if you have any doubts about it being safe for YOU.
5. Remember that exercise programming doesn't mean a thing without exercise technique. Never sacrifice form for more weight, and if you aren't sure about how an exercise is performed. Again, ask the folks on the Precision Nutrition forums for clarification.

Program Details

1. This program will last 12 weeks and be divided into three 4-week phases. You'll lift weights four days per week and supplement this training with anywhere from 2-5 metabolic conditioning sessions.
2. Phase 1 will be Stage 1 of the general off-season phase. It should be preceded by a short early off-season period where you recuperate from your competitive season. You should be ready to kick the door down to the weight room by the time the early off-season ends, so if you're dragging, chances are that you need to take it easy with your training for a bit longer. The primary emphases in Phase 1 are improving maximal strength, explosive strength, and strength-speed. Little emphasis will be placed on metabolic conditioning.
3. Phase 2 will be Stage 2 of the general off-season phase. In Phase 2, you will start to incorporate some of the maximal strength and strength-speed you've built into movement training with complete rest periods, and you'll also introduce more speed-strength training. Still, metabolic conditioning will be de-emphasized, although you'll be doing more movement training than in the previous phase.
4. Phase 3 will be the late off-season phase. In this phase, you'll emphasize metabolic conditioning more and integrate the general physical abilities you've developed into your chosen sport more frequently. It should immediately precede the preseason phase for the subsequent season.
5. Please keep in mind that Phases 1 and 2 will usually be longer than one-month in a typical athlete's training year; they are each limited to one-month here to accommodate the 12-week template. If you have a longer off-season, I would recommend extending Phases 1 and 2 considerably (albeit with different programming) while keeping Phase 3 relatively constant. And if you're looking for more sample templates, check out my [The Ultimate Off-Season Training Manual](#) here.
6. The mobility and activation work and the foam rolling are without a doubt of paramount importance to the success of this program. It's extremely important to address both soft tissue *length* and *quality*. The vast majority of the mobility and activation drills we outline can be found on my [Magnificent Mobility DVD](#). For more information on how to foam roll and where to purchase a roller, check out my article: [Feel Better for \\$10](#). You can also learn more about the interaction of soft tissue work, mobility training, and classic static stretches by reading my article: [The Joint Health Checklist](#).

Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 1: Warm-Up (4 weeks)

Phase 1: Lower Body Days		Phase 1: Upper Body Days	
<i>Foam Rolling:</i>		<i>Foam Rolling:</i>	
-IT Band/Tensor Fasciae Latae		-IT Band/Tensor Fasciae Latae	
-Quads		-Quads	
-Hip Flexors		-Hip Flexors	
-Hamstrings		-Hamstrings	
-Adductors		-Adductors	
-Thoracic Extension		-Thoracic Extension	
-Calves (w/tennis ball)		-Calves (w/tennis ball)	
-Peroneals (w/tennis ball)		-Peroneals (w/tennis ball)	
Kneeling Rectus Femoris Stretch	15s/side	Kneeling Rectus Femoris Stretch	15s/side
Seated 90/90 Stretch	15s/side	Seated 90/90 Stretch	15s/side
Supine Bridge	1x12	Supine Bridge	1x12
Birddog	8/side	X-band Walk	12/side
Calf Mobilization	8/side	Side-to-Side Leg Swing	10/side
Hip Correction	12/side	Anterior-Posterior Leg Swing	10/side
Pull-Back Butt Kick	5/side	Walking Spiderman	5/side
Cradle Walk	5/side	Reverse Lunge w/Twist	5/side
Squat-to-Stand	1x8	Levator Scapulae/Upper Trap Stretch	15s/side
Alternating Lateral Lunge Walk	5/side	Scap Pushup	1x15
Overhead Lunge Walk	5/side	Overhead Broomstick Dislocation	1x10

Off-Season Training For Athletes

Phase 1: Strength and Speed Training (4 weeks)

