



Optimizing Rugby Performance: A Study on the Combined Effects of Resisted Inspiratory Muscle Exercise and Nordic Training

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<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijst.v2i3.049>

Cite this Article: Prajapati, Y., Taneja, (D.), Ranjeeta, (W.) & Sharma, D. R. (2026). Optimizing Rugby Performance: A Study on the Combined Effects of Resisted Inspiratory Muscle Exercise and Nordic Training. *International Journal of Science, Strategic Management and Technology*, 02(03).

<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijst.v2i3.049>

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ABSTRACT

Background: Athlete performance optimization in rugby is fundamental to the maximization of player potential and injury prevention. The present study examines the cumulative effects of resisted inspiratory muscle training and Nordic training on different performance parameters among male rugby players.

Methods: Experimental study design utilized with thirty male rugby players between 20 to 30 years of age, randomly divided into two groups: Group A (combined training) and Group B (control group). Group A received resisted inspiratory muscle exercises and Nordic training sessions thrice weekly for eight weeks, whereas Group B had their usual rugby training without any interventions. Performance measures, such as vertical jump test (VJT), one-repetition maximum (1 RM), and Yo-Yo Intermittent Recovery Test (YYIRT), were assessed at baseline and final study time.

Results: Group A exhibited statistically significant improvements in all the parameters of performance against Group B. Significantly, VJT values reported a highly significant rise ($t = -20.75$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating increased lower limb power. Improvement in 1 RM ($t = -18.17$, $p < 0.001$) and YYIRT ($t = -22.17$, $p < 0.001$) further testified to greater muscle strength and aerobic endurance in the combined training group.

Conclusion: The research concludes that the inclusion of resisted inspiratory muscle exercise and Nordic training in routine rugby training substantially improves athletic performance indices. The results



underscore the significance of creative training methods in eliciting strength, power, and endurance in rugby players with implications for future research into long-term consequences and wider applicability to various athletic groups.

Keywords: *Rugby, resisted inspiratory muscle exercise, Nordic training, athletic performance, strength, endurance, muscle power.*

INTRODUCTION

Resisted inspiratory muscle exercises (RIMs) significantly improve the strength and endurance of respiratory muscles and, thereby, enhance the performance of swimmers. Incorporating RIMs into their training program will enable swimmers to have increased lung capacity and efficiency that leads to better oxygen uptake during intense exercise. Sustaining performance is extremely important during longer races where endurance becomes critical. Strengthening the inspiratory muscles facilitates optimal breathing patterns in an athlete, allowing them to synchronize breaths with strokes so that drag is minimized and efficiency of their stroke is improved. RIMs also reduce the onset of respiratory muscle fatigue, enabling swimmers to swim for longer periods at more intense levels without feeling breathless. Additionally, better regulation of respiration gives the swimmer more control over his or her breathing in competition, improving concentration and general performance. Finally, incorporating resisted inspiratory muscle exercises into training enables swimmers to experience enhanced speed, endurance, and competence in swimming, making them an important element of their fitness program.

The hamstring muscle group comprises three prominent muscles at the back of the thigh: the biceps femoris, semitendinosus, and semimembranosus. They run from the pelvis down the back of the thigh to the bones of the lower leg, and each of them plays an essential role in various movements of the lower extremities. The hamstring muscles primarily help in flexion of the knee-essential functions during activities like running, cycling, and squatting, where the leg must be pulled back towards the body. These muscles also contribute to extension of the hip, an action used during standing up, climbing stairs, and jumping actions and more important in athletic movements involving powerful thrusts of the leg. These strong and flexible hamstrings are necessary for athletes competing in most sports, as they provide speed, agility, and general lower-body strength. On the other hand, hamstring injuries are one of the most prevalent sports injuries and can vary in severity from slight strains to a complete tear; the symptoms for this type of injury include pain, swelling, and bruising behind the thigh. Often rehabilitation of such injuries will involve a combination of rest, ice, compression, and the gradual return of movement and strengthening. In this respect, avoiding these types of injuries would also include regular exercise that helps one to maintain appropriate flexibility and strength of the hamstrings, typically with deadlifts, leg curls, and lunges. Overall, the hamstrings are essential not only for athletic performance but also for daily movements, and knowledge of their function and preservation can lead to better physical performance and a lower risk of injury.

