AT A GLANCE
Are there still power reserves remaining unused by elite athletes? Markus Roßmann says there are. He teaches soccer coaches how to train their fasciae. Frank Aschoff spoke with him.

What made you pick soccer players as your target group for fascial training?
I’m an athlete myself. I’ve played basketball in the regional league and in the second division, and I have been a youth coach for years. I have known for a long time that a special training of the fasciae can boost an athlete’s capacity and prevent injuries. It can also be used for rehabilitation.

The boosted capacity is easily explained: An elastic fascial network results in a smaller consumption of energy while moving leaving power reserves that a soccer player might need in the defining last ten minutes of the game, for example. A second important aspect that I have experienced is that the fascial training improves the focus out on the field. Players talked about a better sense of direction, being able to comprehend faster where their teammates and opponents were, and more precise passes and shots.

How can this be explained?
A very big part of someone’s depth perception, their proprioception, is influenced by the fascial system—more than by the receptors in the structures near the joint which fire mostly when the joint is an end-range position. This is how you can explain the observed effects on the field. The fascial network is our largest sense organ, so it is only logical to train it.

Currently, a lot of attention is drawn to this subject and many reports refer to the well-known international fasciae researcher, Dr. Robert Schleip. In what way are you working with him?
He is a Rolfing instructor and was the one that trained me, too. He also let me be a part of his practice rather soon. I knew that he was doing a lot of research, and then he asked me if I wanted to work with him on a new concept for moving that lets you actively train your fasciae. In the beginning, there were five or six of us that worked closely together with each other. My job is to turn their latest scientific discoveries into actual moves. It’s a fact that people have always been training both

GLOSSAR
Rolfing
Rolfing is bodywork that has been focusing on fasciae for a long time. This method was developed by biochemist Ida Rolf (1896-1979) in the 1950s.
Flamingo I

Goal: flexibility of the complete back of the upper leg, while including the fascia net of the whole body

It is very important to remember the playful aspect of this (»Everything is allowed«): for example, changing the position of the leg or the torso, changing the position of the arm, or changing the position of the head.

The well-known exercise now gets a twist: the game with different motion vectors begins. You can look for new, inexperienced tension. Once you find a position, you should bounce lightly three or four times, and then move on to a new position.

Bring body weight over the leg, feel the tension.

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Everyone can discover for himself where he feels the tension.

It is no secret that many soccer players are not very flexible and often suffer from pulled or torn muscles. This is why I bring up the fasciae roll in courses. After the trainers have worked with the roll for 15 minutes, they usually feel like they are able to move a lot more easily. Also, they notice very quickly that the finger-floor muscles and fasciae. Obviously, a separation is nearly impossible now. We are moving the focus on the fasciae. While people train, we let them move in a way that activates more fasciae, and therefore makes them need fewer muscles. This way of moving is well known by a lot of people, and yet it is somehow new to them.

So research results are put into practice regularly?
Yes, we are very lucky that Dr. Robert Schleip is so close to the source and that he keeps us informed on a regular basis.

What have you done with the soccer players so far?
So far, I mainly provided training for trainers, especially at the soccer association of Württemberg, at the Bavarian soccer association, but also at the federation of German soccer-trainers. Those are the ones with the highest trainer certification. However, I am not only involved in soccer, but in many other sports like golf, triathlon and long-distance track as well. I even was a trainer at a summer camp for Norwegian biathletes once.

What do you offer the soccer trainers?
First, I offer some theoretical basics particularly concerning soccer. Soon, we focus on practicing. The course participants exercise a lot. This way, the trainer can feel the effects for themselves, which is important! It then becomes clear to them: We can change how we move in a way that activates our fascial network more.

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What do you offer the soccer trainers?
distance is reduced by a lot. They say, »I can reach further down now!« Every soccer player has areas with which he struggles. Often, we can take active measures to prevent problems, or help with a looming pulled muscle. I have been told various times by the players that they were able to go back to training the very next day.

Another important aspect is the »fascial stretch“ which offers three-dimensionality. When doing so called «correct axial stretches”, we only stretch a small part of the neglected parts. There’s no impulse. It is essential, not only for soccer players, to move on to a change of vectors. The athlete can discover for himself: Where do I feel the pull? Where do I feel this exercise? That’s something no trainer can tell him, everyone has to feel it for himself. So, no more one-dimensionality. It’s time to move on to three-dimensional stretching with many changes of vectors.

You know, every person is an individual. Everyone has a different bone structure, different muscles, different fasciae, and, most of all, a different everyday life. While one person sits behind his or her desk all day, another works physically in the construction business. Their bodies are being formed individually. However, when it comes to sports, everyone is told to do the same stretches in the same positions. It just doesn’t make sense.

Only once the athlete starts looking for better ways, when he tries many changes of vectors, he will be able to activate a wide range of fasciae and muscles, and he will be prepared for bigger athletic challenges.