	Week 1 High	Week 2 Medium	Week 3 Very High	Week 4 Low
Sunday: Regeneration or Complete Rest, no scrimmaging				
Monday: Lower Body				
Box Jumps	4x6	4x5	5x6	3x5
A) Snatch Grip Deadlift (Wks. 1, 2), Front Squat (Wks. 3,4)	3,3,3,5,5	3x1, 2x3	3,3,3,5,5,5	3x3 (easy)
B) DB Reverse Lunge - Front Foot Elevated 4"	7,7,10/side	7,7,10/side	7,7,7,10/side	2x7/side (easy)
C1) Pull-Throughs	3x12	3x12	4x12	2x12
C2) Pallof Presses	3x10/side	3x10/side	3x10/side	3x10/side
D) Plate Pinches	3x30s	3x30s	3x30s	2x30s
Tuesday: Regeneration and/or skill work, no scrimmaging				
Wednesday: Upper Body				
Split-Stance Altitude Landings	4x6/side	4x6/side	5x6/side	OMIT
A) Steep Incline Press (Wks. 1,2), Thick Bar Bench Press (Wks. 3,4)	3,3,3,5,5	3x1, 2x3	3,3,3,5,5,5	3x3 (easy)
B1) DB Floor Press	7,7,7,10	7,7,10	7,7,7,10	2x7 (easy)
B2) One-Arm DB Rows	7,7,7,10	7,7,10	7,7,7,10	3x7 (easy)
C1) Prone Trap Raises	3x12	3x12	3x12	3x12
C2) Scap Pushups	3x15	3x15	3x15	3x15
D) Side Bridges	3x30s/side	3x30s/side	3x30s/side	3x30s/side

Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 1: Strength and Speed Training (continued)

Thursday: Skill work and light scrimmaging or 20-set LIGHT corrective exercise circuit as per guidelines in Cardio Confusion article				
Friday: Lower Body				
Single-Leg Reflexive Ankle Jumps	3x10/side	3x10/side	4x10/side	OMIT
A) Box Squat	8x2@50% 1RM	6x2@55%	10x2@60%	4x2@45%, 2x1 over 90%
B1) Stiff-legged Deadlift	4x6	3x6	5x6	3x5
B2) Doorway Pec Stretches	3x15s/side	3x15s/side	3x15s/side	3x15s/side
C1) Cressey Split Squats	3x30s/side	3x30s/side	3x30s/side	3x30s/side
C2) Reverse Crunches	3x12s/side	3x30s/side	3x30s/side	3x30s/side
D) Suitcase Deadlifts	3x8/side	3x8/side	3x8/side	2x8/side
Saturday: Upper Body				
A) Speed Bench Press - Pause on Chest	8x2@50% 1RM	6x2@55%	10x2@60%	4x2@45%, then 1RM bench test
B1) Close-Grip Bench Press	4x6	3x6	5x6	3x5
B2) (Weighted) Neutral Grip Pull-up	4x6	3x6	5x6	3x5
C1) Medium, Pronated Grip Seated Cable Row	3x12	3x12	4x12	3x12
C2) Kneeling Cable Scarecrows	3x12	3x12	4x12	3x12
*Light skill work/scrimmaging separate from session is okay.				

Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 2: Warm-Up (4 weeks)

