

Performance Training Center Magazine: Interview With Matt Hauck, “PTC’s First Athlete”

Here’s an interview with Performance Training Center athlete, employee, and former intern Matt Hauck. Matt is currently studying Exercise Science at Western Oregon University.

PTCM: First off, thanks for taking the time from your busy school and work schedule to do this interview. Why don’t you start off by giving us some information on your athletic background and what your collegiate football experience was like?

Matt Hauck: I have enjoyed playing sports since I was 4 or 5 years old. I have a somewhat diverse athletic background, as I played hockey, soccer (indoors and out) basketball and football in grade school. This doesn’t include the recreational bike riding, swimming, tree-climbing and wrestling that regularly occurred as well. I played on recreational teams with all of my school friends, so I associated sports with friends, and thus with having fun. The level of diversity in my sports changed in high school as I focused on football and took up track and field. Football was life, and I only ran track to improve my football playing ability, but I quickly became fascinated with the athleticism of elite level sprinters.

The football team I played on in high school did not win many games. In fact, during my three years on varsity, the team managed to win a total of 5 games. I was very passionate about the game, and was a slightly above average player who lacked in size but made up for it in speed and strength. Because of how high school football ended, I was not ready to just hang up the pads and call it a career. I was set on playing college ball anywhere I could, which turned out to be the local D-1AA university.

Being from a smaller school and playing on below average teams, getting the chance to play at a big time school was a dream come true. I started to train with Mark McLaughlin at the end of high school before heading to college, so I was physically better prepared and more confident in my ability to play at that level. My strength was mediocre compared to the other players on the team, but my speed was to the point where I was among the very fastest players on the field (the second fastest overall, to be exact). Though I had the tools to contribute to the team, I wasn’t going to do my share as a 5’9” 168 pound safety. In hindsight I know that

playing as a slot receiver would have been a better fit for me because of my size, speed and playing ability. This is a lesson I wish I would have learned much sooner.

Playing as a safety in this program, there was plenty of talent in front of me on the depth chart. Needless to say, I wasn't being worked into the rotation anytime soon. My positional coach gave me my options after spring ball, and I decided that I would transfer instead of sitting on the bench for four years. A local D-II school provided the perfect opportunity to play.

When I transferred I went from being out of position at safety to being out of position at corner. By this time I had gained a bit of weight, and with the training I was doing with Mark, my strength numbers were through the roof. Even with the size, strength and speed I had, it took me a long time to get adjusted to playing CB. I was an offensive player trying to switch myself into a defensive mentality. It was a recipe for disaster, or in my case, retirement.

PTCM: Why did you stop playing college football?

MH: To this day, this is the hardest decision I have ever made. My life was football. The way I ate, slept, trained and lived was for football. I transferred schools for educational purposes as well, but playing football only sweetened the deal. The experience I was going through at the D-II school was nightmarish for a few basic reasons. First and foremost, I did not perform well at cornerback and my progress was very slow. I was still shaking off the rust from the time I was not playing football during the period of transferring. Physically, I was as strong and fast as ever, but I was not able to re-teach myself the motor patterns of a CB as quickly as I wanted to. My positional coach was very supportive of me keeping after it, trying to push me to keep getting better. These failures led me into a destructive psychological state. I saw my failures on the field as failures in life.

The tactical side of my performance was only the beginning of it. My physical conditioning was drastically deteriorating as well due to the insane demands of the weightlifting and conditioning sessions put on by the program. I knew what they were making us do was not going to make us any faster, stronger or more fit. Unfortunately, we had no choice but to do these things to "improve our mental toughness."

I would say the last straw for me was when I scheduled a meeting with our offensive coordinator/strength coach to discuss opportunities to improve our off-season program and help the team make a huge competitive step forward. During this meeting I was looked in the eye by the coach and told that they (the

coaches) knew that these conditioning and training sessions weren't as efficient as they could be, but that they were interested in developing "mentally tough" football players to represent (insert head coach's name here)'s football program at our university. I was looked in the eye and told that the head coach's image as the leader of the program was more important than the physical improvement of the team.

