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Eagle Men's Soccer Partners with University's School of Health & Kinesiology

September 16, 2015

At Georgia Southern men's soccer, "Sport Science" isn't just the title of a segment on SportsCenter, it is something the team has a hand in every day.

Beginning in the spring of 2015, Georgia Southern men's soccer has partnered with the University's School of Health and Kinesiology to do research on athletic performance and the body's recovery. Additionally, researchers can provide real-time data to coaches about the performance of student-athletes on the field.

"In the past we've worked with the School of Health and Kinesiology to do VO2 Max testing with our student-athletes to measure their cardiovascular fitness," said head coach [Kevin Kennedy](#). "By working with Dr. Adam Wells, we're able to give our guys real-time feedback of how their bodies are responding and if they are about to hit the wall."

Researchers use a Zephyr BioHarness along with a GPS tracker, which is attached to each student-athlete's back, to track a variety of factors including heart rate, G-forces on the body, physiological load, distance traveled, calories burned and training intensity. Their system also records climactic conditions to provide a point of comparison. Nic Coker travels with the Eagles to every game to fit the harnesses and record the data.

The data is recorded in real-time and streamed to a computer beside the pitch where researchers can watch each student-athlete's load throughout the game. Recent changes by the NCAA now allow coaches to use this information during a match.

"The research team sits right beside or behind our bench at every game," said assistant coach Geoff Del Forn. "During the game, we ask them questions and they let us know when some of our guys are reaching their limit. Coach Kennedy can use that information when deciding whether or not to substitute a player out of the game."

This in-game data would be useless without the knowledge of how various loads impact each student-athlete. That knowledge was gleaned back in the spring when the team went through baseline testing while wearing the harness.

"Back in the spring we had a day where our student-athletes ran to the point of exhaustion in order to see how their body reacts as they reach their physical limit," Del Forn said. "The guys weren't excited that day, but they've been very receptive to using this data to monitor their performance. They see professional clubs like Real Madrid, Barcelona, Liverpool and Chelsea using this kind of system every day, and they know it makes them a better player."

After each game, the researchers, coaches and student-athletes receive a spreadsheet of each game's data. Some soccer student-athletes run as much as six or seven miles over the course of a match and keep their average heart rate over 150 for the match.

"On the team, we compare our individual data," said sophomore midfielder [Thor Sveinbjornsson](#). "We're a competitive group—we look at the distance traveled and sprint speeds against our teammates to know where we can improve."

Once the 2015 season is complete, Dr. Wells and his team analyze the data to see how the student-athlete's performance changes throughout the season. Additionally the team is interested to learn how rest, recovery and the climate effect the student-athlete's performance.

“We’re excited to be working with our Health & Kinesiology Department again as this is one of our university’s most outstanding colleges,” said Kennedy. “Dr. Amy Joe Riggs has consulted with our team on Sports Nutrition, particularly in the areas of post-training meals, pre-game meals and recovery nutrition. We also worked with Assistant Dean Dr. Steve Rossi on a study that analyzed the benefits of players wearing recovery tights after matches. I’m really looking forward to working with Dr. Adam Wells in this venture, we have had tremendous relationship with this department over the last several years and I’m thankful for the support of Dr. Jim McMillan and Dr. Barry Joyner.”

Currently, Dr. Wells and his team are also working with the Georgia Southern men’s tennis program to record data on the hardcourt.

In the future, many other Georgia Southern sports can take advantage of science to get wins on the field.

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