

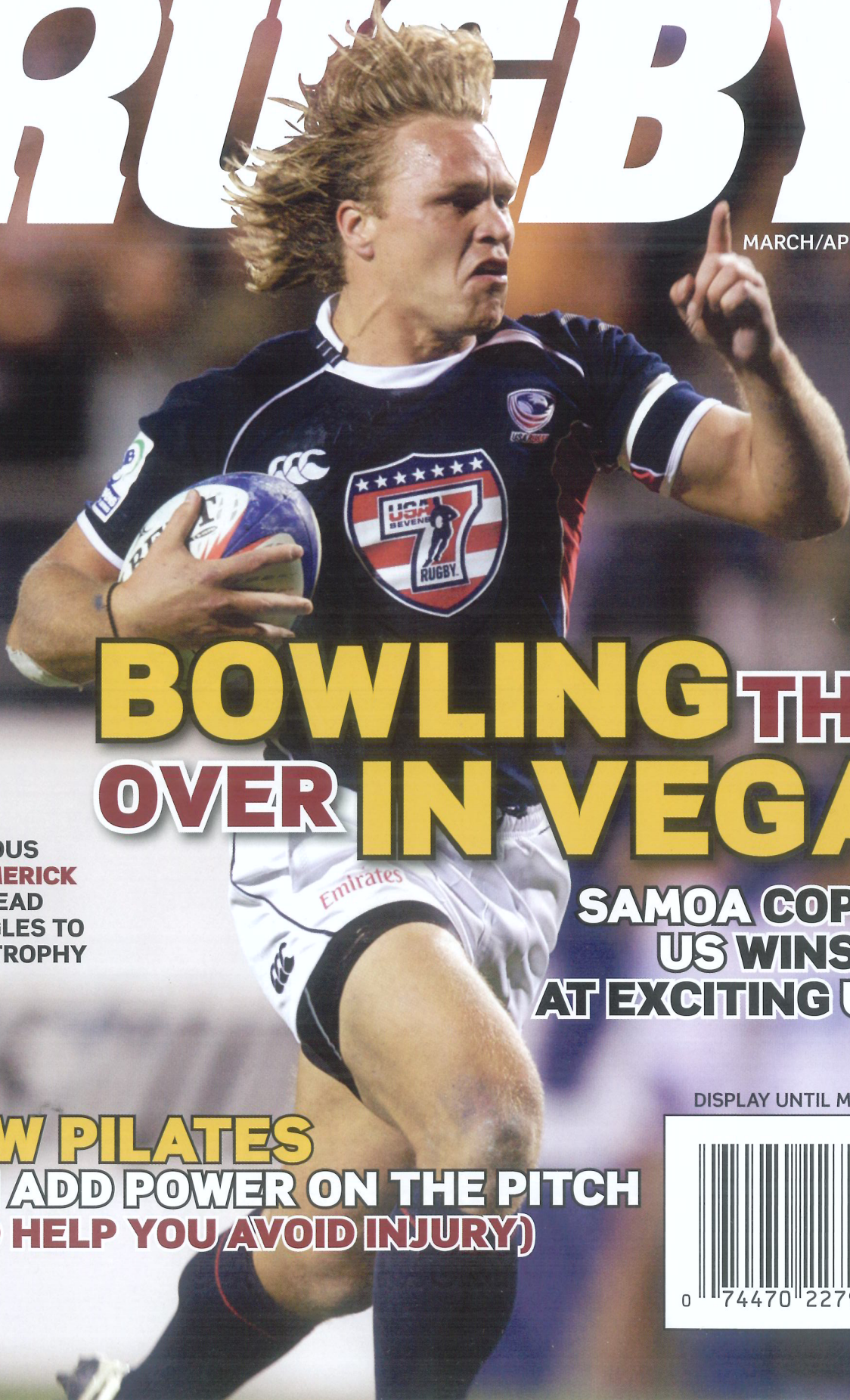
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BOWLING THEM OVER IN VEGAS

