

Have you ever said, “I *almost* had it”?

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Have you ever been inches away from the game-winning catch? Or needed just a centimeter or two for that score or blocked shot? Did you ever feel that your throw or kick just needed to be a little harder, a little faster?

There is no magic formula to make those things happen, but a thorough stretching program might make that difference. Stretching is an activity that many athletes and weekend athletes overlook. Your coach and trainer tell you to do it before practice and games, but why? How can it actually *improve* your game?

By placing the joints in your body in stretched positions, over time, you increase the length of muscles and tendons that make those joints work and move. As a result, range of motion of that joint is increased. By increasing the range of motion, you increase the *distance* the limb or joint can move. For example, the quadriceps and hip flexor muscles in front of the leg, and hamstrings in back of the leg are put under a strain when performing a kicking or jumping movement. The more flexible and pliable those muscles become, the farther the leg can travel producing a harder, more powerful kick or jump.

If you need to sprint and speed is important, you want a *long* stride length, not a short one. Watch any film of great sprinters and look how their legs reach at each stride. Check out the pictures of the arm, shoulder and trunk flexibility of any great athlete during a throw. They produce tremendous speed and power with great *range of motion*. They had to stretch consistently to get that flexible and look at the results!

Talk with your trainer, coach or a physical therapist to develop a safe, proper, sport-specific, individualized stretching routine. Stick to it and you can kick harder, throw farther, and run faster!