The hamstrings are one of the major movers in the deadlift, another staple strength training exercise for working multiple muscles. Here is how they involve themselves in executing the movement:

1. Hip Extension:

As one deadlifts, the dominant movement is an extension of the hips as he pulls the barbell off the floor. The hamstrings are quite effective in their role, particularly when synergizing with the gluteus maximus, during hip extension. As the lifter drives into his heels and lifts his torso, the hamstrings contract to assist in pulling the pelvis forward, maintaining correct position and mechanics.



2. Knee Stability:

As the lifter initiates the deadlift, the hamstrings also help stabilize the knee joint. Although the primary function of the quadriceps is to extend the knee, the hamstrings are there to assist in the control of movement and prevent the knees from extending or collapsing too much during the lift, thereby aiding in overall stability.

3. Engagement of the Posterior Chain:

The deadlift is a compound movement, heavily engaging the posterior chain-the hamstrings, glutes, and lower back muscles. Well-developed hamstrings are very important for holding an effective posture throughout the lift, allowing the lifter to keep his or her back straight and avoid placing undue stress on the spinal column.

4. Force Generation:

As the lifter stands up from the deadlift, the hamstrings help in force generation. When the bar is lifted, the hamstrings pull the torso toward the bar, creating a more efficient lifting motion. This synergy between the hamstrings, glutes, and other muscle groups results in a powerful upward movement.

5. Eccentric Control:

During the lowering phase of the deadlift, the hamstrings are also used eccentrically. This simply means that they would assist in controlling how fast the bar descends due to gravity. Eccentric strength in the hamstrings is necessary for injury prevention and proper control of movement, thus needing it to maintain an intact lifting technique overall.

The hamstrings are vital for effective deadlifting, providing the necessary force, stability, and control throughout the lift. Strengthening the hamstrings through targeted exercises can enhance deadlift performance and reduce the risk of injury, making them an essential focus for anyone looking to improve their strength training regimen. Proper warm-up and conditioning of the hamstrings can also ensure optimal engagement during this foundational exercise.

The Nordic hamstring exercise is one of the more effective strength training and rehabilitation exercises for the hamstring muscles. Specifically, this type of exercise enhances eccentric strength or the force developed by a muscle as it elongates. One performs this exercise by being positioned on your hands and knees at a hip width distance on a cushioned surface where your feet must be pinned beneath a solid support or fastened down with someone holding you. Keep your torso upright and your body in a straight line from your knees to your shoulders. Slowly lean forward from your knees while maintaining control, lowering your body toward the ground. Aim to lower yourself as far as possible without breaking form, ideally until your chest is approaching the floor. Once you attain your maximum controlled position, you can use your hands to push off the ground or pull yourself back up using your hamstrings and glutes. You should do 3 to 4 sets of 5 to 10 repetitions, depending on your level of fitness, and make sure you rest sufficiently between sets. The Nordic hamstring exercise helps develop eccentric strength in the hamstrings, which is essential in the prevention of injury, particularly for sports requiring sprinting or changing direction rapidly. It's therefore an exercise beneficial for rehabilitation and athletic performance, but the execution should be appropriate to avoid straining, especially for the beginners.

Rugby is a highly demanding sport involving explosive power and prolonged endurance, and thus proper breathing is essential for controlling exertion and maximizing oxygen delivery. Resisted inspiratory muscle



