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CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS

The Blackhawks, under strength coach Paul Goodman, are already getting back to work. And usually, they're barefoot.

By Jimmy Greenfield
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1 of 11 < >

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Blackhawks strength coach Paul Goodman, right, works with forward Alex DeBrincat during an offseason workout on May 1, 2019, at MB Ice Arena in Chicago. (Jose M. Osorio/Chicago Tribune)

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DeBrincat isn't required to be here; neither is Brent Seabrook. The Hawks' season ended a few weeks ago and so did any responsibility the players had to show up for an early morning workout. While team-directed offseason training is expected and has become a way of life in the NHL, it is entirely voluntary.

Yet here DeBrincat and Seabrook are, just a little after 8 a.m., getting ready to do what Hawks strength and conditioning coach Paul Goodman asks them to.

“Nothing against those other sports, but the work ethic I've experienced in terms of the sport as a culture ... they know the work is necessitated to enjoy the accolades on the ice,” Goodman said.

DeBrincat and Seabrook happened to be in town, but Goodman is helping direct offseason workouts for dozens of players in the organization scattered all over the world, from Jonathan Toews to the youngest prospects. They all have direct access to Goodman, 44, who has been in his role with the Hawks since 2008 after holding similar positions at the University of Vermont and University of Wisconsin.

Goodman's title — strength and conditioning coach — is an accurate description of what he does, and he reinforces it by wearing a black T-shirt with the word “Strength” that includes the Blackhawks' iconic feathers at the end of the final letter.

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having a light workout — the heavy offseason stuff doesn't begin until June — involving thick rubber bands around their ankles, throwing medicine balls against walls and a lot of one-legged hopping.



Blackhawks strength and conditioning coach Paul Goodman wants his pupils to have the feeling that the opposing player "couldn't possibly have done what you've done." (Jose M. Osorio/Chicago Tribune)

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“When you stand in front of somebody else you know that you did absolutely everything and anything that was brought to you,” he said. “You know that other person couldn’t possibly have done what you’ve done. And that’s the kind of feel I want them to have. That’s strength. That’s the kind of energy I want them to feel when they head back onto the ice.”

One thing Goodman has become known for is a tendency to go barefoot. At the United Center, he’ll walk around without shoes or socks before and after games. It’s noticeable when every other person working at the game has their feet covered with gym shoes, loafers or, of course, skates.

But this isn’t because Goodman needs to be casual or comfortable.

“Being barefoot, that’s just how I train,” Goodman said. “That’s how I live, and as much as I can be barefoot it just makes me feel better versus being in a shoe where you’re lifted off your heel.”

Although DeBrincat and Seabrook worked out in shoes, this isn’t typical. Goodman said the players do nearly every in-season workout barefoot and most offseason ones as well.

“I want to keep those guys out of shoes as much as possible because I want their feet to be malleable,” Goodman said. “I want them to actually work like feet. Work the muscles, work the strength, work the stabilizers because once they put their (hockey) boot back on they’ll feel much more grounded, much more in connection with everything back up the chain.”

After representing the U.S. at the World Championships this month, DeBrincat will return to Chicago and

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He creates videos of his exercises, allowing players and their on-site trainers to view as needed and perform them as he intended. That level of commitment doesn't go unnoticed by the players.

“It's cool to see him really invested in us and want to see us get better,” DeBrincat said. “He's got the workouts for us, but he's quick to change those if we're not feeling up to it or something's bothering us. He knows exactly what to switch to. He'll change it to something else in a different category so you're always getting your full reps in. Just very beneficial for me to be here and be training with him.”

Not every player brings the same level of determination and commitment to their workouts, of course, but Goodman has recognized Dylan Strome as a candidate to be his next star pupil.



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“He's decided after Worlds he's coming back and staying (in Chicago),” Goodman said. “When Dylan (was traded) here, I could see where I could fit in and help right away because I could see how he skates. You could see he plays with a shorter stick and so I asked him about that. He ends up being a lacrosse player. I

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“Ultimately, you’re going to see whether or not these guys are flourishing and catapulting up. That’s the excitement you generate each offseason. It’s like what else can we do? How else can we get you better? With Dylan coming in ... I’m going to give him everything I have. And I’m not saying other people haven’t, but I am going to absolutely make sure he gets to his potential as quickly as he can. That’s ultimately what I want.”

What Goodman doesn’t want is to force players to do anything. He said he doesn’t track the offseason workouts of players, nor does he want to.

“It’s got to be organic,” he said. “I really feel that when we work with athletes if we make them do something it’s not as enjoyable as when they want to do something. You can’t lead a horse to water and make them drink. You want to make them want to drink.”

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