

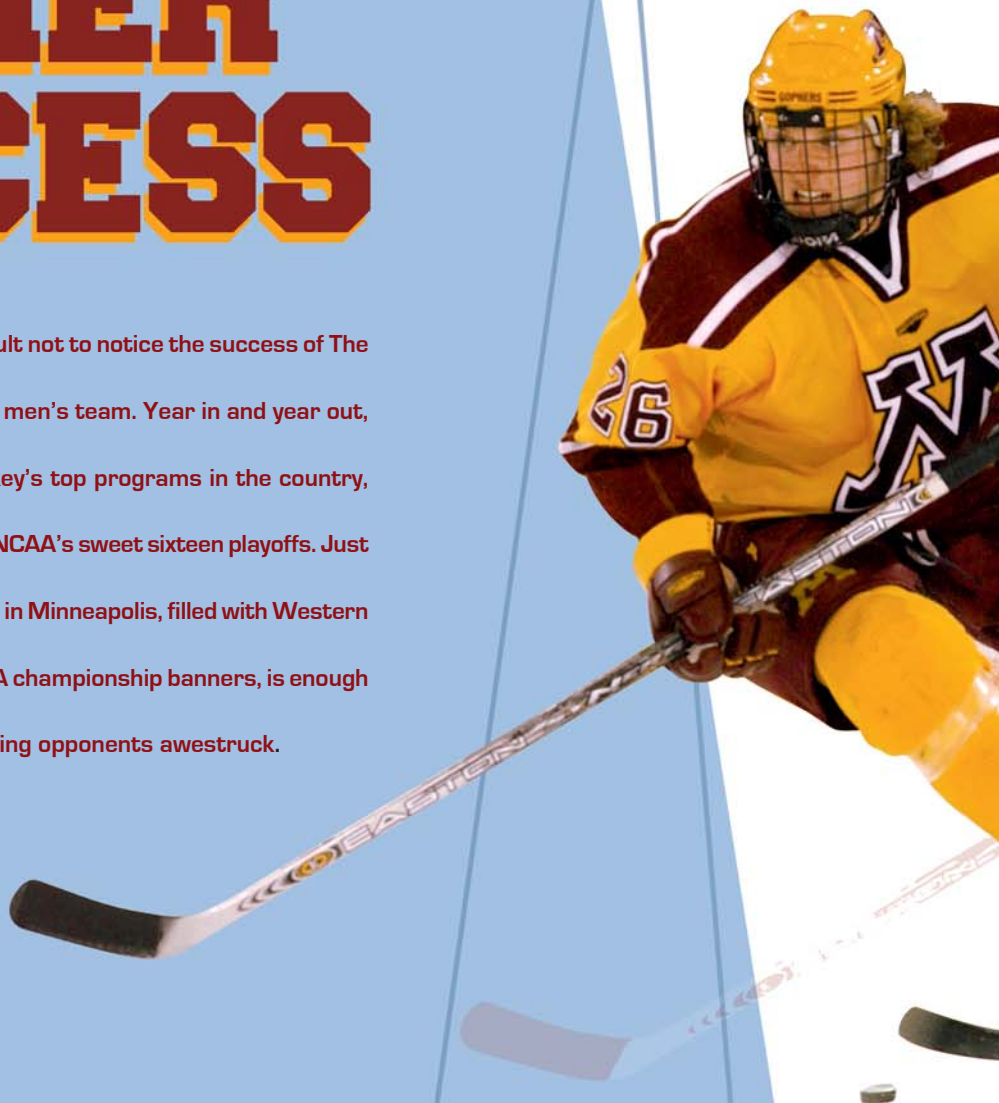


conditioning
is the key to

GOPHER SUCCESS

>> Greg Mergens

If you are a college hockey fan, it is difficult not to notice the success of The University of Minnesota Golden Gopher men's team. Year in and year out, the Gopher team is one of college hockey's top programs in the country, earning almost annual invitations to the NCAA's sweet sixteen playoffs. Just one look at the rafters of Mariucci Arena in Minneapolis, filled with Western Collegiate Hockey Association and NCAA championship banners, is enough to leave even the most determined visiting opponents awestruck.



Many opponents wonder what magic formula the U of M's hockey program has that consistently puts them as one of the top programs in the country. Of course, living in a cold climate that happens to be a hockey hotbed has its advantages when searching for talent. Minnesota has a tradition of recruiting home-grown talent with most of their players coming from within Minnesota. But this alone cannot detail the success of the U's hockey program. More than a hundred kids leave Minnesota after their senior year in high school to play Division I hockey at other universities around the country, with many of these players achieving great success in the college ranks and even advancing their careers to the professional level.

