

Velocity promises gains in speed, power and agility

by Ellyn Wexler *Staff Writer*

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Brian Lewis/The Gazette

Brandon Baylor of Silver Spring, who plays on the Unity Thunder team of the Capital Beltway Youth Football League, works out under the direction of Richard Levy, Velocity's sports performance director.

the expansive, high-ceilinged main room. Within are a 50-yard, four-lane track with electronic timing, a turf field, a multipurpose hardcourt and state of the art weight training equipment. For the novice, some of these pieces require explanation or demonstration -- among them adjustable hurdles, weight lifting platforms, slides for lateral movement, kettle bells, a vertical jump trainer and an agility ladder.

Both Horwitzes emphasize that fun and safety distinguish Velocity's sports performance training. Aside from the monotony of cardio machines, Dr. Horwitz

Velocity Sports Performance is not a gym or a health club. It doesn't look like either one and offers none of the traditional club workouts. There's not a cardio machine in sight, and no studio for step aerobics or spinning classes. Most remarkable, says owner Samantha Horwitz, is the absence of monotony or haphazard training methods.

The facility's location is the first indication of something out of the ordinary; stumbling upon Velocity during the course of an average day's errands is highly unlikely. The 4-month-old franchise of a Georgia-based company with about 45 facilities in North America is housed in a 15,000-square foot warehouse. To get there, enter the parking lot at the sign that says "Katz's Deli" on Boiling Brook Parkway in Rockville, make a right turn, go up the hill and circle all the way around the rear. (Or, warm up for your workout by parking in front of the market and making the trek on foot.)

The brightly-lit, climate controlled facility is designed for sports performance training.

"It's a mini Olympic training center for the public," says chiropractic sports physician Steven Horwitz, Samantha's partner in both business and life.

A viewing area with seating and television screens for parents or coaches to observe the goings-on looks out on

points out that they work only "one plane of motion: forward." In contrast, Velocity training focuses on "multi planes of motion," which translates into functional training -- that is, preparing for movement in daily life as well as sports.

Training children's and high school team players is a substantial part of the business. The objective is to prepare them pre-season and thus diminish the chances of injury.

"If you're serious about winning, you have to give kids all the skills," Samantha says. "It's safer to be trained professionally, to learn technique, for example, how to use your body weight to prepare the body to avoid injury."

The doc concurs: "The more tools you have in your toolbox, the better."

The intention is not to replace a team's coach.

"We don't teach the kids the game; that's the coach's job. When we train them, the kids become better athletes and can give a top-level performance," Samantha explains. "This is their foundation for playing the game."

For adults, especially the middle-aged weekend warrior, Dr. H. offers some wise counsel: "Don't play a sport to stay in shape. Instead, get in shape to play a sport."

Programs are tailored to various age groups and skill levels. They accommodate everyone from 7-year-olds to seniors, male and female, individuals and teams, elite athletes, league participants, even those weekend warriors. All the training has a few things in common: small groups, professional coaches and scientifically designed workouts. The promise is gains in speed, power and agility, what the organization refers to as "the three pillars of athleticism."

The Velocity leaders are not the usual gym rats, either. In fact, Samantha's background is somewhat unique. The Montgomery County native, who graduated from Thomas S. Wootton High School in Rockville, holds a degree in criminology from the University of Maryland as well as a juris doctorate from Howard University. Until last year, she worked as a Secret Service agent based in New York City.

She says her presence in the World Trade Center's Tower no. 1 when the plane hit on Sept. 11 "changed my whole brain chemistry. I had to re-prioritize my life." As such, she married in January, and in May, Secret Service career completed, she came home to Rockville.

"She carried a sub-machine gun at the 2002 Olympics," her husband says, underlining the incongruity of the image with the petite young woman beside him.

When the couple opened Velocity in October, Dr. Horowitz added an on-site office to his Silver Spring medical practice. The doc, who grew up in Bergen County, N.J., earned a history degree at Cornell, then went on to the National College of Chiropractic.

But don't be fooled by all the academics. These two certainly do not lack fitness and sports credentials, training and experience.

Samantha has been an athlete since age 4 when she began playing MSI soccer -- with the boys since no girls team existed. In high school, her sports were softball and basketball, during which she tore her ACL. She says the two resulting surgical procedures made her more sensitive to the need to prepare the body for sports. Subsequently she became a National Academy of Sports Medicine-certified personal trainer.

After weightlifting at Cornell, Steven continued to powerlift (Master's Winner, 2000) and bodybuild. He recalls a shoulder injury in college, for which no rehabilitation was done, as inspiration for becoming a sports chiropractor.

Since 1996, Dr. Horwitz has been on the Maryland Advisory Council on Physical Fitness, serving as chair from 2002 to June '04. He is currently the Maryland State Director of the National Strength and Conditioning Association, which certified him as a strength and conditioning specialist.

He was the medical staff chiropractor for the U.S. team at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, and has been the NFL Players' Association treating chiropractor since 1991.

The operation's third MVP is sports performance director Richard Levy, who was Virginia Military Institute's head strength and conditioning coach and holds a master's degree in sports science from the U.S. Sports Academy.

Levy particularly enjoys "building the self-esteem of kids formerly relegated to the bench. They learn the fundamentals, get more play in the league and have more fun."

There's that element of fun again. Add in the inherent safety and effectiveness, and who could ask for anything more?

Velocity Sports Performance is located at 4956 Boiling Brook Parkway, Rockville; call 301-770-7791.