training is important for improving rugby performance by increasing aerobic capacity, enabling players to sustain energy levels, especially during prolonged activity or after interruptions in play. Resisted inspiratory exercises also improve performance under pressure, allowing players to remain calm and make more informed decisions during critical situations. It also facilitates faster recovery between plays, allowing players to re-enter the game effectively. To incorporate these advantages, rugby players must include resisted inspiratory exercises in their training sessions two to three times a week with the help of breathing resistance devices. In addition to breathing effectiveness, lower limb strength is important in rugby for sprinting, tackling, and quick changes of direction. Nordic training, and specifically hamstrings, improves tackling skills by allowing players to remain upright when in contact, maximizing speed and acceleration for both attacking and defensive moves. In addition, the eccentric strength gained from Nordic exercises avoids hamstring injuries, which are prevalent because of sprinting and sudden stops, and also keeps muscle strength in the legs in balance. To reap these benefits to the fullest, Nordic curls must be added to lower body strength training at least once a week with proper technique to reduce the risk of injury. When combined, resisted inspiratory muscle training and Nordic exercises result in notable improvements in overall fitness, enabling players to perform key rugby skills more efficiently. This combination improves cardiovascular fitness, muscular strength, and endurance, which enables athletes to sustain high levels of performance throughout the game. With improved breath control and reduced body strength, players enhance sprinting, tackling, and positional play, ultimately enhancing team performance. Also, enhanced endurance guarantees continuous energy and lowered exhaustion, enabling players to be as effective to the last whistle. By embracing both resisted inspiratory muscle training and Nordic training, rugby players can help maximize their physical potential, enhancing speed, endurance, and tackling skill while reducing injury chances. All these types of trainings are critical towards long-term success in a contact sport such as rugby.

For rugby, strengthening the hamstrings is crucial for optimal performance, particularly in the squat and deadlift. Here are several effective hamstring strengthening exercises that can be beneficial for deadlifters.

Romanian deadlifts

The Romanian deadlift is one of the best exercises that will definitely help target the hamstrings, glutes, and lower back in strength training, thus a basic movement to be included in this workout. Find a stance standing with feet hip-width apart, holding a barbell or dumbbells in front of the thighs. Bend at the hips, keeping a bit of bend in knees, and then swing the weights along the front of legs. Keep your back straight throughout the exercise. Lower the weights down to where you feel a stretch in your hamstrings, then push back up into the standing position by driving through your hips. This exercise is great for targeting the posterior chain and increasing mobility and strength through the hips.

Good Mornings

Good mornings are an excellent exercise for the strengthening of the hamstrings, glutes, and lower back. They entail mimicking a deadlift's hip hinge movement pattern by hinging at the hips, keeping your back straight as you lower your torso toward the ground with a slight bend in your knees. Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, then place a barbell across your upper back. Lower until you feel you are stretching the hamstrings; then return back to the original position by glutes and hamstring contraction. Leg curls are quite helpful in strength development of posterior chain and will help in achieving overall athletic prowess.



Leg curls

Leg curls are a great way to isolate and strengthen the hamstrings using a leg curl machine. Start by adjusting the machine to ensure proper alignment, with your knees matching the pivot point and your ankles positioned securely under the padded lever. Sit with your back against the pad and curl the lever upward towards your glutes by contracting your hamstrings. Hold briefly at the top of the movement, then lower the lever back to the starting position in a controlled manner. This exercise is ideal for building targeted strength in the hamstrings, improving muscle balance and reducing the risk of injury.

METHODOLOGY

1. Study Design

The study will employ an experimental study design to assess the combined effects of resisted inspiratory muscle exercises and Nordic training on rugby performance parameters. Participants will be randomly allocated into 2 groups: a combined training group (resisted inspiratory muscle exercise and Nordic training), a control group.

2. Participants

Sample Size: 30 male rugby players aged between 20 and 30 years, and weight will 85-100 be enrolled from local rugby teams and clubs.

- Inclusion Criteria:
 - Must have been playing rugby at a competitive level for two or more years.
 - No previous history of respiratory or severe musculoskeletal injuries within the last six months.
- Exclusion Criteria:
 - Any underlying medical condition that may impact participation or performance (e.g., inadequately controlled asthma, cardiovascular problems).

3. Randomization and Grouping

Members will be allocated into 2 groups in a randomised fashion:

Group A (Combined Training): To undergo resisted inspiratory muscle exercises and Nordic training sessions for 15-20 minutes, three times a week, along with regular rugby training regime

Group B (Control): No additional training; to keep up regular rugby training regime.

