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Sep. 13, 2005. 01:00 AM

## Leafs made to sweat by new medical staff

Sundin welcomes fresh approach Conditioning 'dipped' last year

MARK ZWOLINSKI  
SPORTS REPORTER

Maple Leafs players appeared exhausted after being put through a battery of tests which were both high tech and physically demanding by the club's new medical staff yesterday.

On what used to be a day of basic physical examinations and lung testing on a stationary bike, the Leafs were in full uniform as the medical staff produced a whole new profile of each player's body composition and fitness levels.

"I think they're on top of the game, they're on the cutting edge of technology in terms of our fitness," Leafs captain Mats Sundin said.

The very latest in timing

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towers — three-foot pods equipped with light beams to trigger timing devices — as well as telemetry straps and on-the-spot blood samples, were part of the high-tech approach to the old medicals day.

Earlier, the Leafs unveiled their new medical staff that is headed by Kevin Wagner, former head trainer for the Ottawa Senators, who will now serve as head athletic therapist, and Dr. Noah Forman, the new medical director for both the Leafs and the Marlies.

Chris Davie, who spent the past six years as a therapist with the Oilers, is the new assistant athletic therapist, while Dr. Erin Boynton, who has been a senior physician with the Jays since 1989, will serve as orthopaedic consultant.

The incoming staff finally put a face on a newly conceived medical model for the team, which has been under development ever since the club dismissed its former medical staff in July.

"Our new medical model is designed as a critical aspect of our overall strategic plan to manage our assets," Leafs GM John Ferguson said.

"From nutrition, to health care, rehab, injury prevention, diagnosis ... we feel we are better equipped to deal with the health and fitness of our players. The testing today is all an aspect of raising the bar for their performance."

The dismissal of the former staff took many by surprise. But others believed it came about because of the handling of injuries to Mats Sundin, Alex Mogilny, Owen Nolan and Tie Domi.

The Leafs paid out \$4 million (U.S.) to injured players during the lockout. Nolan is also taking the team to an arbitrator for up to \$12 million in salary he feels he is owed while injured.

"There are changes in the medical room and in the locker room, all with the goal of providing better care to our players," Ferguson said.

Players yesterday were asked to sprint the length of the ice so that the timing towers could gather times through segments of the ice. The Leafs hired a 10-person team from the Peak Centre for Human Performance, an Ottawa based organization, that has been assisting pro teams and athletes with state-of-the-art physical testing.

"These are tests that are very specific to what they do on the ice," said the Centre's Ed McNeely.

"We want to see how they recover from their peak heart rates, and we want to see how they recover from peak lactic acid build up.

"We're doing body composition tests as well. From there we can build a complete profile for the team so they can design future systems ... rehab, training, conditioning for their players, and help the players where they might be weak with their bodies and physical conditioning."

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Sundin welcomed the new and more vigorous approach to player health.

"At times, we kind of dipped (team conditioning) after Christmas, so this should help us as players so that we don't have to struggle with something like that in the future," Sundin said.

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