

Keeping Haverford Fit



Fitness center director and strength and conditioning coach Cory Walts helps athletes—as well as the wider College community—stay strong. *By Samantha Drake*



Through the Physical Education program Walts offers speed and agility classes that are open to all Haverford students.

On a chilly winter morning at 7:30 a.m., the Calvin J. Gooding '84 Arena is filled with blaring music and pounding feet. For a moment, it is difficult to pick out Haverford College's strength and conditioning coach Cory Walts in the pack of young men in shorts and T-shirts. But it quickly becomes apparent: Walts is the guy doing all the yelling.

"Never stop your feet gentlemen. Never stop your feet."

Amid scattered laughter, and a yawn

here and there, the students are all business as they sprint back and forth and navigate small hurdles in footwork exercises geared toward improving speed and agility. At the end of the session, Walts eases up on the drill sergeant demeanor as the students gather round for a quick pep talk and the directive to get eight hours of sleep and drink plenty of water.

Through the College's Physical Education program, Walts offers speed and agility classes several times a week, which are open to all students at



Walts (center) provides Haverford sports teams with individualized strength and conditioning training. "This is not the norm for Division 3 schools," says men's soccer coach Bill Brady. "It gives us a leg up on our competitors."

Haverford College. He also oversees individualized weight lifting regimens for interested members of the Haverford community.

Even in the off season, sleeping in and slacking off are out of the question for most varsity athletes. "Working out in the off season is all voluntary," notes Walts. "They don't have to be here."

"We're here because we want to get better," says Joseph Howard, a junior men's soccer player attending the early morning workout. Alejandro Rettig y Martinez, a sophomore soccer player, notes that an element of competition among the team members is also a motivation. If you aren't at Walts' classes, you won't be as fit as everyone else on the team, which could make the difference between being on the team and not being on it, he says.

Walts is equally committed to the teams he helps train. "I don't think there's anyone more dedicated on campus than Cory," Rettig y Martinez. "Even when there was two feet of snow, he was here."

The Science of Strength

Walts, 27, is in his third year at Haverford. As the strength and conditioning coach, he works with most sports teams at Haverford on some level and works closely with about 14 teams to design training that is team- and sport-specific with a focus on improving strength, fitness, speed, and agility. He

also creates individualized, progressive training programs for about 200 athletes.

Strength and conditioning is a relatively new field, and the specific training depends on the sport and the individual—which is where Walts' skill in assessing the evolving needs of teams and athletes comes into play.

Walts says an effective strength and conditioning program focuses on three areas: strength training to increase muscle mass, endurance, and power; metabolic conditioning to increase speed, agility, and aerobic capabilities; and injury prevention, which Walts refers to as "prehabilitation," aimed at avoiding problems before they start.

Strength and conditioning also encourages team members to work out together, which promotes team spirit, friendly competition with each other, and a commitment to the team's success, he notes.

Walts got his first introduction to the field in high school, when he got an after-school job working with a fitness trainer in his hometown of Albany, N.Y. Eventually, he started seeing the job as a possible career (the fact that he could wear shorts and a T-shirt to work didn't hurt). Walts graduated magna cum laude from Ithaca College with a major in clinical exercise science and a general business minor, followed by a master's degree in kinesiology from the University of Maryland, College Park.

A defining moment came early on in Walts' education during a three-month internship with the strength and conditioning coach for the NFL's Buffalo Bills. The college kid quickly had to learn to talk with authority to the professional football players and earn their respect. "You learn by doing it and getting shot down," he says, adding that he soon realized that explaining the how's and why's behind everything helped build a rapport with the high-level athletes.

Fortunately, Walts says, "I'm a science guy. I like learning how the body works" and how to increase health through exercise.

"I think our whole athletic program is improving and Cory is part of that," says Haverford's athletic director Wendy Smith. "He is one of the supports that is crucial."

Haverford created the position of strength and conditioning coach in 2005 for the new Douglas B. Gardner '83 Integrated Athletic Center, which opened in October of that year. "We consider physical fitness a big part of the educational process," Smith notes.

"Cory has brought a lot of enthusiasm to the position. He's a good fit for the institution."

Bill Brady, the head coach of the men's soccer team, says the fact that his players have access to individualized strength and conditioning training is "fantastic." Says Brady, "This is not the norm for a

Division 3 school. It gives us a leg up on our competitors.”

