

GETTING A JOB IN SPORTS NUTRITION (*and keeping it!*)

Professor Graeme Close offers his advice on getting your foot in the sports nutrition door and keeping it firmly there



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How do I get a job in sports nutrition?" is one of the most frequent questions I'm asked, especially by students and young practitioners. I am very lucky that I have spent almost 30 years immersed in professional sports as a player, researcher and a practitioner. So here are my top seven tips for getting a job in this fascinating, challenging and unique world.

1. GET PROPERLY QUALIFIED (AND GET A MENTOR)

It may seem obvious but many fall short at this first hurdle. Most jobs in professional and Olympic sports require an MSc in Sports Nutrition alongside a BSc in either sports science, nutrition or dietetics. Also a good mentor is crucial, find one carefully, treat them well and cling on to them tightly.

2. GET ACCREDITED

Once you have the correct academic qualifications then it is essential that you become accredited. I firmly believe the most important accreditation is the Sport and Exercise Nutrition Register (SENr). This is quickly becoming the license to practice sport nutrition in professional and Olympic sport in the UK. Other helpful accreditations are to be a UK Anti-Doping Advisor, ISAK Level 1 in Anthropometry, and Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene.

3. GET EXPERIENCE

Once you are qualified and accredited it's vital that you begin to build some practical experience. Many MSc courses now offer placements as part of the course which allow you to gain applied experience alongside traditional academic teaching. A common mistake made by many young practitioners is to only look for work in their desired sport; take a broad approach and be prepared to kiss a few frogs before you find your prince!

4. BE WILLING TO GET STUCK IN

Make the most of every opportunity and don't be scared of rolling up your sleeves! You are never too qualified to do the basics. Don't get stuck in an office, make sure you are seen on the training field. Offer to help other departments within the sports science team (bring in equipment, help out in the gym, tidy up). Make yourself invaluable to the department. If you get a foot in the front door, do what you can to get the rest of your body in!

5. UNDERSTAND THE SPORT AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

A strong understanding of the physiology of the sport and the culture of the sport are essential to good practice. Without understanding the physiology you can't put appropriate interventions into place and without understanding the culture your interventions won't be adhered to.

It's also crucial to build relationships within the team and this takes time. When you first go into a new environment invest time in observing the current practices and ask questions to better understand the 'why' and not just the 'what'.

Where possible, try and get an 'easy win' – something that you can quickly improve but will make a real difference. For example, tweaking a game-day nutrition routine, improved signage in the changing rooms or a better structure to the supplement regime. By adding some immediate value you have a much better chance of being accepted as part of the support team.

6. BE REFLECTIVE AND MANAGE YOUR TIME WELL

You don't learn from experiences, you learn from reflecting upon experiences. Take a notebook everywhere with you – not only is this practical for note taking it also demonstrates a desire to learn. Use the notepad to make some notes about your experiences then reflect on these at the end of each day. Engage your mentor with this reflection by talking through the scenarios. Time management is also an important skill. Try and get some structure to your day by planning your work in advance and setting yourself some daily goals.

7. GROW YOUR NETWORK AND STAY HUMBLE

Sports nutrition is a very small world and everyone knows everyone. Your challenge is to get to know them and get them to know you! Grow your network by attending appropriate conferences, asking questions and engaging with others during breakout sessions. Don't be afraid to email people and ask for advice. Also keep an eye out for the English Institute of Sport's *Skills 4 Performance* programme which is an intensive week of practitioner development.

Finally, stay humble. If you do land that dream job, remember that when a team wins it is not down to you and likewise when they lose it is not down to you. We are a small (yet important) cog in a big machine. ●



BLOG

This article is an adaptation from Professor Graeme Close's blog visit closenutrition.com