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## Teaching football players yoga . and so much more

By Diane Claytor



Michelle Brown leads Miramonte's varsity football team in their weekly Stretching, Mobility and Breathing class. Photo Diane Claytor

release for an hour every week during football season," Brown explains.

Myofascial release, Brown describes, deals with the fascial network - the "place where the body tends to hold more tension and where there is more tension imbalance. MFR allows those areas to spread out through pressure, rehydrate and get more circulation. When you suffer an injury," Brown continues, "your body has mechanisms to heal itself. But sometimes scar tissue develops and breaking up that scar tissue can be very beneficial."

Coach Schram reports that when he was playing college football years ago, he took two years of ballet, which, at the time, was recommended by the NFL. "It really helped my flexibility," Schram said. "I thought that incorporating yoga, stretching, and working out the muscles would be beneficial to the kids and teach them something useful.

"Michelle was the perfect fit for what I wanted," Schram remembers. "She fully understood that I didn't want a typical yoga class but something more personalized for football players." The class includes a lot of warming up of the muscles using blocks and lacrosse balls to loosen them. "I think it's worked out great," Schram said proudly. "The kids seem to enjoy the class and I think they genuinely see the benefit."

Brown agrees. "Allowing your body to rest is so undervalued, especially with athletes," she notes. "They feel like they have to go all the time and if you want to perform well, rest and recovery are essential at any age." Her goal is enabling these young men "to get the best out of their bodies."

Educating the players about their bodies is an important part of Brown's class because, as she notes, "Most people know more about their cars than their own bodies. I talk to them about muscle groups and why things do what they do and feel like they feel." She happily finds that the boys are very respectful and "eager to learn."

Twenty minutes after the last bell of the day has rung at Miramonte High School, 30 young men, all varsity football players, begin sauntering into the gym. There's bantering and fist pumps as they warmly greet one another. One by one they pick up a yoga mat, lacrosse ball and foam pads and find a spot on the floor. At 3:30 p.m., the lights are turned off and other than the voice of Michelle Brown, standing in the middle of the gym, barely a peep is heard. This is how it remains for the next hour, with the exception of the occasional groans.

Brown, a 2001, 2002 and 2009 Kung Fu Full Contact National Champion, a 2009 Full Contact World Champion and a Second Degree Black Belt, is leading the varsity football team in a Stretching, Mobility and Breathing class. What began five years ago as an idea from Jack Schram, head football coach, to start a yoga program for his players, has evolved into much more. "We do some yoga, but focus more on stretching, breathing and myofascial

Brown, an Alamo native, knows football. She is a lifetime 49ers fan and wished she could have played the sport herself. Instead, she became a high school cheerleader and now attends at least one Miramonte game each season.

More than 20 years ago, Brown was living in San Francisco and decided, at the urging of her father, to learn self defense. She signed up for a kick boxing class at a local YMCA and, as she remembers, "when I threw my first martial arts kick, I realized that this is what I'd been missing. I felt an immediate connection to it. The whole mind body spirit aspect became the real reason I wanted to do it." Martial arts, Brown explains, is very psychological and actually more about the mind than the body. "You have to learn to control your mind before you can learn to control your body and then your spirit," she says.

Brown developed her own self defense class - Hit with Power - where she teaches mostly young women, many going off to college, how to make smarter choices, avoid risky situations and how to deal with an unsafe situation should they be confronted with one. "We talk a lot about using your voice because, after all, that's really our most powerful weapon," Brown states. "It's an intense class and these young women go away feeling very empowered."

In addition to her passion for the martial arts, Brown is a medical exercise specialist and health coach; she oversees three Gumsaba outdoor boot camps and owns a personal training gym in Alamo - Gumsaba Custom Fitness Programs - where she is a personal trainer for 60 clients.

Brown loves what she does and is quite proud of the fact that she is able to help people feel better and get the most from their bodies.

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