



Court Ready Series - **Shoulder Mobility**

Welcome to the first of our monthly instalments where we hope to discuss topics in relation to Performance, Injury/Injury Reduction, and Rehab in Handball. Our hope is that some of our insights, experience, knowledge and expertise will help you perform better, recover quicker, and play for longer.

Over the past 15 years I have worked along with many Handballers, from many age groups, of varying abilities', in all codes. Such a technical, aerobic sport is both a marvel, and a mind field, for those of us interested in sport performance, biomechanics and injury reduction. Unfortunately, we often see people stop playing or missing major championships due to a variety of reasons. This could be someone who does not have the aerobic capacity to see out a full game, or someone with a rotator cuff or ankle injury who can't perform at the level they could if they were injury free.

When we work with a Handballer for the first time, our first task is to identify what they can do well. Often, coaches, S&C coaches, and physios have their own ideas of what is optimal performance and movement. By projecting this onto an athlete, we can often fail to see an athlete's strengths and potential. By identifying what makes a player play well, and what they enjoy, we can support their continued development, and then look at what may be hindering this development process. Very often a player is unaware that certain areas of their body aren't as strong as it could be, or needs to be. Development is about moving forwards in a structured process, while at the same time, trying to remove obstacles – physical, mental, and technical – which may obstruct that process.

One of the common obstacles we see in the clinic relate to the shoulder and rotator cuff. In handball - just like golf, tennis, shot putt etc - the shoulder needs to be robust enough to generate speed and power, while at the same time being mobile enough for an adequate range of movement to prevent injury. We often see one or more of these issues relating to shoulders, even in elite players. Very often a player can have a very strong sidearm stroke for power shots, but can struggle with an overarm stroke due to a reduced range of movement. Alternatively, we see players who have an excellent range of movement, but who don't have the strength around the joint to generate enough speed and power. Even for players with strong overarm, sidearm, and underarm strokes, but who have, for example, limited shoulder external rotation, they will often end up with a rotator cuff injury over time. Unfortunately, in handball a shoulder injury usually means severely restricted or no play.

When we are building rehab or S&C programmes for handballers, we will always start with assessing range of movement in all joints. By performing regular mobility exercises you can dramatically improve how you play and generate power. Here are some of our frequently used shoulder mobility exercises, suitable for players of all abilities.

Wall Slides

- Lean back against a wall in a slight squat position.
- Lower back, back of shoulders, head, and elbows against the wall.
- Start with forearms away from the wall, then rotate them 90° so they are in contact with the wall.
- Slide arms up wall as far as possible but keeping all above parts touching wall. Come back to starting point and rotate forearms out again. Repeat 20–30 times



Floor Slides

- If you are having difficulty completing Wall Slides or can't keep your elbows in contact with the wall, try Floor Slides instead.
- Lie flat on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Lower back, back of shoulders, head, and elbows in contact with the floor.
- Start with forearms away from the floor, then rotate them 90° so they are in contact with the floor.
- Slide arms along the floor over your head as far as possible trying to keep all above parts touching the floor. Come back to starting point and rotate forarms out again. Repeat 15–20 times



Thoracic Rotations

- Get onto all fours on the ground. Put your left hand at the back of your head.
- Turn your left elbow towards the sky and let your head turn with it so that you are looking up.
- Keep the hips steady and the right arm completely straight. Return to the starting position and keep going so that your elbow is coming under your body.
- Repeat 15-20 reps, and then the same on the opposite side.



Tommy Gallagher is a Registered Physical Therapist who specialises in Elite Athlete Injury treatment and Rehabilitation. With 15 years' experience working in Gaelic games, Golf, Athletics, Rugby, and Football, his main clinic in Donegal helps athletes of all ages recover from injury and come back fitter and stronger. His methods of finding the source of pain and weakness means that you are working with the person the Professionals turn to in their time of need. For more information or if you would like to see us cover a specific topic over the coming months, send an email to tommy@tommygallagher.ie or call 074 9168788

Avril McNamee works alongside Tommy as a Senior Rehabilitation Coach. As a successful Handballer herself, she brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to help players maximise their physical potential on the court. All programmes are individually designed to improve a player's mobility, speed and power, in a way that they can transfer into their game.

