

Backstage

Dorian Dugmore

Head of the Fit to Manage plan targeting heart disease in sport

The death of Marc-Vivien Foé last month highlighted the need for a change in attitude to heart-related health issues. If the loss of the Cameroon player was to prompt one thing, I hope it would be mandatory testing throughout a player's career. Nobody could guarantee that every abnormality would be found, but at least there's a better chance.

As the director of Wellness International at the Adidas UK headquarters in Hazel Grove, I oversee the Fit to Manage programme targeted at preventing heart disease in the corporate world.

John Barnwell, chief executive of the League Managers' Association, tried it himself and signed up the whole membership. It began last July with 30 participants and we now have 50, with several more joining.

My speciality is cardiovascular medicine, but I'm also no stranger to the stresses football bosses experience: I spent 17 years as a senior coach for the Football Association, and had a team in a post-Falklands World Student Games where we played Argentina in a quarter-final, winning 1-0 with a disputed penalty. The pressures I faced during that match alone were immense.

So many managers probably started out as players, with a high level of sport-related fitness. Suddenly they find, week in, week out, they're under the media microscope. If they're at the smaller clubs, their job can mean anything from taking on new players to dealing with accounts. With all the demands on their time, looking after themselves gets forgotten, and this may lead to heart problems and related illness.

An ounce of prevention is better than a ton of aftercare, and that's the message we're trying to get across through Fit to Manage. Making the right changes — including regular moderate aerobic

exercise, a low-fat diet, handling stress correctly and stopping smoking — helps to offset the risk of a heart attack by as much as 30-40%.

Fit to Manage is rolled out at intervals throughout the year, but the summer months are the ideal time to get into good shape and be able to cope with demands of a season.

The guys spend up to three-quarters of a day with us. First we carry out a full lifestyle assessment: from family history of heart trouble to how many hours they spend working.

Then their resting metabolism is measured: lung function, blood fats, body fat, resting electrocardiograms and other tests. They'll go from those to pushing themselves to maximum exhaustion on a treadmill, where we check their heart's performance and oxygen levels.

After recovery, we spend a couple of hours talking over our findings, and passing on individually tailored exercise, nutrition and lifestyle guidance.

It doesn't end there: today's medicine is about what happens between visits to the doctor. And our Wellness coaches carry out follow-ups every month because our primary concern is to mentor and track those on Fit to Manage. Everything will be measured again mid-year and at the 12-month point, and it rolls on like that.



Dr Dorian Dugmore at work at the Adidas centre in Stockport Photograph: Don McPhee