

# Pilates for the Sports Guy!

More and more athletes are reaping the benefits of mind-body exercise – and as a result, their game and their physique are topping the scoreboard

By Kerrie Lee Brown

**W**ith the warmer weather upon us, guys are looking for alternative ways to build strength, increase energy and get in shape for their favourite summer sport. Pilates is a great way to incorporate invigorating and challenging new moves into strength training and sports conditioning regimens.

### Benefits for Athletes

Pilates helps athletes develop core strength, increase flexibility, assists in rehabilitation after injury and creates balance throughout the entire body. As a result, athletes can withstand rigorous training regimes and ultimately improve their golf drive or baseball pitch, prevent or recover from injury, and maintain an optimal weight for their activity of choice.

“Pilates works on developing kinesthetic awareness of the body, or where it is in relationship to itself, and the world around it. It also focuses on good postural alignment which will help an individual perform a movement efficiently, thus reducing the amount of unnecessary strain on the muscles and joints,” explains Moira Merrithew, Executive Director of Education for STOTT PILATES®. “Specific strengthening exercises will also help to balance the muscles around a joint and balance pairs of muscles from one side of the body to the other.”



### Not Just for Women

Women have gravitated toward Pilates in the past, citing the desire to develop the long, lean physiques of dancers. It is only recently that men have realized the potential for Pilates training, although they still have to get past the stigma of it being “women’s exercise”. Men tend to strengthen the body from the outside rather than from the inside as Pilates does.

Generally, men have limited flexibility, weak pelvic floor musculature and a lack of postural muscles – all areas that can be targeted by Pilates practice. The endorsement of Pilates from a wide variety of male professional athletes may be spearheading the trend in male participants. These spokespeople include golfers Tiger Woods, David Duval and Steve Balasteros; basketball star Jason Kidd; pitcher Curt Schilling; pro hockey player Carlo Colaiacovo and offensive lineman Ruben Brown, among others. These guys are helping fuel this mind-body method of exercise amongst the masses.

Pilates is particularly effective for recovering from injury. According to Matt Nichol, Head Strength and Conditioning Coach for the Toronto Maple Leafs, Pilates teaches athletes to be mindful in their movements – integrating their pelvis, trunk and shoulder girdle in a safe, challenging and progressive system. “Pilates can be a very effective supplement to an injury rehabilitation program as it provides athletes with a challenging workout without impact or excessive weight bearing,” says Nichol.

John Garey, STOTT PILATES Master Instructor Trainer and owner of John Garey Pilates in Los Angeles, trains men and women for athletic conditioning regularly. Among his most recognized clients are the band members from No Doubt and the Captain of the US Rugby Team, Mike Hercus.

Many pro athletes are incorporating Pilates into their regular training regimens. In particular, they are turning to this method for strength conditioning and the rehab of sport-related injuries. These are guys who go through intense training pre-

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season and during the season for their sport who were perhaps introduced to Pilates while on the mend from injury – but for the most part, they are sticking with it because it works.

“I’ve heard from many athletes that when they take Pilates, they start to think about their body and its function differently. In particular, they start thinking about their “centre” or “core”. Ultimately they find that they transfer all that they learn in the studio to the playing field – often subconsciously. We hear from clients all the time – whether they are cyclists, golfers, rugby players – that they find they have more power after taking Pilates,” explains

Garey. “In general, athletes are good at what they do, and since Pilates is often a foreign activity for them, they are forced to think about what they are doing physically and mentally. It’s not like a cyclist doing a Spinning class. Pilates makes athletes get back in touch with their basic training principles and therefore expands on what they already know. The benefits are amazing – increased power, strength and mobility.”

**Next issue:** How the pros do it!

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