

# Pilates for Athletes

*Written by Zoey Trap, MS.*

When we watch the Olympics, we are reminded that while we are all training for the game of life, some of us are training to excel at sports specifically. Athletes may start Pilates for different reasons than the average student – they might want to focus on injury prevention, improve performance and/or develop the winning edge. After all, Pilates has many benefits for athletes of all sports at all levels of competition.

It's no secret that athletes train specifically for their sport. Runners, run. Swimmers, swim. Cyclists, cycle. They work with serious dedication to improve in their event, and they 'wear their sport' on their bodies. Every sport has different physical demands that the competitor will endure. This can lead to poor posture, muscle imbalances and even biomechanical issues. Athletes want to get faster, stronger, more flexible and develop better stability, balance, coordination, agility, and power. Sometimes their bodies develop strategies for improving performance that are not optimal, yet the athlete is unaware. **Pilates is a great way to train for efficiency in movement.**

Pilates allows athletes dedicated time to work from their center and build greater awareness of motor patterning, which can help with injury prevention and recovery as well as performance. Many athletes start Pilates working from their periphery and are unaware of how to work from their 'core' – let alone their *powerhouse*, which is the 'core but more.' It consists not only of the torso muscles but the inner thighs and gluteals as well. In fact, the new Pilates student who is an athlete may be shocked by the bodily shaking they feel when they first tap into their core command center for initiation, stabilization and control. They may try to muscle through exercises or force their body to do more than it is ready for.

It's a journey, but of course, they are thrilled when their performance improves.

The Pilates Principles are also wonderful tools to connect the mind and body for athletes specifically. They help the athlete to develop a better connection to movement patterns and an ability to stay present and calm mentally. *Breathing* connects mind and body and can have a calming effect; *centering* reminds them to work from the center to *control* mind and body; *concentration* helps them move their mind/thoughts into their body to create better quality and efficiency of movement; and *flowing movement* helps the athlete to develop mental and physical stamina as well as to transition smoothly from one movement to another.

Working with athletes will bring out the best in you as the instructor. As you help the athlete toward their personal best, you will develop new cues, new ways of thinking about functional transference, and you may even attract new clientele.

**If you are interested in working with athletes, keep these key notes in mind:**

- Teach athletes Pilates! That's what the athlete is coming to you to learn. Classical Pilates is a workout, so bring the work. When I am working with a new student who is an athlete, I teach them the intro work and make them work deeply so that they earn each new exercise. They need to feel it. I don't try to get fancy and do a bunch of stuff I think will help the sport. They need to build a proper foundation first.
- Challenge athletes or they are likely to quit, or find a different instructor.
- Introduce them to concepts one at a time. Just because they are athletes doesn't mean they can work like experienced Pilates students. Let them be beginners though work them hard.

- Help students discover what the Pilates Principles are and how to use them in their Pilates workouts as well as in their sport.
- If you aren't familiar with their sport, do some research. Explore possible imbalances they might face and what the physical and mental demands are. Then you can anticipate their needs, know what to watch for, and design effective Part C's and D's.