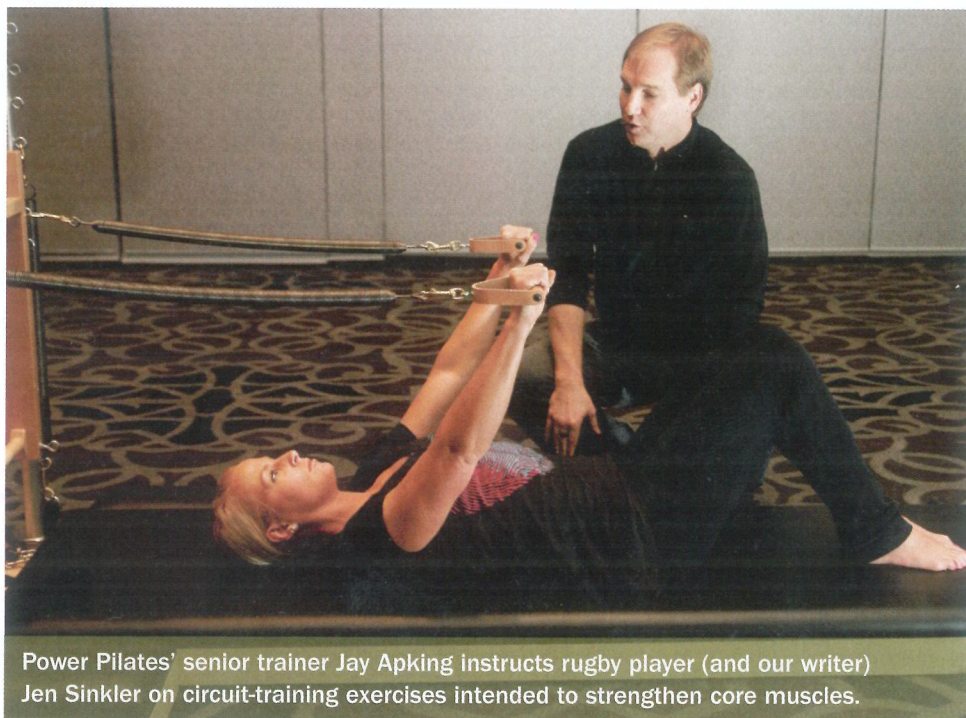
TENACIOUS
PAUL EMERICK
HELPS LEAD
THE EAGLES TO
USA 7s TROPHY

**SAMOA COPS CUP,
US WINS BOWL
AT EXCITING USA 7s**

**HOW PILATES
CAN ADD POWER ON THE PITCH
(AND HELP YOU AVOID INJURY)**

DISPLAY UNTIL MAY 15, 2010





Power Pilates' senior trainer Jay Apking instructs rugby player (and our writer) Jen Sinkler on circuit-training exercises intended to strengthen core muscles.

CORE CHALLENGE

ADDING PILATES TO YOUR EXERCISE PROGRAM CAN IMPROVE YOUR PELVIC STABILITY AND RANGE OF MOTION, AID IN INJURY PREVENTION, AND INCREASE YOUR POWER ON THE PITCH.

BY JEN SINKLER

Hours before most rugby fans were making their still-groggy way to Sam Boyd Stadium in Las Vegas for the first day of the USA 7s Tournament (Feb. 13-14), I joined a few hearty souls—rugby coaches and trainers—attending a morning seminar called “Maximizing Performance in Competitive Sports.” The two-hour presentation at the Hard Rock Hotel was a featured part of the annual Power Pilates Conference sponsored by Apogee Wellness (based in White Plains, NY).

Making my way through a sea of lithe bodies attending the workshops, I introduce myself to the seminar presenters—Howard Sichel, DC, chiropractor and President and CEO of Power Pilates, and Jay Apking, senior trainer of the new athletics division—and explain I’m writing an article on how Pilates might benefit rugby players, like myself.

“Oh good, we need a body during the demonstration!” exclaims Apking.

Caught off guard, I look around for another guinea pig. “But I’ve never done Pilates,” I hedge.

“Not a problem!” Apking assures me. “You’re fit and you’re a rugby player—it will be a perfect chance for you to experience firsthand how Pilates can improve your strength and performance on the field.”

I was in.

Sichel begins the session with a fundamental premise. “Most athletes’ lower-extremity injuries happen due to chronic weakness of the hips and the lumbar spine—everything from herniations, to hamstring tears, to groin pulls,” he says. “And it’s because those muscles aren’t being fed properly from the core—the muscles aren’t being innervated fully by the nerves of the spine.”

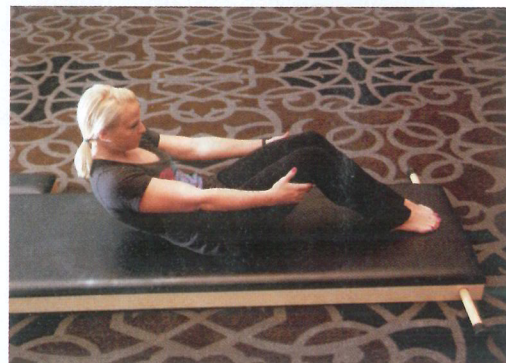
Apking concurs that core strength is the key to power and injury prevention, adding that athletes tend to exacerbate a bad situation when they focus on weight training without having a stable base: “By lifting more and heavier weights to get stronger, you’re just adding to instability and further increasing the risk of injury.”

The bottom line: Pilates focuses on shoring up the powerhouse of the pelvis.

“If you have a stable base, you not only prevent injury, but you can also run faster and become stronger,” says Sichel. “As you build up that base, you keep increasing the challenge. The minute the trainer sees the athlete has stability, they can make it more difficult by taking the exertion more distally.” You can do this by widening your movements, or by increasing resistance through use of springs on equipment such as Pilates Towers or Reformers.

