

In the general scheme of things the ankle is given a fairly low priority. This is somewhat surprising since the ankle and the foot, play extremely important roles not only athletics, but in everyday life. For example, one of its most important functions is to maintain a base or foundation for the body during execution of a multitude of sports skills and everyday actions.

In addition, the ankle is responsible for both absorbing and transferring forces when the foot makes contact with the ground in both an upward and downward direction. When the foot and ankle cannot do their jobs, you are you not able to perform as well as possible, and it could very easily lead to injury. Keep in mind that the ankle plays different roles in different sports so that the fix for one sport may not be suitable for another.

For example, ankle joint flexibility may not be very important in some sports but is critical in others. In running you need a full range of motion in the ankle not only to ensure a maximum range in the pushoff (ankle extension) but also for dorsiflexion which is critical for speed in the shin swing out and for a more effective landing under the body.

It is also important to understand that the ankle undergoes a greater range of motion that is forced upon it in some sports skills than you can volitionally duplicate. For example, in a sharp cutting action the ankle undergoes extreme foot adduction ? greater than 45°. This is why it is not uncommon to see an athlete lose a shoe in a cutting action when wearing low cut shoes.

In order for the ankle to be stable during execution of various sports skills and especially in running, the muscles that surround the ankle joint must be quite strong. This means that not only must the ankle extensors ? the calf muscles ? be strong and flexible but also the dorsiflexors (tibialis anterior of the shin) and the muscles on the sides of the ankle - the peroneous muscles and the anterior and posterior tibialis.

To strengthen the muscles surrounding the ankle joint, trainers typically do balance type exercises. These exercises are good but they develop mainly static strength not dynamic which is most often needed in sports. Because of this I recommend doing active full range of motion exercises to strengthen the muscles surrounding the ankle.

This includes heel raises, toe raises, ankle adduction and ankle abduction. Heel raises are typically best performed on a calf raise machine while the toe raises and ankle adduction and ankle abduction are best done with Active Cords. The Cords allow for full range of motion and the ability to duplicate the actions needed. By doing these strength exercises you develop both stability and mobility of the ankle. This is the key to successful execution of sports skills since you need both of these abilities in order to maintain a strong and safe ankle joint. Because of this, there may not be any need to tape the ankle joint prior to competition as is presently done in many sports.