West Ham United and the Premier League

- West Ham United is a premier league club located in East London, as with all premier league clubs it is a highly prestigious, competitive and scrutinised environment.
- Interpersonal dynamics are especially important with players and staff both within West Ham and the football world.
- Due to a challenging season in 2017-18 where many of the matches were spent battling relegation, a new manager was appointed to change the club’s direction.
- By the time I arrived at the club, 11 new players had been signed and an entirely new coaching staff and Head of Medical had been brought in.

Role and Professional Development

Initially my role was simple, but still crucial to the training week. As I proved my competence and gained the trust of the staff and players my role was expanded to include:

- Being responsible preparation and delivery of all nutritional supplementation and training drinks, weighing the players every morning and managing the spreadsheet of bodyweights to track changes.
- Monitoring and running a section of the team gym sessions. Typically this would involve coaching players through a pair of exercises in a larger circuit.
- Designing and delivering a supplementary strength and conditioning programme for one of the players.
- Leading the pre training activation of one of the players, and leading or assisting with the delivery of football drills within the session.
- Taking players for one to one sessions in the gym when required.
- Assisting in the force testing of players and their rehab on return from injury.

Challenges Presented

- The authority to force changes lies only with the manager. This means that the medical staff are responsible for delivering interventions but must use persuasion as the primary mechanism.
- Finding the balance between having the players respect but also being able to respond to their ‘banter’ is therefore crucial.
- A combination of player attitude and pressure from higher-ups mean that ‘best practice’ is rarely possible.
- Everything is of secondary importance to getting 3 points on the Saturday because at season’s end one point or even one goal difference can impact a club’s future for several years.

Academic Development

Due to the nature of the environment, I was rarely challenged academically as a result of my role. However I did learn a great deal from the exceptionally knowledgeable medical team.

- I was regularly involved and invited to participate in scientific discussions on a variety of topics from skill acquisition, the nature of football for a player, gameplay, injury prevention and rehab as well as general strength and conditioning.
- In such a challenging environment, the translation from best theoretical practice into what is reasonably physically achievable is significant and takes a great deal of thought.
- They have clearly represented a practical application of the theory learned at university, which I believe, is the main purpose of the placement year.

Further Advancement

- Upon completion of the Premier League season I was invited back to train the new interns and to help run the preseason training.
- I also was able to secure a summer placement working with the English Institute of Sport, coaching the GB Rowing Team in strength and conditioning.
- At the start of this year, myself and a fellow student set up a Sports Science Department at Bracknell Town Football Club.
- My research question for my dissertation was also formulated in discussions with the medical department.