“If you’re doing Pilates twice a week, you’re going to see a difference within four or five sessions,” claims Sichel. “And if you’re already in peak shape, probably even faster.”

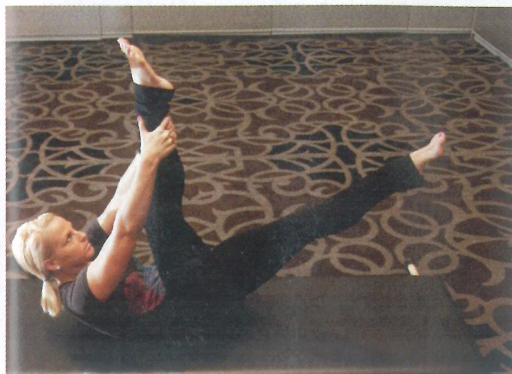
Both Sichel and Apking strongly recommend finding a qualified trainer to learn proper form and nuance, but to begin connecting with your core, they suggest trying the following three-exercise, abdominal mini-circuit. Complete the entire circuit three times, several times a week.



HALF ROLL-DOWN

Sit on a mat with your legs bent to 90 degrees, feet together and flat on the ground. Place your hands lightly on the backs of your thighs just above the knees. Scoop your abdominals in and up so that your body forms the shape of a “C” and, keeping the “C” intact, slowly lean backward until you nearly tip over. Keep your feet on the floor throughout, and don’t

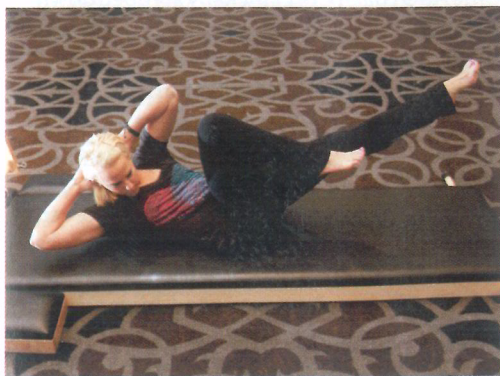
pull on or grip your legs—the movement should be controlled entirely by your core. Return to the upright seated position. *Complete three to five reps.*



SINGLE-LEG PULL

Lie on your back with both legs pointed toward the ceiling, feet together and toes pointed. Keeping both legs straight, slide both hands down one leg toward your ankle and let the other leg sink toward the floor. Engaging your abdominal muscles the entire time, pull the upright leg gently toward you, then switch legs. If your hamstrings are tight, you can bend the knee of your upright leg slightly. Keep your shoulder blades off the floor throughout the movement.

Complete 10 to 15 reps per leg.



CRISS-CROSS

Lying on your back, bend your knees to 90 degrees and raise your legs so your shins are parallel with the floor. Place your hands behind your head, elbows pointing outward, and support the base of your skull gently, without pulling your head forward. Scoop your abs in toward your spine and curl your shoulder blades off the floor. Slowly straighten one leg

downward, at the same time slowly twisting your torso toward your still-bent knee, keeping your elbows flared wide and your shoulder blades off the floor the entire time. Reverse the movement and repeat on the other side. (Note: Yep, this exercise is hard.) *Complete 10 to 15 reps per leg.*

Perhaps the most valuable tip I gleaned from the session was not to let my abs “pop out” during any of these exercises. Before the demonstration began, Sichel grilled me about my abdominal region during my workouts.

“Are you always, always, *always* holding and paying attention to this area?” he demanded, pointing accusingly at my midsection.

Wait a minute, I thought to myself. I’m a rugby-playing fitness magazine editor, for the love of god. I’ve got some core control.

“Yes, I really try to,” I answered.

Turns out, this was a whole new ballgame. During a leg-lowering drill, Sichel instructs me to press my fingers into the area around my belly button. As my legs nears the floor, sure enough—bloop!—my ab muscles sprang up an inch.

“You’re strong,” Sichel reassured me. “But just work to the point in the movement right

before they pop, and you’ll see your range improve over time.” That finely honed control and engagement, explained Sichel, makes the pelvis more stable, in turn providing a stronger platform for the femurs on downward.

That platform, it seems, is what we keep coming back to, and it makes good sense for rugby players to work on improving pelvic stability, considering the explosive bursts of speed and changes of direction that originate there. Anything that might help this cause is worth adding to the fitness regimen, and Pilates’ stringent demands on core strength made me a believer in just two hours.

“I’m told playing rugby is a lifestyle,” says Sichel. “Meaning rugby enthusiasts apply the principles of their sport to the rest of their lives. The same is true of Pilates, and in this case, Pilates can make you a better rugby player.”

To find a Power Pilates instructor near you, visit www.powerpilates.com.

Jen Sinkler, a former Eagle and senior fitness editor for *Experience Life* magazine, blogs at <http://blogs.experiencelifemag.com/survival-of-the-fittest>.

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