

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR NAP TIME

By Dan McCarthy

<https://www.usaswimming.org/articles-landing-page/2017/02/01/getting-the-most-out-of-your-nap-time>

Much has been made of Northwestern's return to the world of relevant college football the last two seasons. Coach Pat Fitzgerald has brought an innovative offense and better recruiting to the Wildcats, but he has also paid attention to physiological details, like sleep.

In a recent article in the New York Times, 'Caught Napping' Can Be a Positive by Steven Braid (September 17, 2013), Fitzgerald's emphasis on quality sleep and the importance of taking naps is chronicled. Indeed, naps are now mandatory on game days.

Sleep is the time when the body recovers from the stresses loaded upon it, and the repair of muscle and connective tissue begins. Naps are an excellent tool for athletes in training and on game day as well. Below are a few tips to help get the most out of your nap time.

- Napping between 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. seems to be the most beneficial. For most, napping later than 4 p.m. can interfere with a good night's sleep
- A Power Nap (10-20 minutes) can increase energy and alertness, but doesn't provide enough time to enter into the deeper stage of sleep.
- A 90 minute nap will take you through a full cycle of sleep, including REM sleep (dreaming). A nap of this length usually leaves the athlete refreshed and "ready to go" upon waking.
- A 30 minute nap may not be the best choice. It's too short to provide any curative benefits, but long enough to cause grogginess upon waking.
- An hour-long nap has some restorative benefits, but may leave the athlete groggy as well.

It would be worthwhile to engage in a detailed athlete-coach discussion to create the most ideal nap schedule for each athlete. Managing double workouts, strength and conditioning sessions, and work or school obviously present challenges; however, the benefits of taking a short nap (or a long one) are too significant to ignore.