



SPORTS / EXERCISE / FITNESS

## A Comprehensive Guide to Becoming a Sports DC

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In this article, let's explore common questions posed by students, interns and licensed chiropractors aiming to provide specialized care to athletes. These insights are based on consultations with head athletic trainers and chiropractors from NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, and MLS teams; as well as input from around 1,000 university sports medicine staff members nationwide.

In the context of professional sports, chiropractors play an integral role within sports medicine teams, demonstrating a substantial presence across various leagues. Notably, chiropractors are engaged by an impressive 90% of professional sports teams.

Within the NFL, all 32 teams have chiropractors on their staff, followed by the NHL, where all 31 teams include DCs. The MLS exhibits a 75% adoption rate, with 18 of 24 teams incorporating chiropractors, while the MLB and NBA report 97% (29 of 30 teams) and 80% (24 of 30 teams) utilization rates, respectively.

Shifting our attention to collegiate and university sports medicine staff, among the 1,100 institutions surveyed during the 2019-2020 season, only 238 have integrated DCs into their teams. As such, there exist numerous opportunities for us to collaborate.

### Becoming a Chiropractor for Athletes

*Obtain the necessary qualifications:* Complete your chiropractic education and obtain your license. Some chiropractic interns have prior experience as certified athletic trainers, which is advantageous.

*Gain experience and expertise:* Develop specialized skills in sports-related chiropractic care. Consider additional certifications or postgraduate programs, focusing on biomechanics, rehabilitation and nutrition. Proficiency in spinal and extremity manipulation is essential.

*Network and build relationships:* Attend sports medicine conferences, seminars and workshops to

connect with professionals in the field. Join relevant local, state, national and international organizations to expand your network and stay updated on industry trends.

*Volunteer and gain practical experience:* Offer your services to local sports teams or events to gain valuable experience working with athletes.

*Build a strong reputation:* Provide exceptional care to patients, athletes or otherwise, to establish a positive reputation in the community. Word-of-mouth recommendations can be instrumental in securing opportunities with sports teams.

#### Getting in With Sports Medicine Staff

*Research the team and its staff:* Understand the sports medicine department's structure and key decision-makers' preferences for chiropractic care.

*Network strategically:* Connect with professionals in sports medicine, attend industry events, seek mentorship opportunities, and build alliances with experienced practitioners.

*Leverage your online presence:* Establish a professional online presence through a website, blog and/or social media platforms. Share valuable content related to sports chiropractic care to attract sports medicine professionals.

#### Effective Communication With Staff

When approaching a sports team's medical staff, communicate your qualifications, experience and commitment effectively. Tailor your message to the team's specific needs.

*Emphasize sports chiropractic expertise:* Highlight your specialized training and experience in providing chiropractic care to athletes.

*Showcase relevant experience:* Share your track record working with athletes, including previous teams or events you've treated.

*Promote a collaborative approach:* Express your willingness to work collaboratively with other sports medicine professionals to ensure comprehensive athlete care.

*Diversify your skillset:* Consider offering various treatment modalities, including dry needling, acupuncture, cupping, and soft-tissue techniques, in addition to spinal and extremity manipulation.

#### Special Certifications and Training

While not always mandatory, specialized certifications or training in sports chiropractic can enhance your prospects of working with sports teams. Consider credentials like Certified Chiropractic Sports Physician (CCSP) or Diplomate of the American Chiropractic Board of Sports Physicians (DACBSP) to demonstrate your commitment.

#### Compensation Considerations

Compensation for working with athletes varies based on factors such as team level, experience and specific arrangements. Charging competitive fees, ranging from \$100 to \$500 per treatment, is reasonable, structured through insurance billing, cash payments or a combination.

Avoid providing services for free, as it can diminish your value. Athletes invest significantly in their well-being, and your reputation is at stake. A yearly stipend, ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000,

depends on time commitment and treatment quantity. Evaluate the balance between time spent away from your office and earnings.

### Key Contacts

Identify the primary contact within a sports team's hierarchy, typically the head athletic trainer or sports medicine director. Networking with professionals already involved in sports medicine can facilitate introductions and help navigate the team's hierarchy effectively.

### Take-Home Points

Becoming a sports chiropractor for high-school, college or professional teams requires specialized training, practical experience, strategic networking, and effective communication. By following these steps and strategies, you can enhance your chances of joining a sports medicine staff and contribute to athletes' well-being and performance in the competitive sports arena.

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