

No-frills training center builds strong support

Pro and amateur athletes swear by Euclid facility

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Plain Dealer Reporter

The lights are dim and there is no air conditioning. The sounds come from whirling fans. And there are grunts.

Speed Strength Systems Inc., at the Euclid Sports Plant, is located in a corner of what once was the General Motors Fisher Body Plant in Euclid.

"We manufacture athletes in a place where cars were once manufactured," said Eric Lichter.

Lichter and Tim Robertson operate one of the area's most intriguing training facilities. It is a facility used by NBA players, NFL players, big-league baseball players, college athletes and high school athletes.

Boys and girls, men and women. "I'd say that 40 percent of our clients are women," Robertson said.

This is a 7,000-square-foot throw-back facility. Looking around, one might expect Sylvester Stallone to emerge around a corner to train for an upcoming fight.

Indeed, amateur boxing cards are sometimes staged in the middle of the basketball courts.

The spartanlike atmosphere is part of the facility's charm. "When someone starts squawking about no air conditioning and it is too hot, I tell them that there is a country club down the road," said Robertson, who holds a degree in education and exercise science from the University of Dayton. He played basketball under coach Mike Moran at St. Joseph High School.

The list of clients who sweat, grunt and groan at Speed Strength Systems is wide-ranging and diverse.

The list includes former Indians pitcher Brian Anderson; Ohio State running back Maurice Clarett; Ron Dayne, Joe Jurevics and Nate Clements of the NFL; LeBron James, DeSagana Diop and J.R. Bremer of the Cavaliers; former Kent State basketball player Trevor Huffman; and Stanley Roberts, who ate his way out of the NBA several years ago and is attempting a comeback.

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Athletes who walk through these doors will find no comfort zone in the spartan facility. The Euclid Sports Plant draws professional and amateur athletes willing to go through intense workouts to improve their performance.

"We make the training so hard that playing the sport is easy. For instance, with [Cleveland Heights native and Cavs guard J.R.] Bremer, we worked him so hard that chasing a player around a basketball court for 48 minutes was a snap."

Eric Lichter, trainer for Speed Strength Systems Inc. at the Euclid Sports Plant.

TRAINING

FROM D1

Athletes drawn to no-frills facility

Foreign basketball players include Nene Hilario, the seventh pick (by Denver) of the 2002 NBA draft, and Leandro Barbosa, a first-round pick of the San An-

tonio Spurs who was traded to the Phoenix Suns in the June NBA draft. Both are Brazilians.

"We've got high-profile and the not-so-high-profile athletes here," Robertson said.

Among the not-so-high-profile athletes is Jessica Sabath, a Lake Catholic High School graduate who won a volleyball scholarship to Eastern Kentucky University.

Sabath has worked under the

tutelage of Lichter and Robertson for two years. "I've worked out four times a week for 1½ to 2 hours," Sabath said. "You are pushed here."

"It's good. I improved my vertical jump a lot the last two years."

The facility has a 5,000-square-foot weight training area, four indoor basketball courts, a 15-yard by 30-yard sand training pit and two indoor turf tracks — one measuring 70 yards, the other 25. And, if this isn't enough to get the blood pumping and muscles aching, down the street, behind a McDonald's restaurant, there is a hill that's 60 yards long with a 30-degree incline.

"One of the drills on the hill," Lichter said, "is walking up it on your hands."

"At this point," said Robertson, smiling, "we have no name for the hill."

Training under Lichter and Robertson obviously is no picnic.

"We make the training so hard," said Lichter, who graduated from Weber State with a degree in exercise physiology, "that playing the sport is easy. For instance, with Bremer, we worked him so hard that chasing a player around a basketball court for 48 minutes was a snap."

The cost of undergoing this training ranges from a \$175 a month package to \$4,000 a month for the athletes who are aspiring pros or already pros. "Take a guy like Hilario," Robertson said.

"He came to us as an unknown. He spent \$4,000, but made \$3 [million] or \$4 million with the contract he signed."

Robertson said there is no secret why this bare-bones facility without the frills, which opened in January 2001, has become popular with the serious athlete. "We provide a training stimulus that is very unique," he said. "There is no place that does what we do. This is a blue-collar place where athletes can get into the best shape of their lives."

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THE PLAIN DEALER



Answer to
Question #2

Niagara Falls



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