

# Westport's IST regenerates Columbia U. men's soccer players

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E.J. Zebro, left, trains members of Columbia University's men's soccer team at Integrated Sports Therapy at 180 Post Road East in Westport on Wednesday, August 10, 2011. Photo: Brian A. Pounds / Connecticut Post

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Preventing injuries by taking proactive steps makes a difference for everyone.

Certain programs take this precaution to help athletes avoid injuries that are considered unavoidable.

Performing certain exercises that focus on muscles, such as hip flexors, hamstrings, knees and the lower back, has saved many athletes from these maladies.

E.J. Zebro, the founder and owner of Integrated Sports Therapy in Westport, conducted a rigorous training session for six members of the Columbia University men's soccer team to build their muscles and help them avoid these wounds last Tuesday and Wednesday.

After pushing Columbia's booters to the max in Tuesday's session, he did regeneration therapy.

Similar to yoga, it helped them recover from the typical aches that are usually the aftermath of an intense workout so they would fully heal.



E.J. Zebro, right, trains members of Columbia University's men's soccer team at Integrated Sports Therapy at 180 Post Road East in Westport on Wednesday, August 10, 2011. Photo: Brian A. Pounds / Connecticut Post

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Zebro didn't have them do traditional crunches but had them on their elbows a lot to let their bodies recover more easily.

It also allowed the athletes to build strength in muscle areas vulnerable to injuries to enable them to handle even more intense workouts in the immediate future.

"The purpose of the program is for the athlete to remain healthy while increasing their strengths and skills," Zebro said. "Muscle imbalance and ACL tears correlate to muscle weakening."

Greg Gudis, a former All-FCIAC forward for Staples High School who worked with Zebro before graduating in June, broke his leg during last year's Class LL soccer tournament. He and Zebro believe no training can prevent such an injury, but ankle and ACL injuries are avoidable impairments that happen as a result of weakened muscles.

"I've been working with E.J. for five years, and I can say what he has done will help us avoid injuries and give us something we can bring to Columbia, like everyday stretching," Gudis said. "He helped us improve our form in exercising, and it will help us at Columbia this fall."

Soccer player Kofi Agyapong, who is transferring to Columbia from Wake Forest University, also benefited from Zebro's therapy while playing at St. Luke's High School in New Canaan.

"It [the training] helped me a lot," said Agyapong, who also played for the Premier team of Beachside of Connecticut Soccer Club in Norwalk. "The first day was tough but we did warm-ups and stretches, which loosened me up and I feel better now. We do most of the stuff here that we do in college. Here (at Integrated Sport Therapy), they give us the right technique."



Greg Gudis, left of Westport, trains with his teammates from the Columbia University men's soccer team at Integrated Sports Therapy at 180 Post

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In the end, Zebro wants to empower the athlete so he or she can learn how to push and when to take a break.

"I just want to give them enough knowledge, and I want them to know when their bodies are pushed too hard and give them the skills where they know how to fix them," Zebro said. Athletes need to be pushed hard and then repaired so you can push them harder the next time."

Renee Daly is Zebro's associate and is confident the workouts at IST will help them in the long run.

"It will help them with their more functional training, which will help them with speed, strength and recovery during the preseason," Daly said.

Gudis said, "It's monumental for us. E.J. is very knowledgeable and shows us things we can bring to Columbia. He propelled our training for the week and he's the driving force in our training, regeneration and restoration."