Spray preparing players for August camp, season

Intense workouts focus on the little things

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Jason Spray has been on the Blue Raider Strength & Conditioning staff since 2002, first as a graduate assistant, and then as Head S&C Coach for basketball for the past seven years. Spray was recently named as National Assistant Strength Coach of the Year by the NSCA, and was elevated to Head S&C Coach for football in January. He is from Murfreesboro, played fullback for Middle Tennessee for three years, and was named co-captain of the 2002 team. Spray is also certified by the National Association of Speed & Explosion, certified in weight-lifting, and as a sports nutritionist. GoBlueRaiders.com recently talked with Spray about his duties in regard to the Blue Raider football team. How did you get involved in strength and conditioning? "When I was in high school at Oakland, I weighed about 300 pounds and played nose guard. My academics weren't where they needed to be, and I realized that my life wasn't where I wanted it to be. I went the junior college route in order to improve my grades, and lost 100 pounds the summer before I arrived at MTSU. I sat out a year, worked my butt off, and fell in love with this aspect of the game." **Who got you interested in strength and conditioning?** "It was Robb Rogers. He came to me on senior day and said that hopefully we will get to work together some day. I had never thought about it, but it hit me then how awesome a profession it would be. I loved Coach Rogers, I loved Coach Riley, and I loved the camaraderie of the guys in

here working together. The very next day we got together with Andy McCollum and got me on as a graduate assistant". **What did Coach Stockstill discuss with you when you got the job as the head Strength and Conditioning Coach?** "The main thing was that he wanted his guys working hard, getting them in the best shape they can be. We want them to be strong and healthy at the same time. Football is such a collision sport that injuries are going to happen, so we didn't need the extra injuries coming from the weight room side of things. The big thing was he wanted guys having fun, working hard, and bring them together and to instill a new work ethic and a new attitude." **How do you deal with the different levels of interest in the players in working out?** "Typically, you will have about 10 percent that aren't interested in working out, about 80 percent that will do whatever you tell them to do, and then you have the other 10 or maybe 20 percent that will go way above and beyond. That's about the way it is with anything. We have to find out what motivates each player. With some of them, it's the NFL, with others it's winning the conference championship. You just have to find out what motivates them, and then you have to make them believe in what they are doing. The saying goes that "They don't care about how much you know, until they know how much you care." They have to know that you care, and they will buy into you." **The power running game for the Blue Raiders has been an area of concern recently. As a former fullback, are you pleased to see that part of the game get more emphasis?** "The fullback position in the spread offense had kind of died over the years, so it's good to see it coming back. I like those fullback or linebacker type guys. They are usually great in the weight room. They are strong guys. They are in that 10-20 percent that will go above and beyond. They are collision guys and they understand the importance of working out in a structured program. They add another dynamic of toughness to your team." **Terms such as hard-nosed and toughness have been used to describe the desired attributes of this year's football team. How much of your program is "mind-set"?** "A lot of it. We try to get these guys to understand that this is a collision sport, it's a tough game, and it's a man's game. When they come in to the weight room, it is very structured, very intense, the music is loud, we are loud, we are very vocal, we don't let them get away with the little things, because it's the little things that will get you beat." **In strength and conditioning, what is the difference in "quicker" and "faster"?** Fast is typically looked at as horizontal speed, breakaway speed, track speed, while quickness is associated more with your shifty guys. Quickness is the ability to accelerate in that five-ten yard box. Fast is more along the lines of speed beyond 20 yards. Training for quickness, or acceleration, is what we call starting strength. That is where you work your box jumps, your squats, your power cleans. That is pure strength, the ability to stop, absorb that force, reproduce it and make you go where you want to go. Speed is more along the lines of elastic, getting the muscles to have a "bounding" effect. We'll use squat jumps, where you hit and have to go back up. Bounce and go, bounce and go. There is a big difference in training the two." **You work with pro athletes in something known as plyometrics. In layman's tems, what is plyometrics?** "It is something like that stretch shortening cycle that uses the elastic effect, and you have to train that. It is the ability for that muscle to go on and stretch, and then snap back to produce the athletic feat that you want to produce. It is very important because you have to be able to stop, absorb that force, reproduce it, and make your tackle, or make somebody miss. That aspect of it is very important. Just to produce the quality of strength just for the sake of strength, without the effect of that elastic reflex, is pointless." **Perhaps the most famous injury in athletics is the hamstring pull. Is that what you are talking about?** "Yes, because that muscle just can't handle that elastic effect, and it will strain. The body is funny. You can't prevent everything. All we can do is try to give that muscle time to develop. With our off-season program, we won't do anything full speed over 20 yards for at least three weeks. We try to give that hamstring the ability to contract, forcefully, and give it time to build up the strength to do those kinds of things. Later in the summer, probably the first week after July

4th, we'll start working on the breakaway speed that we talked about with the longer type sprinting." **With all of the different skill sets at different positions involved on a football team, what are the hardest things to deal with in the areas of strength and conditioning and also in nutrition?** "The hardest part is making these guys understand that they have to drink enough water. When you tell them to drink, they think Hawaiian Punch, lemonade, tea, and sodas. Those things are nothing but diuretics that you just urinate out, and that is what dries and brittles the muscles. If the muscle becomes dry and brittle, it's like leaving a rubber band out in the sun. It will snap. Our bodies are 70 percent water, and we need that to function. As many calories as we get, and the sun, and what we are asking these guys to do, they need to take in gallons of water per day. "We also preach protein intake because a lot of times they won't get enough protein. They will get their carbs, but a lot of times they don't understand getting the meats and that kind of thing in their daily diets. We use supplements approved in NCAA guidelines, and we try to give them a couple of supplements a day. We try to give them around 1,000 calories every time they come see us thru supplements. A supplement is a supplement to their diet. We ask them to get their big three: breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and their three snacks, especially around their workout window." **Incoming freshmen have a huge adjustment to make to college football. What is generally the biggest adjustment for new players?** "It would have to be their work capacity. Some guys will come in at their strongest, and stronger than some of the guys we have. Some will come in as fast or faster than what we have. But it is just their work capacity. They can't produce that same effort over and over again just because they haven't trained for that. That is usually the biggest thing you will see. Typically, your big guys will be stiff because that is all they have ever done. And your small guys are fast, but they are weak, and that is simply because they have never weight-trained before. We try to improve their functional movement and their work capacity. The rule of thumb is that can you improve flexibility day by day if you work on it. Your strength will improve week to week, speed will improve month to month and work capacity is year to year. "That is why there is a difference between a guy who has been here four years, and a guy who is just coming in. Veteran players may have taken two or three weeks off, but muscle memory comes back real quick. Once he gets his capacity back, he's there. His work capacity is way better than the guy who has just arrived on campus." **Are there any instructions for newcomers?** "Yes, we send them a program of what they need to do. Some follow it better than others. Recruits from some areas may not have the facilities available to work out, so we try to give them simple running, half-gassers. All they need is a field. They can do pushups anywhere. Something is better than nothing. That is what we try to preach to them."

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