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HEALTH & FITNESS

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Jump higher, run faster, play harder

BY TOM UHLENBROCK
Of the Post-Dispatch

Ben Harris is a father of four and a sales rep for a printing company. But there he was, working out in the HammerBodies weight room with a 350-pound lineman for the Rams and a bunch of high school jocks eyeing college scholarships.

"I've lost 25 to 30 pounds and taken 10 strokes off my golf game," Harris said. "I can play 36 holes of golf and have no aches and pains the next day. I gave all my fat pants away to my brother."

Harris, 32, is enrolled in the sports performance training program at HammerBodies Custom Fitness Clinic in Creve Coeur. The program specializes in taking promising young athletes and helping them advance to the next level of competition. But it also can work for regular guys like Harris.

"It helps when you surround yourself with talented people who take fitness seriously," Harris said.

Coach Hammer — that's his adopted legal name — is the man behind HammerBodies. He

Fitness training outside of school can help young athletes reach peak performance

started the company in 1970 while a sophomore football player at Memphis State University, charging coeds \$3 an hour to get them into shape. He was majoring in health, recreation, physical education and nutrition, but his focus on fitness actually began years earlier, when he was determined to make the football team at Clayton High School as a 113-pound offensive lineman.

"In 1970, there weren't any personal trainers; there wasn't even a word for it," said Hammer, now 5-foot-4 and 151 pounds of muscle. "I was a competitive bodybuilder on stage, plus a football player. I designed my own nutrition and training program. I experimented on myself."

HammerBodies is a private teaching clinic with 15 trainers that customizes fitness programs for an athlete who wants to jump higher, run faster or swim farther.

"Sports performance training is training designed specifically to enhance the performance of an athlete based on the sport he wants to excel

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DAVID CARSON / POST-DISPATCH

Sam Scroggins, a graduate of McCluer North High School, works out with the help of Coach Hammer at HammerBodies Custom Fitness Clinic in Creve Coeur. Scroggins will attend the University of Minnesota this fall on a football scholarship.

Coach says ... Here are Coach Hammer's 10 tips to develop functional athleticism, which can help you perform daily tasks:

Know your body. If you are weak or tired, or have problems with balance and posture, see an internist for a comprehensive physical exam and an exercise specialist for a fitness evaluation.

Develop a training game plan. Start slowly with activities designed to prepare the body for increased movement. Then add range of motion and agility, followed by activities to increase your strength.

Feed the machine. Treat your body with respect by feeding it the necessary water, proteins, carbohydrates and unsaturated fats it must have for recovery and growth.

Walk, don't ride. You will become more athletic by moving those muscles and joints. Walk the letter to the mailbox, take the stairs up to your office, replace the riding mower with one you can push.

Do it yourself. If you're in good health, there is no reason you can't move furniture, clean windows and wash your own car.

Try something different. If you can power walk a mile on flat terrain, try walking for a half mile on gently rolling hills.

Ask for help. You may need a coach to watch you and offer suggestions to keep your training on a par with your level of conditioning.

Don't quit. You have a lifetime to reach your goals. Go back to your last successful level of activity and build from there.

Change is good. Change movements, activities and exercises every 10 to 12 weeks to add variety to your athletic game plan.

Practice. After training for six weeks and becoming stronger, use your new strength to build a deck, plant some flowers, cut the grass or hike the park. Stay healthy, stay fit, stay young.

— Tom Uhlenbrock

Sports

Performance training can help athletes

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in," Hammer explained. "When an athlete walks into our doors, the initial phase is a 90-minute fitness evaluation and interview. This 90-minute session is the cornerstone of our program."

Every physical factor — strength, flexibility, body composition, speed, endurance, heart rate, vertical leap — is tabulated in the fitness evaluation. The interview, which can include parents and coaches, sets the athlete's goals.

"We want to know where the athlete is right now, and where he wants to go," Hammer said. "Then we sit down and develop a program to take him to the next level."

Andrew Jones is a linebacker at Duchesne High School who already has several college offers, even though he still has a year of high school left. He is in his second year in the HammerBodies program.

"I went from 198 to 220 pounds on a protein diet and cut my time in the 40 from 4.8 seconds to 4.5," Jones said.

Each individual program runs 10 to 12 weeks, usually with three 90-minute sessions a week, at a cost of around \$2,300. The program features not only customized workouts with a trainer, but a personal diet designed by a nutritionist, with advice on what to eat and drink before, during and after athletic events.

While the program is aimed at the competitive athlete, Hammer said it can benefit almost anyone.

"Anybody can become stronger and more fit," he said. "You can teach a person to have more balance and support to their spine so they can go out there and garden and not hurt themselves. Even people who suffer from horrible coordination can become more athletic."

Similar program

The Missouri Bone & Joint Center, also in Creve Coeur, offers a sports performance training program on a different scale, said manager Scott Roberts.

"We do nutrition in a separate program, and we don't do personal training like they do," he said. "We do our workouts in groups, usually three athletes at a time."

The center, which is privately owned by several orthopedic surgeons, has five full-time employees in the sports training program and will enroll up to 150 clients this summer, most of them high school athletes. The six-week program has 18 sessions of 90 minutes each and costs \$400. The 10-week program has 30 sessions for \$585.

"Primarily we see students from eighth grade up who play volleyball, soccer, baseball and basketball," Roberts said. "The high school football coaches try to hang on to their athletes over the summer."

"Two-thirds of our athletes are female, probably because female sports are so much bigger now. We see moms who didn't have the opportunity to compete in sports, and they want to give their daughters every advantage to get to the next level."

The center starts the athletes with an evaluation that determines body fat, speed, flexibility, muscle strength, agility, endurance and other physical aspects. That profile, along with the student's athletic goals, is used to create a customized exercise program.

After 18 sessions, Roberts said, the typical athlete can cut one-tenth of a second off the time in a 25-yard sprint, add an inch to the vertical jump, increase strength by 10 pounds in the bench press and 25 pounds in the squat and improve endurance by adding 10 push-ups in a minute.

"We teach them the proper techniques (so) if they don't come back, at least they're safe to work out on their own," said Roberts, who has a master's degree in exercise physiology and is a certified strength and conditioning specialist.

Ryan Wuller, 18, was one of the athletes working out in the weight room. A recent graduate of Althoff High School in Belleville, Wuller is a sprinter who hopes to compete as a walk-on at DePaul University in Chicago.

"I've cut at least a second from my times in the 100 and 200 — for sprints, that's pretty good," he said.

One of the center's prize pupils is Erin Waller, 17, who will be a senior at Incarnate Word Academy. The Post-Dispatch last fall named Waller the St. Louis area's No. 1 volleyball player. PrepVolleyball.com selected her as one of its 100 high school All-Americans, and Gatorade named her the top player in Missouri.

"My goals were to improve my speed, vertical leap and quickness," said Waller, who has been training for three years at the center. "When I first started, my vertical leap was like, 19, which is pathetic. Now it's been measured at 27 inches."

Waller, who has a volleyball scholarship offer from Stanford, said the center provides a training regimen she can't get at high school.

"At MoBoJo, they're there all the time. They know exactly what you need to do to get what you want."

For more information on HammerBodies, call 1-800-321-0711 or visit hammerbodies.com. For Missouri Bone & Joint Center, call 1-314-205-2888, Ext. 406, or visit www.mobojo.com.

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