**You are talking about a playful element as well.**

Definitely. A basic exercise is given, and then everyone can find the area where he or she feels the pull: »I have potential the-
I can work on that. And then they are allowed to do continuous, soft and bouncy movements in that specific direction – exactly what we were told not to do for thirty years.

**How do you explain this new attitude towards bouncy movements to the trainers?**

Well, the goal is a tear-resistant, elastic fascial network. With examples like the Achilles’ tendon, science has clearly shown that there can only be an impulse with bouncy movements. Normal stretching, without bouncing or pre-stretching, is not enough for an impulse! You can look at the tendon like a rubber band. It can conserve energy or give it off. To get low energy consumption, it needs optimal elastic characteristics. To train the Achilles’ tendon perfectly for exactly those traits, you don’t have to do any extra training. All it takes is the inclusion of this knowledge in the normal training. For instance, a good exercise to improve the catapult effect of the Achilles’ tendon are bouncy, teetering movements when going up the stairs –of course, after pre-stretching.

**What are the typical areas a soccer player struggles with?**

Mainly the calf muscle, hamstrings, quadriceps, but obviously, the pelvis, loins and hip area.

Crest problems are fairly common, too.

**What about those?**

There is still need for more research. If we’re lucky, we will have new insights soon.

**How do the athletes react to the new exercises?**

The majority of the exercises encounter a positive feedback, because the soccer
players can feel the improvement right away. Also, it is diverse and entertaining. The area of the Sensory Refinements, meaning the proprioception exercises, takes some getting used to for many players. Often, they smile at me oddly when I ask them to turn around on the floor and »toll”. However, once they give it a try, they quickly realize that it does a lot for them, especially once they’re out on the field again. The new insights about fascial training are not being used to their full potential yet, especially not in male sports. Luckily, as an athlete, I know how to «sell” these exercises. I know that I don’t need fancy instructions like »Imagine you are a starfish...« to stimulate the imagination, so I don’t use them.

Mister Roßmann, what is your next goal?
The plan is to include the positive effects of fascial training in many different sports. I’m highlighting the word »include” here, because it is extremely important to us to make clear that fascial training is just another tool in the tool box «training and therapy”. When used correctly as a part of training and therapy, I promise a bigger capacity, faster healing and a lower risk of injuries. Another big goal has to be the inclusion of fascial training in mass sports.
It is simply a fact that it allows you to do more for your health in less time—and this is a trend that fits our modern lives perfectly. Last but not least, there is a by-product of fascial training we should not forget about: it encourages creativity and self-reponsibility. Two things that we don’t get too often in our working lives or in society.

Thank you for this conversation!

**Starfish**

**Goal**: Improvement of the body perception, mainly of the contralateral movements, which are extremely important when it comes to running and shooting.

*Initial position*  
*Start of the motion*

Initiate a turn to the left, bring your left elbow and your right knee closer together, and at the same time stretch the entire right side of your body.

As soon as the center of the body weight lies on the left side, you change positions into the relaxed “embryo position”. Don’t remain in this position for too long, but instead move on to the opposite, contrasting movement. To enjoy the full potential of this exercise, continue doing those flowing motions for three to four minutes.

**IMAGES**

All photographs by Mira Hampel for the Fascial Fitness Association
BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FASCIAL TRAINING

Fascial Stretch
Playful, creative whole-body fascia and muscle stretching can stimulate the fascial network perfectly. A multi-directional, bouncy stretching prepares the soccer player (athlete) specifically for the extreme, three-dimensional, and physical pressure during a competition or practice.

Rebound Elasticity
Only by pre-stretching the fascial network, the maximum of physical strength can be achieved. This training boosts the so-called »catapult effect«. It supports the process where motions can be done with less muscle energy, which leads to fewer tendon and ligament injuries.

Fascial Release
Fascial Release is a self-treatment method with a fasciae roll. It lets you dissolve adhesions and the tissue gets softer. This results in more flexibility and a general better physical comfort that you can feel right away. Fascial Release should be done before (fast rolling) and after (slow rolling) practice and competitions.

Sensory Refinement
Considering that the fascial network is our largest sense organ, the fascial system should be stimulated to its maximum capacity when thinking about our body perception. At times, this makes delicate, sensual exercises necessary. The better the body perception, the closer to perfect will be the motion sequences. In the case of a soccer player, this equals more precise passes and shots, as well as a more economical running style.

(See www.fascial-fitness.de)

MARKUS ROSSMANN
Qualified physical education instructor, Univ.; Certified Rolfer, MAT/EAP certification, fascial trainer, many years of experience as a conductor of motion and health seminars, member of the European Rolfing Association. Short résumé: 1992 graduation from the Technical University Munich as a sport scientist (rehabilitation/prevention). After working abroad as a ski instructor in Canada, he was the head of medical training therapies of several ambulant rehabilitation centers. Searching for new, more efficient and sustainable approaches, he came across the Rolfing-method. After completing his training in Munich in December of 2004, he started working in Munich and Erding.

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