

Improve your game with Pilates

More hockey players, athletes discovering regimen's benefits

Well, just when you may have thought that the Ilitch family couldn't come up with another way to help out the hockey community or the sport of amateur hockey in Michigan – they have.

Kelle Ilitch, wife of Chris Ilitch is the owner/founder of Pure Element Pilates in West Bloomfield. The studio opened this past



OUTSIDE THE BOARDS

By Jennifer Watters

Some of our very own Detroit Tigers work out there too. When I say workout, I mean utilize Pilates as part of their training/workout program.

Pilates was originally invented by Joseph Pilates in the early 1900's. As a sickly child he had devoted his life to becoming stronger and overcoming his ailments. He first put his early ideas of what has now become known as Pilates to use during World War I while being held in a camp with other German citizens in England. He eventually migrated to the United States where, with the help of his wife, they worked to improve the Pilates methods he had invented. At that time, they used it primarily for dancers to alleviate lower back pain and improve awareness of breath and create better posture and spine alignment. They eventually opened their own dance studio. Pilates' wife Clara, who had been a nurse, found ways to utilize Pilates to help heal sick and bedridden people as well.

More recently, Pilates is becoming quite popular among the strict athlete as an important part of the training routine. Pilates is not just for hotties - women of all ages - anymore.

Ilitch, once involved in ballet and formal dancing, injured her lower back and couldn't continue to practice dancing. She found Pilates to cure her problem. "Someone recommended Pilates to me when I injured my back," said Ilitch, "So I did it four times a week for four weeks and my lower back issues were gone. It had been the worst pain ever, worse than having kids and after just two weeks I could see a difference, after four weeks the pain was gone."

Then, some years later, with a devoted interest in her practice of Pilates for her own health, she had done quite a bit of traveling and visited many different Pilates studios across the country. When she was home in Michigan, she couldn't find quite the same type of Pilates. She decided that she wanted the people in Detroit to have that great kind of a place to practice Pilates too. Ilitch recalled, "I knew how much a difference it made, I wanted men, women and athletes to see what I saw in Pilates, that it could provide a rehabilitative approach, too."

Pure Element Pilates is one of the most refreshing places to try it out. One of the welcoming attributes of the studio is that you don't feel like you are entering a traditional gym. In fact, it feels more like a yoga studio, very peaceful and calming. You'll notice the clean rooms, clean decor. Simple and understated, it is warm and inviting. The staff is outgoing and excited and extremely friendly. You don't feel out of place or overwhelmed if

November. Pure Element Pilates is a studio where, yes, you are reading correctly, hockey players are now working out. In fact, all kinds of people are working out: Older adults, young hockey players, hockey moms and hockey dads, un-hockey people and even your favs – the Red Wings.



Pilates instructors Diana Legel works on a leg stretch with Toby Murray, above, and at left instructor Lisa Hakim-Yarberry helps Zach Badalamenti work on his arms and upper body.

Hockey Weekly Photos by John Castine



Tyler Murray manages a laugh as Kelle Ilitch puts him through his Reformer Machine Pilates workout (foreground) while Diana Legel works with Toby Murray.

you are a first time Pilates practitioner.

When you arrive, you leave your shoes and coat at the door – only socks are permitted in the workout area. Although different types of Pilates classes are held there, including the mat Pilates and even Barre Pilates in which a ballet barre is used, this story will focus on the utilization of Reformer Machine Pilates.

Now, my experience with Pilates until my visit to Pure Element Pilates was strictly with all exercises are done on a mat on the floor in a room full of people and one instructor. But the use of the Reformer Machine style is the one in which I can seriously see all of you hockey players getting into.

According to Pure Element Pilates instructor Lisa Hakim-Yarberry, Pilates is great because it focuses on some of the most important aspects of making you a more well-conditioned hockey player, or any type of athlete for that matter: balance, core strength and endurance. Pilates is also great for improving flexibility and creating long, lean muscles; all qualities that will better your game and your health. Ilitch mentioned that "a lot of NHL

players and professional athletes are doing Pilates all over the country ... that's why I thought we needed it in Detroit.

"Athletes were finding that their abs weren't strong enough and lower backs were injured or strained so Pilates is recommended for that. Also, our studio is unique in that our trainers have the highest certification in Pilates instruction that a trainer can have. Three of our instructors are certified specifically for working with athletes."

The Pilates Reformer Machines work on a system of springs and pulleys, which allow you to complete an entire body workout. A session with an instructor at Pure Element Pilates on the Reformer Machines puts you through a series of arm, leg and body movements that stress tightening and utilizing your core (mid-section) while working to strengthen all parts of your body. There are exercises that focus on upper body and lower body. Pilates truly is an entire body workout, without the stress of lifting huge weights or becoming so winded you think you won't make it. As Ilitch explains, "You work your

entire body, you can isolate certain muscles, but you are also working your core, which doesn't happen with regular weight training. You also prevent injury from exercise with the use of Pilates. With other exercises or during weight lifting you are often more accident or injury prone."

While enduring a Pilates workout, you even find yourself feeling quite happy, not tortured as other workouts can leave you feeling. You might laugh at yourself, but with the help of your Pure Element Pilates instructor, you'll at least feel you have accomplished something uplifting and motivating for your body and mind. Pilates is quite energizing as well. It is a workout you can do as many times a week as you like. Your workouts can vary in length and difficulty. Once you've adopted a Pilates routine, you'll find the all-over body benefits are evident and apply no matter what type of athlete you are, or aren't.

For the younger athletes and hockey players, Pilates is a great workout that isn't stressful or harmful to the young, growing body. At Pure Element Pilates, youth hockey players can take a session with two-to-three of his/her teammates. Two Ilitch nephews, Tyler, 14, and Toby Murray, 13, have been working out at Pure Element Pilates with teammates, and they can't believe how much fun they've had. Toby plays with the Birmingham Liberty Pee Wee A team and Tyler is on the '93 Bantam Major Little Caesars AAA team. Tyler's teammate Zach Badalamenti joined him for his first session over the holiday school break as Hakim-Yarberry, Ilitch and instructor Diana Legel, put the three boys through an hour workout.

"It was hard, but fun," said Badalamenti. "It's better than having coach tell us to run two miles."

"It's harder than I thought," said Tyler Murray. "I feel it will improve me as a hockey player."

Legel, who also works with autistic children in Pilates, said she enjoys hearing the feedback from the boys as they workout.

"I like quizzing them and hearing them connect when they feel the difference in their body," Legel said.

For instance, Tyler Murray said: "I've never been conscious of strengthening my abs and hamstrings as I have with this workout."

"It pushed me to my limits," said Toby Murray. "It stretched parts of my body where I don't usually feel it. I feel burns in my stomach and butt."

Tom Badalamenti watched his son's workout and said afterwards: "I thought it was geared toward women, but now I see it's definitely worthwhile for athletes. And I was just reading where pro athletes like Jason Kidd and Curt Schilling are now using Pilates."

Don't be fooled, though. Pilates is great even if you aren't a hardcore athlete. So hockey players, take your parents, grandparents, siblings and friends along with you. This is one workout that makes you feel good and has lifelong health benefits whether you are shooting for the NHL or watching the shots from the stands.

You can find Pure Element Pilates on the web at www.pureelementpilates.com or by calling 248-862-2200.