4. Duration of the Study

The intervention will be for eight weeks, with the measurements being taken at pre, at the (week 0), and at the end (week 8).

5. Details of the Intervention

- Resisted Inspiratory Muscle Exercise: Participants will wear a resistance breathing device (e.g., POWERbreathe) where they will carry out a series of controlled breaths against resistance, building up the resistance as based on each individual's capacity.
- Resisted inspiratory muscle exercises (RIMes) to develop the inspiratory muscles:



1. Threshold Inspiratory Muscle Training

This training makes use of a threshold inspiratory muscle trainer that provides resistance during inhalation.

- Instructions:

1. Sit comfortably or stand comfortably and hold the device in your mouth.
2. Forcefully breathe in through the device, over-coming the resistance.
3. Repeat for 10, resting in between for 3 seconds.
4. Gradually add the resistance after you can easily finish the sets.

2. Flow-Resistive Breathing

Inhaling through a device that adds resistance enables you to breathe in a controlled way.

- Instructions:

1. Use a flow-resistive breathing device; most likely this is a piece of hardware that is utilized in physical therapy.
2. Breathe in slowly and deeply from the device where your attention needs to be directed towards controlling each breath against resistance
3. Training in sets, typically 10 reps, is with 30-second recovery between them
4. Once improved, increment resistance slowly.

3. Inspiratory Muscle Strength Training (IMST)

This too is a therapy using a hand-held breath device that overloads the inspiratory muscles.

1. Place resistance breather inside your mouth:
2. Breathe in against the resistance and then breathe out as usual.
3. Repeat 10 breaths per set with recovery between sets.
4. Slowly add resistance as your strength gets better.

4. Diaphragmatic Breathing

Not a conventional resisted breathing exercise, but it will increase control and strength in the diaphragm.

1. Lie on your back with bent knees or sit relaxed.
2. Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.
3. Breathe in slowly through your nose, and feel your belly get big as your chest stays flat.
4. Exhale slowly through puckered lips, letting the abdomen fall.
5. Repeat for 10 minutes, sensing movement of the diaphragm.

5. Inspiratory Breath Holds

This exercise employs breath-holding on inspiration as a blend of resistance and control of breath.

- Instructions:

1. Inhale fully into the lungs.
2. Hold breath for 10 seconds, as comfortable.
3. Exhale slowly and completely.
4. Repeat for 5-10 cycles, gradually increasing hold times as capable.

6. Pursed-Lip Breathing

Increases control of breath and resists exhalation.

- Instructions:

1. Breathe in through your nose for 2 counts.
2. Purse your lips as if you're going to whistle.
3. Exhale slowly and gently through your pursed lips for 4 counts.
4. Repeat for 5-10 minutes to improve breathing efficiency.



7. Straw Breathing

A cheap but effective way to develop resistance.

- Instructions:

1. Use a small drinking straw and inhale deeply through it.
 2. Exhale normally without the straw.
 3. Gradually extend the length and control of your straw inhalations.
 4. Do for a few minutes, noticing smooth, controlled breathing.
- Nordic Training: Nordic curls will be performed with concentration on correct form to maximize eccentric strength. 3 sets of 6-10 repetitions will be done by the participants during their training sessions.
 - Nordic hamstring exercise: 3 sets of 12-15 reps, emphasis on controlled movement and the eccentric phase.
 - Three repetitions of 12-15 reps with shifting loads according to the individual's capabilities on the remaining hamstring exercises.(e.g., Romanian deadlifts, leg curls, and good morning).
 - Training sessions are about 60 to 75 minutes long, with warmup and cool down also included.
 - Training Sessions: Training will be conducted under the guidance of experienced coaches to facilitate compliance and correct technique.

