

Pies hope to fly high with altitude room

By Michael Gleeson

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Collingwood has built a \$100,000 altitude training room to capitalise on its two-week high-altitude training camp in Arizona it believes can deliver up to 5 per cent improvement on performance and lengthen the careers of its players.

Long accused of living high, Collingwood has now embraced the notion with not only the US trip but the construction of the innovative room at the Lexus Centre. The altitude room, which thins the air inside, has been built to harness the fitness gains achieved by the two-week training camp in the US.

But while the team is expected to achieve a slight improvement in performance from the trip to Flagstaff, Arizona, those gains would be lost within two months - and certainly before next season begins - if not for the construction of the altitude room.

The room, believed to be a first for an AFL club, accommodates up to six players at a time on treadmills and exercise bikes. Players have already begun using the room to acclimatise before leaving for Arizona but the prime benefit will be achieved when the team returns.

Fitness and conditioning coach David Buttifant, who used altitude training extensively when working with Olympic athletes through the AIS in the lead up to the 2000 Olympics before joining Collingwood, said altitude training could deliver 2 to 5 per cent improvements in performance.

"Finishing 15th we want to do everything we possibly can to get an advantage and to maximise our performance," Buttifant said.

The room and the changed training regime could potentially lengthen the career of captain Nathan Buckley by enabling him to achieve the aerobic benefits of a hard pre-season without exacting the same physical toll on the body.

It would also assist a player such as Alan Didak who suffered leg stress injuries last pre-season when trying to build his aerobic fitness levels to enable him to play in the midfield. By working in the altitude room Didak could theoretically do less work - with less strain on his body - and still achieve the improvements to his running capacity to move up the ground.

"One of the advantages of going to altitude is it creates more physiological stress but without doing the mechanical workload. So it creates stress on your body when you go to altitude and when you come back that is when you get the gains which will help performance," Buttifant said.

"You hold those adaptations for a few weeks, up to five weeks, then they start to drop off, however we have an altitude room which we are able to use to maintain these adaptations throughout the season.

"The training camp complements the room - going to altitude and coming back and having the ability to be able to retain a lot of those training characteristics is a huge advantage.

"We are looking at between 2 to 5 per cent change in performance . . . at the elite level 2 per cent is significant.

"If you look at the 2000 Olympic Games 10,000 metres when Haile Gebrselassie won the gold medal, from first to fourth place was .08 per cent difference in time. So it is less than 1 per cent between winning gold and not getting a medal.

"If we can get 2 to 5 per cent changes they are significant changes in performance."

The Magpies players and coaching staff leave tomorrow for the two-week training camp at Flagstaff, Arizona, which is at an altitude of 2200 metres.

They will do a range of cross-training, bike riding and trekking, including hiking to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and back - as well as ball work on the soccer fields and at the Superdome.