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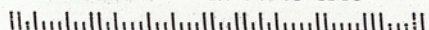
**QUIZ: ARE YOU
A GOOD SPORT?**



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MARCH/APRIL 2000 www.siforwomen.com

Now&Zen

An innovative take on yoga-centric techniques to lengthen and strengthen your muscles **BY BETH HOWARD**

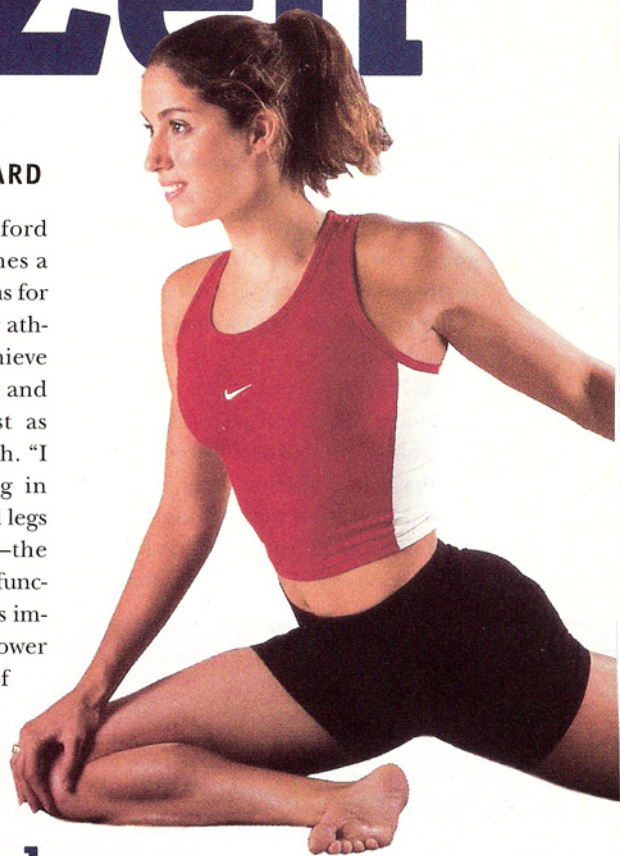
THE SIGN ON the door at the Center of Balance, a training studio in Mountain View, Calif., reads, WELCOME. PLEASE REMOVE YOUR SHOES. With low lighting, New Age music and Japanese screens setting the scene, the converted warehouse feels more like a spa than a gym.

Don't be misled by the peaceful atmosphere; even though there are no dumbbells clanking or treadmills whirring, there's serious work going on, both mental and physical. "You definitely get a sweat going, but it's very relaxing at the same time," says Stanford swimmer Gabrielle Rose, whose team trains three times a week with Tom McCook, the center's founder. The exercises they perform—slow, deliberate movements and precise postures, all integrated with the breath—are a hybrid of yoga (the 4,000-year-old discipline that links movement with the breath), Pilates (a method that strengthens the body's core through a series of concentrated movements) and resistance stretching (a technique that as it actively lengthens muscles, aligns and connects the body). The resulting workout combination emphasizes strength, flexibility, mental concentration and posture; the goal—truth in advertising—is a more muscularly and spiritually balanced body.

Despite their simple appearance, the moves are intense. "We do a minimum number of highly focused reps," says Rose. "That way quality isn't sacrificed." Trading dozens and dozens of heavy-metal squat and bench-press sets for a few reps of body-weight-only movements hasn't made dumbbells

dinosaur material yet (the Stanford team still lifts weights three times a week), but it has increased options for complementary training. Today athletes are recognizing that to achieve optimal performance, flexibility and physical awareness matter just as much as pure muscular strength. "I used to think about swimming in terms of how strong my arms and legs were. Now I realize—and feel—the whole way my body connects and functions," says Rose, who also counts improved flexibility and reduced lower back pain as tangible benefits of McCook's program.

Although the Center of Balance's devotees, which range from Silicon Valley millionaires



Center of Balance

THESE FIVE EXERCISES, demonstrated by Stanford swimmer Gabrielle Rose, represent a small portion of a full training session, which typically incorporates about 40 positions. Use this routine as a warmup and, ideally, as a cooldown. "As you do them, you should feel as though you're pulling your body together, not apart," says Tom McCook. "And be sure to focus on your breath."

The Triangle

BENEFITS: STRETCHES HAMSTRINGS, HIPS AND QUADS

A. Kneel and extend your right leg, knee slightly bent and spine

straight. Using your fingertips on the floor for balance, press your right heel down as you pull the left leg back.

B. Extend the left leg, heel off the floor. Keep your weight off your hands; if needed, move your left leg in. Take five to 10 breaths in each posture.

Repeat sequence on other side.