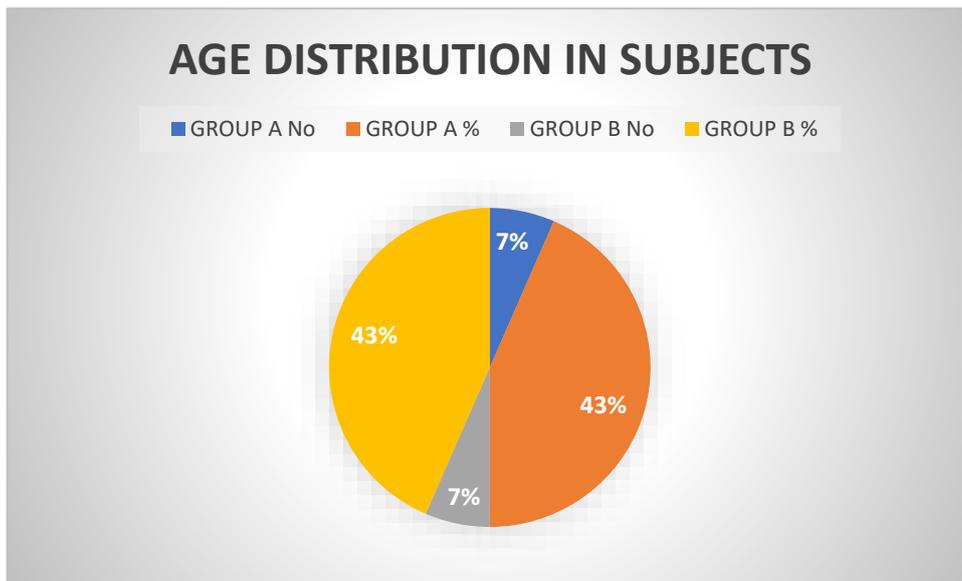
6. Outcome Measures

Outcome measures to be measured are as follows:

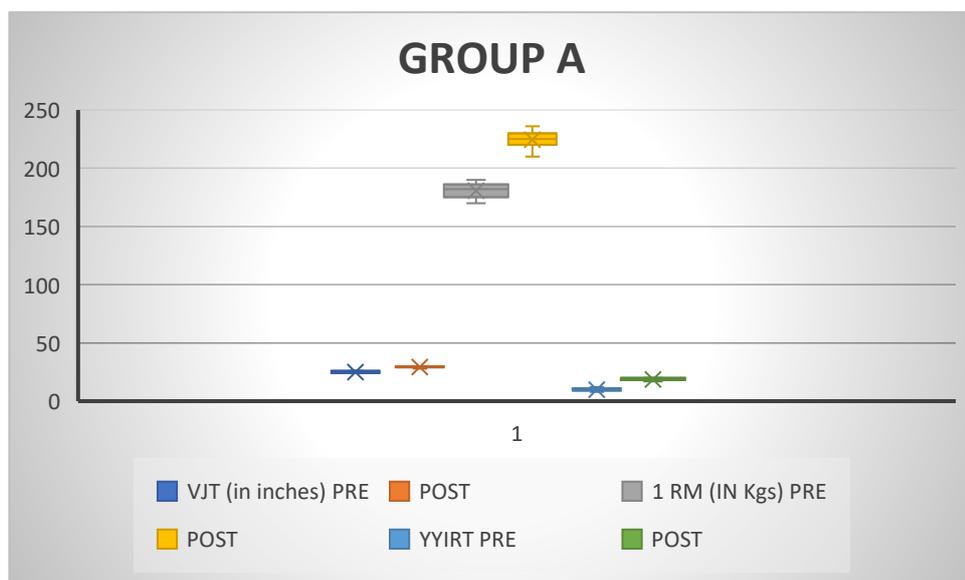
- Aerobic Capacity: Measured by a Yo-Yo intermittent recovery test to assess endurance.
- Muscle Power and Strength: Measurements via vertical jump test and 1RM (one-repetition maximum) for squat strength.
- Addressing Performance: Tactical practice drills to measure tackling proficiency will be rated by experienced observers with standardized forms.

