

A Purdue Fitness Guru Packs Heavy for Road Trips

By RACHEL BACHMAN

When the Purdue men's basketball team travels, Josh Bonhotal is its behind-the-scenes Superman. As the Bollemakers' director of sports performance, his job is to keep every player fueled, rested and energized.

The team typically flies charter out of Purdue University Airport, so the 32-year-old Mr. Bonhotal can pack heavy.

He takes as many as four bags on longer trips. If the Bollemakers, ranked 15th in the latest Associated

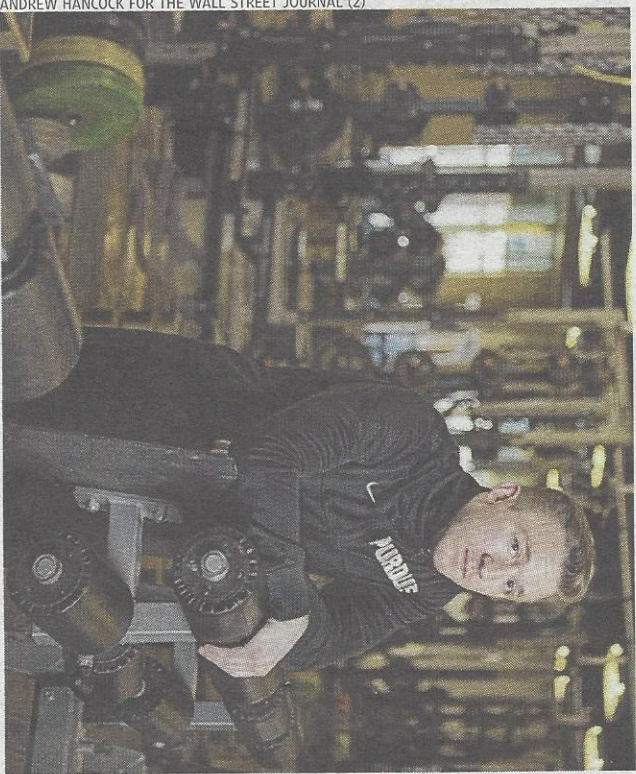
Press poll, keeps winning, he can book another business trip to the NCAA tournament later in March.

On the plane he gives each player a bag full of snacks, such as grass-fed beef jerky, nuts and applesauce in a squeeze pouch—"what you would give a 5- or 6-year-old, but it's perfect for the road." He wants players eating nutrient-rich foods rather than candy or chips.

Mr. Bonhotal's main job is to design strength and conditioning workouts to keep Purdue's wide range of players—from 5-foot-10 to 7-foot-2—in top form and even getting stronger over the season. He designs regimens depending on a player's experience, strength and current health.

Athletes who get less playing time typically go through lengthier workouts in the hotel fitness room the night before a game. Players who play more minutes do a shorter workout the day of a game, either at the hotel or at the arena, if it has a weight room. Mr. Bonhotal will have players do kettlebell

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Purdue's Josh Bonhotal travels with: 1) exercise bands 2) jump rope 3) furniture sliders for floor-bound ab workouts 4) PVC pipe for massage 5) protein powder 6) energy waffles 7) beetroot juice 8) portable motor and connecting air hose to go with 9) a Normatec massage unit 10) tart cherry juice 11) complex-carbohydrate bars and 12) powder 13) massage sticks.

swings or squats with weights. The goal is to warm their muscles and get their blood pumping.

"A lot of times it can calm some anxiety that can be associated with a big game," he says. "You get in the player's ear and talk to him about, 'You're doing more to prepare right now than your opponent is.'"

Mr. Bonhotal rides the bus with players to the arena, then hands out equipment they can use to start or continue warming up. Some jump rope. Others do plank-style abdominal exercises using repurposed plastic discs typically used to help furniture slide across the floor. Some use resistance

bands to work muscles or stretch out. About an hour before tipoff, Mr. Bonhotal mixes a concoction made with a lower-calorie and lower-sugar type of Gatorade, beetroot juice and a complex-carbohydrate powder called UCana—fuel for the three or four hours between warm-ups and games end. A handful of players don't like the taste. He says he tells them it will help maintain energy and "they'll just chug it."

Mr. Bonhotal helps players stretch out their muscles. He lays out special massage sticks with rollers designed for working out knots. Instead of bulky foam rollers, he brings two smaller lengths of PVC pipe that players can

use to massage and loosen larger muscle areas. He can slide the sticks into the PVC pipes to fit them into his bag. Mr. Bonhotal wears a Purdue warm-up suit as he races around the arena tending to player needs. With 10 minutes until tipoff, he rushes to the locker room.

"That's when I've got to do my Clark Kent and get in the telephone booth and throw my suit on really quick," he says.

He developed a taste for Hugo Boss suits while working with the Chicago Bulls several years ago and keeps an eye open for sales. He sits on Purdue's bench during games and is visible on

TV.

"I try to use it to express a little of my personality and express different types of looks," he says, including a recent charcoal suit and black shirt.

After the game, Mr. Bonhotal hands out drinks he mixes of Gatorade and protein powder, along with tart cherry juice to help speed the recovery process.

"Cherry juice is an antioxidant, so it's going to help with things like decreasing inflammation, minimizing muscle breakdown that is going to lead to feelings of soreness," he says. In a long basketball season, "what it comes down to is player availability."