Phase 2: Lower Body Days		Phase 2: Upper Body Days	
<i>Foam Rolling:</i>		<i>Foam Rolling:</i>	
-IT Band/Tensor Fasciae Latae		-IT Band/Tensor Fasciae Latae	
-Quads		-Quads	
-Hip Flexors		-Hip Flexors	
-Hamstrings		-Hamstrings	
-Adductors		-Adductors	
-Thoracic Extension		-Thoracic Extension	
-Calves (w/tennis ball)		-Calves (w/tennis ball)	
-Peroneals (w/tennis ball)		-Peroneals (w/tennis ball)	
Kneeling Rectus Femoris Stretch	15s/side	Kneeling Rectus Femoris Stretch	15s/side
Seated 90/90 Stretch	15s/side	Seated 90/90 Stretch	15s/side
Supine Bridge	1x12	Supine Bridge	1x12
Birddog	8/side	X-band Walk	12/side
Calf Mobilization	8/side	Supine Leg-Whip	8/side
Mini-Band Reverse Monster Walk	12/side	Anterior-Posterior Leg Swing	10/side
Pull-Back Butt Kick	5/side	Walking Spiderman	5/side
Cradle Walk	5/side	Overhead Cross-Behind Lunge	5/side
Broomstick Overhead Squat	1x8	Levator Scapulae/Upper Trap Stretch	15s/side
Toy Soldiers	5/side	Scap Pushup-Scap Pullup	10 each
Windmills	8/side	Behind-the-Neck Band Pulldown	1x10

Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 2: Strength and Speed Training (4 weeks)

	Week 1 High	Week 2 Medium	Week 3 Very High	Week 4 Low
Sunday: Regeneration or Complete Rest, no scrimmaging				
Monday: Lower Body				
5-10-5 Drill: Sprints only, 40s rest intervals	4/direction	4/direction	5/direction	OMIT
A) Safety Squat Bar Box Squats (Wks. 1, 2) Trap Bar Deadlifts (Wks. 3,4)	6x2	6 singles over 90%	4 singles >90%, then 2x3	3x2 (w/4RM load)
B) High Pulls from the Floor	6x3, 35%	6x3, 40%	6x3, 45%	OMIT
C1) Barbell Step- ups	3x8	3x8	4x8	3x8
D1) Bar Rollouts	3x10	3x10	3x10	3x10
D2) Glute- Emphasis Back Extensions	3x10	3x10	3x10	2x10
Tuesday: 15-set LIGHT corrective exercise circuit as per guidelines in Cardio Confusion article, then 6x70m Tempo runs at 75% effort, focusing on running mechanics: walk back to start (full recovery).				
Wednesday: Upper Body				
Bounce Drop Jumps from 12" step to High Box	4x5	3x5	5x5	OMIT
A) Incline Press (Wks. 1,2) Pull-up (Weeks 3,4)	6x2	6 singles over 90%	6x3	3x2 (w/4RM load)
B1) One-Arm DB Push Press	3x8	3x8	4x8	3x8

**Off-Season Training For Athletes
Phase 2: Strength and Speed Training (continued)**

	Week 1 High	Week 2 Medium	Week 3 Very High	Week 4 Low
B2) Chest Supported Row - Pronated Grip	3x8	3x8	4x8	3x8
C1) Lever Bar Rotations	3x10/direction /arm	3x8/direction /arm	4x8/direction /arm	2x6/direction /arm
C2) Scap Pushups - Hands on Dyna-Disc or Airex pad (or other unstable surface)	3x15	3x15	3x15	3x15
Thursday: Regeneration and/or skill work, no scrimmaging				
Friday: Lower Body				
Extended Warm-up: Anterolateral Bounding	4x6/side	4x6/side	4x6/side	Test V-Jump and Bounce Drop Jump
10m Sprints, 30s rest intervals	3-point start x 6 Backpedals x 6	3-point start x 5 Backpedals x 5	3-point start x 8 Backpedals x 8	OMIT
A) Reactive Squats	6x3,38%	6x3,41%	6x3,44%	OMIT
B) Front Squats (deep)	4x5	3x5	5x5	3x4
C1) DB Walking Lunges	5,5,8/side	5,5,8/side	5,5,8,8/side	2x5/side
C2) Dragon Flags	3x12	3x12	3x12	3x12
Saturday: Upper Body				
A) Kneeling Overhead Med Ball Stomp	4x6, 5kg	4x6, 6kg	4x6,7kg	Omit
B1) Close Grip Bench Press	4x5	3x5	5x5	3x4
B2) Close-Grip Chin-ups	4x5	3x5	5x5	3x4
C1) Thick Handle Neutral Grip Seated Cable Row	3x10	3x10	4x10	2x10
C2) Side-lying External Rotation	3x12	3x12	3x12	3x12
*Light skill work/scrimmaging separate from session is okay.				

