



FASHION & FITNESS / FITNESS FILE / Strength Training, Anyone? / Tennis players net the benefits of sport-specific power workouts

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KEITH Kambourian remembers the day he was introduced to strength training. It was the late 1980s, and he was an all-conference tennis player at Duke University in Durham, N.C. "The strength coach for the football team came in and said, 'OK, here's the program,'" recalled Kambourian.

But a regimen of heavy incline bench presses and power cleans that might be perfectly suited for a 300-pound tackle wasn't much help to a 140-pound tennis player. It was a lesson Kambourian

took with him to his current job as director of tennis at the Bethpage Park Tennis Center.

Strength and conditioning work has become an important aspect of training for every sport; but it has to be the right kind of training- exercises and movements designed to complement the movements and demands of the particular sport. Kambourian knew that even the average player could benefit from such a program. "If we can improve agility or power by 5 percent, they'll become better tennis players," he said. "That's why [strength training] is now so prevalent among the professionals. I thought it would be a great thing to get going here."

So Kambourian invited his personal trainer, Doug Sheppard of J & D Fitness in Glen Cove, to develop something new-a conditioning class specifically for tennis, tailored for players of every age and ability.

The "Tennis Performance Workshop" was introduced in February. No one was quite sure what to make of it. "People came down here thinking we'd be doing bench presses," chuckled Sheppard.

Hardly. Sheppard knew the regimen he would give to a client such as Rob Burnett-a Selden native who is now a star defensive lineman with the Super Bowl champion Baltimore Ravens-wouldn't play with the tennis crowd at Bethpage. Instead, he and his partner Judy Paris, working in consultation with Kambourian, developed a sport-specific program emphasizing agility skills, rotator cuff conditioning, balance and strengthening of the core muscles of the abdominals and trunk.

"That's the buzzword in fitness these days," said Sheppard. "Core, core, core." But, he added, there's a reason for that. "That's where your power comes from."

And building that foundation of strength-specifically geared to the demands of tennis, a game that requires the ability to sprint quickly in every direction and tremendous rotational strength (think swinging a racquet)-is what Sheppard and Paris sought to achieve. They made it clear, however, that they weren't there to teach people the fine points of the game. "We're not tennis instructors," said Sheppard. "We're trying to strengthen their bodies so that in the moments when they need to call on certain muscles...the ability is there." Also, by following a proper conditioning regimen, they hoped to forestall some of the common injuries of tennis, including those of the rotator cuff muscles of the shoulder, the ankle, knee and hip.

The trainers put all this together into five hourlong sessions and offered them to members of the Bethpage Park Tennis Center for \$150. The response? Well, let's put it this way. It wasn't quite the same as if they had walked out onto the courts on a crowded Saturday morning and yelled, "Free U.S. Open tickets! Who wants 'em?"

Still, the cool reception wasn't unexpected. "In tennis, [the idea of] sports-specific training hasn't really filtered down to the masses," said Kambourian. "There's been a lot of curiosity [about the program]. But people have hesitated."

Interestingly enough, the players who didn't hesitate to embrace the opportunity to enhance their

conditioning were the ones most serious about their game. At a session at the center on a recent Sunday morning, only six players were in attendance. But among them were some of the top youth players on Long Island, including Ian Bliss, a senior at Plainview High School and a junior player ranked in the top 100 nationally.

"If the pros do it, I'll do it," says Bliss. And so he did - he went through the grueling series of unusual exercises, led by Sheppard, Paris and another one of their trainers, Fred DiMenna. "It's all body awareness," said the pony-tailed DiMenna, throwing a medicine ball to Bliss, who tried to steady himself on a balance board as he caught it. "I can't do this," said Bliss, with a rueful laugh, as the board wobbled beneath him. But after a few tries, he managed to stabilize his body and still react fast enough to catch the balls the trainer tossed at him (which, of course, was the whole purpose of the exercise).

"There you go!" said DiMenna.

"People who are serious about tennis should do this," said Bliss, who, as part of his efforts to improve his speed and conditioning, has also joined both the track and soccer teams at Plainview. "It helps, big time."

Next up: Running drills. "We want to do specific speed drills for tennis," said DiMenna, as he gathered the players around him. "What better way to run than on the tennis court?" But this wasn't just a leisurely jog around the eight indoor courts. The idea here was to teach the players to change directions and vary their speeds, just as they would during a match. So DiMenna shouted encouragement as the players sprinted to the net, then back-pedaled to the base line, then turned sideways, and bounded laterally-side to side-back to the net, over and over again. "Hey!" shouted Bliss. "I'm dyin' here!"

Actually, Bliss was doing just fine as was, to her surprise, the one adult in the group, Donna Sinetar of Woodbury. She had accompanied her son, 13-year old Evan Weintraub, an up-and-coming junior player. But as she, too, plays tennis-although not as seriously as Evan-she decided to give the conditioning class a try. "I love it!" she said, after finishing a set of abdominal strengthening exercises on one of the stability balls. "It's great...I want my husband to take this. He's a runner and a tennis player, and his lower back hurts after he plays."

That's the kind of nagging problem a good "core" conditioning regimen could help correct, if done consistently and properly. Which is what Kambourian, Sheppard and Paris hope more of the weekend players will realize when the next session rolls around, later this month. "It's a great complement to what we do in tennis instruction," said Kambourian. "If [the average player] can become a better athlete, stronger, quicker, greater agility, it's certainly going to improve their game." He watched the players end their workout with hamstring stretches-using cords to extend their range of motion-and smiled as they grimaced. "Anything new takes time," he said.

WHERE&WHEN The next Tennis Performance Workshop will be offered for five weeks, from 11 a.m. to noon, starting Sunday, April 22 at the Bethpage Park Tennis Center. The cost is \$150 and is open to all. Call 516-777-1358 for information. A similar, sports-specific conditioning

program for golf also is being planned.

[Illustration]

Caption: Newsday Photos / David L. Pokress - 1) At left, Judy Paris works with Gerald DiChara, 17, of Garden City, while he stretches. 2) Trainer Doug Sheppard, at right, instructs Donna Sinetar on the proper form for a trunk twisting exercise. 3) A balance exercise also is part of the program, as shown below. 4) Donna Sinetar, of Woodbury, does an agility exercise at Bethpage State Park.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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