If you ask Gopher's head coach Don Lucia, the secret is in the players themselves. "We look for the type of guy who is committed to making himself a better hockey player," stated Lucia who feels that work ethic is the biggest part of it. "We want to take our players to the next level if possible, but that really is up to the players." Lucia's staff offers the players many tools to improve their game. But possibly the

biggest resource lies in their conditioning program. Coach Lucia defers all conditioning responsibility to the U of M's strength training and conditioning coach, Cal Dietz, who has his own formula for success. "Our main focus is on power and speed," states Dietz who is entering his sixth season at Minnesota and has trained six national championship teams during his tenure at the U of M, including two with the men's hockey program. "In the old days, guys would ride exercise bikes and run long distances to stay in shape. When I started here, I realized that that wasn't going to work. A hockey player is only on the ice for 45-second shifts, so long distance training can't improve them. Now our guys never run anything more than 60 yards at a time and we focus on a combination of weight and anaerobic activity to get our players in shape." Dietz' experience focusing on shorter intervals at full speed has made players faster and more explosive during their shifts and he has seen fewer lower limb injuries than when they pursued long distance training.

Dietz agrees with Lucia about the success of the program being up to individuals and believes that former Gopher players set a precedent. As you enter the weight training room at Mariucci Arena, painted on the wall is a statement that sets the tone for everyone who enters that says, "This weight room has trained All-Americans, Hobey Baker Award winners, national, world and Olympic champions. Don't disgrace their efforts by giving anything less than 100 percent." Both Dietz and Lucia point to former captains such as Grant Potulny, John Pohl, and Eric Westrum as guys who have taken this statement to heart. "When these guys work hard, the work ethic rubs off on the rest of the team and everybody pushes themselves," acknowledged Dietz. He sets a regimen of conditioning routines all players follow at 6:45 a.m. weekdays during the season. To keep the conditioning less monotonous, Dietz



relies on 26 different training programs and recognizes that each individual is unique, especially the new players. "It's important to recognize that most 18-19-year-old kids are still developing physically so there is only so much that can be achieved in the first couple of years. Most of their conditioning gains are not made until they are in their junior and senior years and it takes the right type of person to push himself to get there."

idea with Don Lucia and Cal Dietz that the U of M coaching staff recognized the value of the Hockey Treadmill, not only as a conditioning tool, but as a rehabilitation tool as well.

Early in the 2002-03 season, the Gopher's junior Grant Potulny went down with a broken leg that appeared to end his season. U of M fans recognized the value that Potulny brought to the team after his freshman season when he led the nation with 16 power play goals and five game winning goals. Potulny followed up his freshman campaign by becoming one of the captains of the team and eventually scoring the game-winning goal in overtime in the 2001-02 Frozen Four championship game to give Minnesota their fourth national championship. As defending champs, the club was going to have to rely heavily on Potulny if they wanted a chance to repeat.



*Left to right:
Don Norqual, Curt Carbaugh,
Don Lucia, and Jack Norqual*

"We want to take our players to the next level..."

Their latest addition to their training tools is the Frappier Acceleration Hockey Treadmill that they purchased within the last year. "Once a week during the season, we put our players on the treadmill," explains Dietz, who feels that the ability of a player to get into a deeper position on the treadmill can put a player up to the next level. Most players have already been exposed to the treadmill because for the past ten years or more, many Minnesota hockey players have been independently going to Frappier Acceleration Training Centers in the twin cities during the off-season to maintain their conditioning. These facilities have used the Hockey Treadmill to maintain athletes' skating stride and work on the mechanics of their skating. However, it wasn't until after Jack and Don Norqual, owners of Acceleration Minnesota, Inc., and president John Frappier discussed the

While Dietz was able to work with Potulny on his strength training, a bolt had been placed in Potulny's leg that went from his ankle to his foot and prevented him from resuming skating on the ice. "He was in pain when his foot went in a particular angle when he tried to skate," explained Dietz. It was at this time that one of Dietz' friends at Acceleration North in Minnesota suggested putting Potulny on the Hockey Treadmill. "There are very few exercises that simulate skating to work the necessary muscles to maintain conditioning of their legs," explained Curt Carbaugh, an Acceleration employee for the past nine years and now the