Off-Season Training For Athletes Phase 3: Warm-Up (4 weeks)

Phase 3: Lower Body Days		Phase 3: Upper Body Days	
-IT Band/Tensor Fasciae Latae		-IT Band/Tensor Fasciae Latae	
-Quads		-Quads	
-Hip Flexors		-Hip Flexors	
-Hamstrings		-Hamstrings	
-Adductors		-Adductors	
-Thoracic Extension		-Thoracic Extension	
-Calves (w/tennis ball)		-Calves (w/tennis ball)	
-Peroneals (w/tennis ball)		-Peroneals (w/tennis ball)	15s/side
Kneeling Rectus Femoris Stretch	15s/side	Kneeling Rectus Femoris Stretch	15s/side
Seated 90/90 Stretch	15s/side	Seated 90/90 Stretch	
Supine Bridge	1x12	Single-Leg Supine Bridge	8/side
Birddog	8/side	X-band Walk	12/side
Calf Mobilization	8/side	<i>Hurdle Drills (don't hike the hips!!)</i>	
Fire Hydrants	8/side	Duck Under	5/side
Pull-Back Butt Kick	5/side	Lateral Step-over	5/side
Clock Rotational Lunge Series	3/direction	Under-Over	5/side
Deep Wideout Drop	1x8	Anterior-Posterior Step-over	5/side
One-leg SLDL Walk	5/side	Hurdle Duck Under to Warrior Lunge	5/side
High Knee Skips	5/side	Band Pullapart	1x10
		Supine DB Protraction	1x15

Off-Season Training For Athletes
Phase 3: Strength and Speed Training (4 weeks)

	Week 1 High	Week 2 Medium	Week 3 Very High	Week 4 Low
Sunday: Regeneration or Complete Rest, no scrimmaging				
Monday AM: Lower Body				
A) Front Box Squats (Wks. 1, 2) Conventional Deadlifts (Wks. 3,4)	7 singles over 90%	5 singles over 90%	3 singles over 90%, then 3x2x3	3x3 (5RM load)
B) Speed Deadlifts	8x1,55%	8x1,60%	10x1,65%	2x1,55% 2x1,65% 2x1,75%
C) Barbell Reverse Lunge - Front Squat Grip	3x6/side	2x6/side	3x6/side	2x6/side
D) Low-to-High Cable Woodchops	3x10/side	2x10/side	3x10/side	2x10/side
Monday PM: Movement Training				
5-10-5 Drill				
-All sprints	5/direction, 30s rest	5/direction, 25s rest	6/direction, 25s rest	3/direction, 20s rest
-Sprint-Side-shuffle-Sprint	5/direction, 30s rest	5/direction, 25s rest	6/direction, 25s rest	3/direction, 20s rest
-Sprint-Backpedal-Sprint	5/direction, 30s rest	5/direction, 25s rest	6/direction, 25s rest	3/direction, 20s rest
Tuesday: Skill work, light scrimmaging				
Wednesday AM: Upper Body				
A) 2-Board Press (Wks. 1,2) Reverse Band Press (Weeks 3,4)	7 singles over 90%	5 singles over 90%	3 singles over 90%, then 3x2x3	3x3 (5RM load)
B1) Towel Chins	3x6/side	3x6/side	3x6/side	2x6/side
B2) Alternating Low Incline DB Press	3x6/side	3x6/side	3x6/side	2x6/side

Off-Season Training For Athletes
Phase 3: Strength and Speed Training (continued)