RESULTS

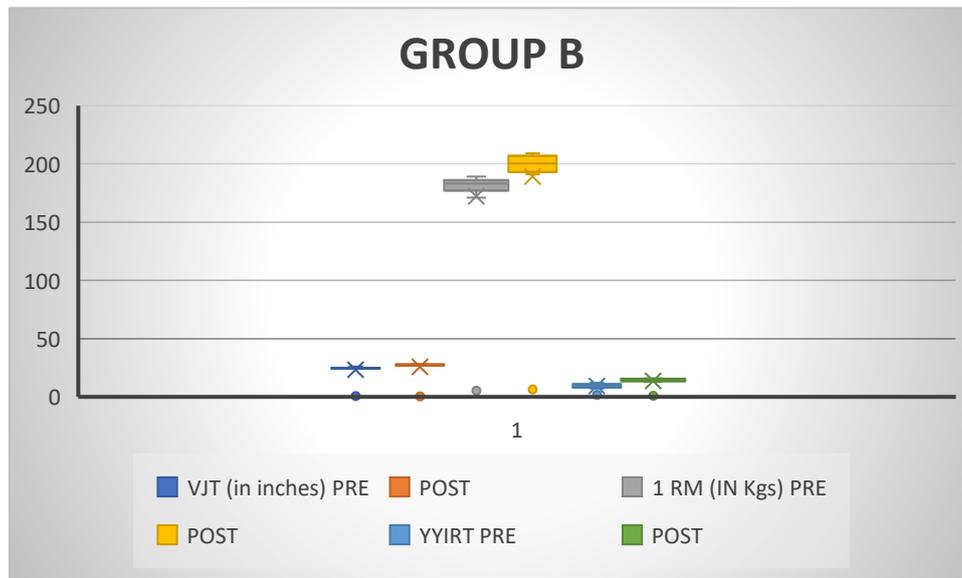
AGE DISTRIBUTION IN SUBJECTS					
S.No	Age in years	GROUP A		GROUP B	
		No	%	No	%
1	20-25	8	53.3	8	53.3
2	26-30	7	46.6	7	46.6
MEAN		7.5		7.5	
SD		0.5		0.5	



GROUP A							
S. No	OUTCOME MEASURES	PRE TEST		POST TEST		PAIRED T- TEST	
		RANGE	MEAN ± SD	RANGE	MEAN ± SD	T-STAT	P VALUE
1	VJT	24-26	24.86 ± 0.80	28-30	29.33 ± 0.69	-20.75	6.54×10^{-12} (highly significant)
2	1 RM	170-190	180.6 ± 6.00	210-235	224.46 ± 7.86	-18.17	3.94×10^{-11} (highly significant)
3	YYIRT	8-12	10 ± 1.41	17-20	18.6 ± 1.08	-22.17	2.65×10^{-12} (highly significant)



GROUP B							
S. No	OUTCOME MEASURE S	PRE TEST		POST TEST		PAIRED T- TEST	
		RANG E	MEAN ± SD	RANG E	MEAN ± SD	T- STAST	P VALUE
1	VJT	24-26	24.6 ± 0.711	27-28	27.46 ± 0.498	-11.2	2.23×10^{-8} (highly significant)
2	1 RM	171-185	182.46 ± 5.47	190-210	200.4 ± 6.52	-15.13	4.53×10^{-10} (highly significant)
3	YYIRT	7-12	9.8 ± 1.68	13-16	14.6 ± 1.08	-9.61	1.53×10^{-7} (highly significant)



The paired t-test results for both Group A and Group B reveal a statistically significant increase in all parameters post-intervention. In Group A, the Vertical Jump Test (VJT) revealed a very significant increase ($t = -20.75, p < 0.001$), indicating a significant improvement in lower limb power. In like manner, 1 Repetition Maximum (1 RM) illustrated an impressive improvement in muscle strength ($t = -18.17, p < 0.001$). The Yo-Yo Intermittent Recovery Test (YYIRT), which indicates endurance and aerobic capacity, illustrated an impressive improvement as well ($t = -22.17, p < 0.001$). Similarly, in Group B, a notable improvement was seen in VJT ($t = -11.21, p < 0.001$), reflecting enhanced jump performance. The 1 RM was also found to improve significantly ($t = -15.13, p < 0.001$), showing increased strength. Furthermore, YYIRT scores also revealed an enhancement in endurance ($t = -9.61, p < 0.001$).