It just happened to be a coincidence in their eyes that after weeks of this training that myself and many other players became too sick to attend their boot-camp sessions. I was no exception as my health became very poor. My immune system was shot, I was hypertensive with bouts of anxiety, I was losing weight and appetite, and psychologically was a wreck. Attending these sessions felt to me as if I was being forced to swallow poison. I saw no light at the end of the tunnel and felt that I could not physically or psychologically put up with it any longer. I think that ending up in the emergency room of the local hospital after having suffered a cardiac episode at the age of 20 was proof enough for me that I had to make that decision. It was a very dark time in my life.

PTCM: Tell us about your major, Exercise Science, and what influences persuaded you to move toward this as a career goal.

MH: I am lucky enough to have the nation's best supplemental education available in the field through my ties to Mark at Performance Training Center. I chose to major in Exercise Science after Mark and his family effectively "showed me the light" in athletics and performance training. Though it was Mark who introduced me to the vast field of Exercise Science, it was the hardships I experienced as a football player dealing with my coaches that keeps me motivated to get deeper into and be successful in the field. I see and hear about coaches every week who, of course, know it all when it comes to their team's performance, yet almost none of them have ever opened up a physiology textbook or heard the words "training macrocycles." I am in this field to bust it wide open so that the misinformation and the status quo are done away with. Heaven forbid a coach have a chip on his shoulder AND an exercise physiology background.

PTCM: You were the first athlete to train at Performance Training Center. What do you remember about that first year of training?

MH: The first year of training was eye opening and frustrating. Mark helped me discover the vast complexity of training – a complexity that grows every time I read a training manual or converse with Mark about training methods. Mark taught me how to treat my body like a Ferrari and not a field plow. He taught me how to be smart about training and about taking care of myself. Looking back, the methods we used back then are primitive compared to the methods being

implemented now. I think that aside from all the physical gains I made, the most valuable asset I have gained is the asset of knowledge. That is what was the most remarkable part of the first year was for me – I wasn't just getting stronger, I knew why I was getting stronger and that I was going to keep getting stronger. That is a scary combination of performance and confidence.

PTCM: How did the Omegawave influence your training? Were you skeptical at first of its effectiveness in guiding the training process?

MH: For those who use it, the Omegawave has almost a cult-like following. This is no exaggeration! It's not like we are bowing and chanting to it like a true cult (like, say, SPARQ), but all users are very much in awe of its value. The Omegawave and I didn't see eye to eye very much in the beginning because it didn't feel that I was ready to start training for several months, whereas I felt ready to start right then and there. The Omegawave, as it turns out, was dead on. The one time I decided to just train anyway, the next test I took revealed the stupidity of my decision as I became just a little more out of whack. From the training prescriptions given by the Omegawave, I finally got back to a homeostatic state that didn't see my sympathetic nervous system taking full charge of operations. I was seriously overreaching sympathetically for several months, and with the help of the Omegawave testing and manipulation of the training prescription, I got back on track and better than ever.

PTCM: Were you able to use the Omegawave this summer during your internship? What are a few things that make this system effective for training athletes?

MH: I was lucky enough to continue using the Omegawave this summer through the internship. What makes the system effective in the training process is that if you understand the demands of a given sport, you can test an athlete to get a snapshot of their current biological power and determine: 1) what biological powers are lacking and 2) what training zones/intensities must be implemented to improve these qualities. If you have an understanding of how to program training to improve certain biological power qualities, the Omegawave is the ultimate training feedback partner. It tells you what parameters the individual athlete being tested needs to train within to develop or maintain specific qualities. How amazing is that?

PTCM: A lot of people have a negative outlook on Exercise Science degrees here in the United States. What is your take on this?

MH: People may think my response to this question is a bit overdone, which is fine. I am very passionate about this field. The negative outlook people have on

this field is partially due to lack of knowledge about it. People also used to believe that only White Anglo-Saxon Protestants should be allowed to own land and vote in America, and that the sun revolved around the earth (which was also believed to be flat, or square). They don't like our field because they don't understand it. Some people who don't like our field feel this way because they are too stubborn or lazy to change their paradigm. That's fine. The field will move on without them. And when we do, we won't have room for them to hitch back on when they see the light.

PTCM: Based on what you've learned, elaborate a little bit on why the cardiac system is a vital component in preparation for team sport athletes.