	Week 1 High	Week 2 Medium	Week 3 Very High	Week 4 Low
C1) Face Pulls	3x12	3x12	3x12	3x12
C2) Seated DB Cleans	3x10	3x10	3x10	3x10
Wednesday PM: Movement Training				
Power Skips for Distance	3x25 yards	3x25 yards	4x25 yards	OMIT
Broad Jumps (fast repeats - minimize ground contact time)	4x5	4x5	5x5	OMIT
10-yard sprint, 3-point start	6 sets 25s rest	6 sets 20s rest	8 sets 15s rest	5 sets 20s rest
20-yard backpedals, standing start	5 sets 25s rest	5 sets 20s rest	6 sets 15s rest	4 sets 20s rest
Thursday: 15-set LIGHT corrective exercise circuit as per guidelines in Cardio Confusion article, Optional Pool Recovery Work				
Friday: Lower Body				
				Test Vertical Jump
Reflexive Ankle Jumps	3x20	3x20	4x20	OMIT
Acceleration Runs	4 sets 50 yards to 75%	3 sets 50 yards to 80%	5 sets 60 yards to 80%	Timed Pro Agility and 40-yard dash
A) Box Squats vs. Light Bands	8x2,45%	6x2,50%	8x2,55%	No bands: 4x2, 45%, then 2x2 heavy
B) Snatch Grip Deadlifts	3x4	3x3	4x4	2x3
C1) Pistol Squats	3x10/side	2x10/side	3x10/side	2x10/side
C2) Farmer's Hold	3x30s	2x30s	3x30s	2x30s

Off-Season Training For Athletes
Phase 3: Strength and Speed Training (continued)

	Week 1 High	Week 2 Medium	Week 3 Very High	Week 4 Low
Saturday: Upper Body				
A) Bench Press vs. Mini-bands	8x2,45%	6x2,50%	8x2,55%	Test 1RM bench (no bands)
B1) Neutral Grip DB Bench Press	3x5	3x5	4x5	2x4
B2) Wide, Pronated Grip Seated Cable Row	4x7	3x7	5x7	3x6
C1) Two-Point One-Arm DB Row	3x10	3x10	3x10	2x10
C2) Suspended Push-ups (Blast Strap) - add weight-vest for resistance or lower straps	3x10	3x10	3x10	3x10
*Skill work/scrimmaging separate from session is okay.				

About Eric Cressey



Eric Cressey received his Master's Degree in Kinesiology with a concentration in Exercise Science through the University of Connecticut Department of Kinesiology, the #1 ranked kinesiology graduate program in the nation.

At UCONN, Eric was involved in varsity strength and conditioning and research in the human performance laboratory. Previously, Eric graduated from the

University of New England with a double major in Exercise Science and Sports and Fitness Management.

An accomplished author, Cressey is a regular contributor to [Testosterone Nation](#), [Men's Fitness](#), and [Elite Fitness Systems](#), authoring over 65 published articles in all; he also serves as Assistant Editor of [Rugged Magazine](#).

Eric has been an invited [guest speaker](#) on both the regional and national levels, and will soon publish the results of his master's thesis, "The effects of 10 weeks of lower-body unstable surface training on markers of athletic performance." He is also a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist (CSCS) through the National Strength and Conditioning Association.

As a competitive powerlifter, Eric holds several state, national, and world records. A mainstay in the *Powerlifting USA* Top 100 lifts in his weight class, Cressey is rapidly approaching Elite status with competition bests of 540 squat, 402 bench, 628 deadlift, and 1532 total in the 165-pound weight class. He trained at the world-renowned South Side Gym in Stratford, Connecticut from 2005 to 2006.

Eric has helped athletes at all levels - from youth sports to the professional and Olympic ranks - achieve their highest levels of performance in a variety of sports. Although prepared in a variety of bodies of knowledge, Cressey specializes in applied kinesiology and biomechanics as they relate to program design and injury rehabilitation; maximal relative strength development; and athletic performance enhancement. He is a highly sought-after coach for healthy and injured athletes alike, and currently trains athletes and weekend warriors alike out of [Excel Sport and Fitness Training](#) in Waltham, MA.