Overall, both groups showed statistically significant improvements in strength, power, and endurance following the intervention. The larger t-values in Group A, however, indicate a greater magnitude of improvement than Group B, and thus the intervention in Group A might have been more effective.



DISCUSSION

This study sought to enhance rugby performance through an eight-week intervention of the combined effects of resisted inspiratory muscle exercise and Nordic training. The results revealed that both training protocols significantly affected performance parameters among male rugby players, validating the efficacy of novel training methodologies in advancing athletic performance.

The findings indicated that Group A (the combined training group) achieved significantly higher improvements in all measured parameters than Group B (the control group). Importantly, the vertical jump test (VJT) in Group A revealed a very significant rise ($t = -20.75$, $p < 0.001$), reflecting a pronounced improvement in lower limb power. In the same vein, the improvement in one-repetition maximum (1 RM) ($t = -18.17$, $p < 0.001$) indicates the efficacy of the combined training program in building strength. The Yo-Yo Intermittent Recovery Test (YYIRT), which measures athletes' endurance and aerobic capacity, also showed a significant improvement ($t = -22.17$, $p < 0.001$) in the combined training group, further attesting to the effectiveness of the intervention. On the contrary, Group B also showed improved performances in VJT ($t = -11.21$, $p < 0.001$) and 1 RM ($t = -15.13$, $p < 0.001$) albeit less so. This shows that whilst conventional rugby training is worthwhile, the incorporation of resisted inspiratory muscle exercise and Nordic training could potentially enhance sporting performance. A number of studies validate the effectiveness of this method, highlighting the importance of novel training methods in sport.

For example, McConnell et al. (2015) found that inspiratory muscle training enhances respiratory muscle function and exercise performance in sporting participants. Our findings accord with theirs, indicating that increased respiratory capacity has a positive effect on athletic performance. In addition, a systematic review by Bourne et al. (2017) indicates that Nordic training enhances strength and reduces the incidence of lower limb injuries in athletes, particularly in contact sports like rugby. This corroborates our study's findings that integrating Nordic exercises can lead to considerable improvements in lower limb strength and power, as reflected in our VJT results. In addition, Wells et al. (2020) analyzed the impact of concurrent strength and endurance training in rugby players. According to their findings, sportsmen who received concurrent training presented considerable gains in strength and aerobic performance, similar to our findings in the combined training group. Also, a pertinent study by Sedeaud et al. (2013) established that enhanced aerobic capacity through targeted endurance training is directly related to performance in high-intensity sports like rugby. The remarkable enhancements in YYIRT scores in our study confirm this correspondence, further emphasizing the role of endurance training for optimizing rugby performance. The encouraging findings of this research suggest important implications for rugby trainers and coaches. Inclusion of resisted inspiratory muscle exercises in addition to conventional training protocols may be an effective method of improving player performance.

Focusing on the training of respiratory as well as lower limb strength may provide a competitive advantage, particularly in high-level sports settings. Future studies need to investigate long-term consequences of these training protocols and how these may affect rates of recovery as well as prevention of injury among rugby players. It is important to take into account different populations and different skill levels in subsequent research to generalize outcomes appropriately. To conclude, the present study adequately proves that an integrated training regimen consisting of resisted inspiratory muscle exercise and Nordic training substantially enhances rugby performance indicators. Our results form a basis for future investigations and practical uses in the field of sports science and training maximization.



CONCLUSION

The present research adequately substantiates that combined training using resisted inspiratory muscle exercises and Nordic training considerably improves rugby performance indicators in male rugby players. The results reflect significant improvements in lower limb power, muscle strength, and aerobic capacity, especially in participants who receive the combined training program.

The higher order of improvements noted among Group A over the control group highlights the promise of using diverse training methods to maximize athletic performance. This study reaffirms the significance of using cutting-edge and complex training methods in sports, especially in high-intensity sports such as rugby.

Ultimately, the findings from this study promote the inclusion of resisted inspiratory muscle training and Nordic exercises into standard training protocols for rugby players. Future research needs to keep examining the long-term consequences of these training methods, taking numerous demographic variables and athletic ability levels into account, in order to continue developing best practices for enhancing performance in rugby and other collision sports.

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