MH: I currently see training, in terms of performance efficiency, as beginning and ending with the heart. You can have the best biomechanist and the fanciest weight room in the world, but you can only get so far without properly addressing the cardiac system. Since there are lots of us who like to compare things to cars, I'll put it as simply as I can: the heart is the fuel pump of the body. You can use rocket fuel and have the best power steering, but that means very little without a constant and efficient fuel delivery system. What is remarkable is the reality that I have seen athletes who have great musculature and decent strength levels, but because their cardiac system is poorly developed they take much longer to recover from training bouts and sessions because their myocardium is thickened and/or weak. I personally have seen tremendous benefits from working to increase my cardiac output and aerobic capacity. My fitness level is much higher and I am able to recover more completely from training.

Think about the high demands of practices and games of team sports. Being able to recover more efficiently from these games and practices is paramount. If you can't recover, you begin digging a hole for yourself that's not easy to climb out from. When recovery fails, performance stumbles. Give yourself a key tool to recovery – an efficient cardiac system.

PTCM: This past summer you did an internship at Performance Training Center. Could you elaborate on some of the highlights?

MH: I have been fortunate enough to spend a lot of time around PTC in its various stages and versions. Any time I get to be back in Portland and see Mark is time well spent, so an internship under his direction was a very natural fit. I would say one of the highlights was learning and working with Landon Evans. Landon has spent time working at the collegiate level in strength and conditioning and is educated and certified in the same field I am in. I see him as several steps ahead of me in the same journey. He has the Masters, the

certification and the experience that I hope to have in a few years time. He also has a unique personality that encourages me to always take the next step in my education inside and outside of the classroom.

Another highlight of the summer was being able to work with Kevin Boss. I had the pleasure of calling him a teammate for one season, and have seen him reach his potential on the field in the NFL. Though Mark and Landon spent much time together planning his training progressions and diet plans, I was allowed to direct a handful of his training sessions. Though what I was doing was being a glorified assistant to Mark and Landon, being able to work hands on with an athlete like Kevin was a tremendous honor. He is a professional athlete with great physical capabilities and a head firmly attached to his shoulders. It was a rare privilege that I don't hesitate to brag about.

It may sound very cliché but the internship itself was a true privilege. There are a very select few college students who had access to the research and information made available to me at PTC. Not only did I have access to training manuscripts and textbooks, but I also was able to communicate with some of the best in the industry. Reading freshly translated works directly from Dr. Verkhoshansky was a great honor and opportunity, as was meeting and conversing with Val Nasedkin of Omegawave.

PTCM: Being a senior in college and having completed an internship, is there any advice you would give underclassmen looking to get into this field?

MH: Get a good background in the basics. I spent a lot of time relearning basic anatomy and physiology concepts during my internship. I wanted to better understand the systems of the body and how the body made changes to deal with stress. This was a great asset for me when I took my Physiology of Exercise class because I knew how to connect the concepts that my professor was teaching. Know your anatomy as well; kinesiology does pay off when you are designing training movements.

With all due respect to the educators of the universities in our country, our Exercise Science (and all sub-disciplines) programs only go so far. Don't rely on what your professors are saying to be the only thing you'll ever need to know about exercise. Ask very specific questions about what you want to know. Ask how you should train a specific type of athlete and then ask why they should be trained that way. When you are given an answer, investigate it for yourself. This brings me to my next point that supplementing your education with individual studies is the best thing you can do. Network with people like Mark and Landon and ask them what books to read or where to look for information. If there is a training seminar in your region, find a way to get there and network some more.

Don't be satisfied with a degree being proof that you know everything about exercise. I'll have that degree this spring, and though I know a great deal, there are still an infinite amount of questions that I would like to have answered about training.

PTCM: What are some of your goals for 2009?

MH: First and foremost is doing well in school and graduating this spring. I am ready to start the next chapter in my life beyond undergraduate work. My second goal will be to get an idea of the path I will take to progress my knowledge. I need to decide if I need more hands-on experience before I pursue grad school, or if I need to keep on schooling while I can.

Performance Training center provides high-level sport performance training to both male and female athletes. Since January 2004, PTC's primary purpose has been the optimization of the physical and psychological potential of each individual athlete we train. Through a comprehensive utilization of concrete scientific data, PTC focuses on the long-term development of each athlete in order to prevent overtraining and injury, while simultaneously ensuring peak performance. PTC has trained over 400 athletes on every competitive level. Our clients include Olympic, professional, college, high school and grade school athletes. Additionally, PTC specializes in coordinating programs with high school and university sport coaches. For more information, visit our website at www.ptconline.net