Although coaches always hope to recruit athletes who are self-motivated, having someone like Walts, who cares about the athletes and personally guides them through the strength and conditioning training, is invaluable, says Brady, who is in his first year as the men’s soccer coach. “The best thing you can have between a strength and conditioning coach and athletes is trust.”

Watching Their Weights

A little later on that same winter morning, about 25 people are working out at the Arn and Nancy Tellem Fitness Center. Walts, the Center’s director, circulates, adjusting equipment and monitoring form.

“We’re really lucky to have Cory,” says Josie Ferri, a sophomore field hockey and lacrosse player, who also works at the center. She notes that both teams she plays for have improved their records since working with Walts. “I can definitely tell my footwork has gotten better,” she adds. She has also built up her strength. This particular day, Ferri is credited on the fitness center record board with a 294-pound squat lift.

As fitness center director, Walts works with everyone who uses the center – students, alumni, faculty, and staff – to conduct orientations and develop individu-

alized programs on request.

Walts says weight training is one area where he must modify his training techniques for men and women. Why? Because no matter how rigorously a female athlete may have trained in high school, women typically haven’t experienced an intense strength training regimen when they arrive at Haverford. Most high schools do not have strength training coaches and some women are initially uncomfortable in a weight room, he explains.

Motivating female athletes involves less yelling and more explaining, encouraging friendly competition, and allaying concerns that they will get bulky from weight lifting, Walts says.

“He’s completely changed the way the women approach fitness in every way,” says Jamie Gluck, the head women’s soccer coach. Walts explains to female athletes how increasing their strength will improve their skills and prevent injury and, in the process, changes their attitudes about weight lifting.

On the first day of a new season, Gluck says she can immediately tell who has been working out in the off-season.

Walts also makes a point of supporting the teams during the season by attending games and sometimes traveling with the teams. “If the team sees Cory on the sidelines it puts a little extra pep in their step,” Gluck says.

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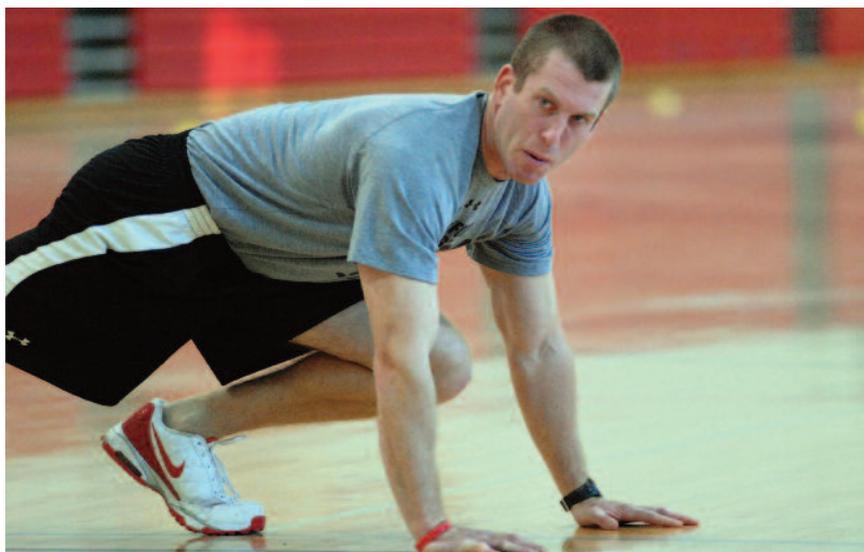
Strength in Numbers

Smith says about 35 percent of all students compete on a varsity team at Haverford. But sooner or later, every student at the College gets to know Walts. In addition to his other duties, Walts teaches the “Intro to Fitness” class, a six-week course that is mandatory for all non-varsity first-year students.

Walts also runs a strength and conditioning summer camp at Haverford for high school students called “Performance Plus.” The camp helps students improve athletic performance and reduce the risk of injury, and counsels students on how to navigate the college recruiting process.

If all that weren’t enough, Walts also organizes the Joe Schwartz ’83 Memorial 3K Run/Walk. Now in its third year, the run/walk, which is held in April, has raised approximately \$8,000 for amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) research. The event honors the memory of Haverford alumnus Joe Schwartz, an avid runner who died of ALS in 2008. The race is open to all members of the Haverford community and Walts oversees individualized training leading up to the race for interested participants.

Despite his long, busy days on campus, Walts still manages to squeeze in his own workouts, taking advantage of the times during the day when most students are in class. Obviously, he takes his own advice to heart: Never stop moving. 🐾



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