



Tribune photos by Jose M. Osorio

Physical therapist Denise Klatt demonstrates how to use the Bodyblade, a rod flanked by flexible hard-rubber blades that create resistance.

Newest ways to sweat it

The trends stay close to the core of training

By Bob Condon
Tribune staff reporter

Health club executives, personal trainers and other fitness professionals gather each year at the annual Club Industry show in Chicago to examine the latest trends in exercise and physical activity. Amid the Pilates machines and high-tech, plugged-in-to-every-imaginable-electronic-option treadmills—both last year's news—there were some standout new trends.

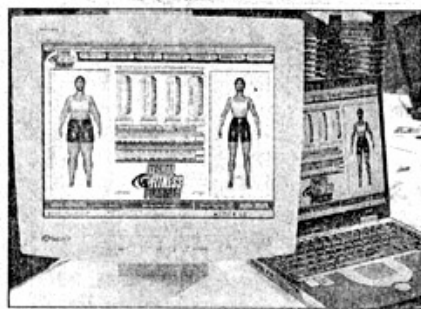
Or at least some new perspectives on old ideas.

For instance, core training, or "functional fitness," was a hot topic at the mid-October show, which covered 900 exhibits and countless beads of demonstrators' sweat at McCormick Place. What elite athletic trainers and physical therapists have been endorsing for years is booming at health clubs.

More classes and equipment are devoted to strengthening the core groups of the abdominal, back, chest and shoulder muscles. The result is you have more function to play your sport, carry the groceries, play with children, walk the ruins on vacation or feel more stamina throughout your work week.

Core-training options at the show ranged from inexpensive to pricey. Bruce Hymanson, physical therapist and founder of Bodyblade (www.bodyblade.com), greeted a stream of visitors at his modest booth.

His product features a rigid but cushioned rod flanked by flexible hard-rubber blades that create resistance when the Bodyblade is gripped in the middle and worked in the air. Ro-



The Visual Fitness Planner shows "before" and "after" images of a person at the show.

tating or wiggling in front or behind while standing or sitting provides a surprisingly thorough core workout.

Hymanson offers blades that range from \$59 for a cross-training model to \$99 for the Classic model aimed at higher resistance and strength workout (plus a children's model). You choose a model based on whether you want it for strength (a six- to eight-minute workout) or toning (30 minutes).

The first Bodyblade was sold in 1991, when Hymanson marketed a few hundred per year to fellow physical therapists. In a decade, he has sold more than 600,000 and gained the endorsement of such regular users as baseball pitching star Randy Johnson (who simulates the throwing motion with it) and heavyweight boxing champion Lennox Lewis.

"I bought two for one-on-one workouts," said Trudy Brock, a 69-year-old personal trainer at Plymouth (Ind.) Club Fitness, near South Bend. "I think it will provide variety and encourage people to exercise more vigorously."

A few aisles down, the Hoist company was debuting its "Composite Motion Leg Press" for roughly \$3,500. The intent for the machine is to avoid the arching of the back that can occur on regular leg-press machines. Also, the machine's fluid-motion design allows people with compromised conditions such as scoliosis (a deformation of the spine), cerebral palsy and knee replacement to use the equipment.

Another hot topic for health club operators is software to support the training regimens of members. The most intriguing offering at the Club Industry show was the brainchild of another physical therapist, Mario Bravomalo, founder of the Ft. Worth-based Visual Fitness Planner. His program provides a detailed daily workout and eating plan in printout form, along with "before" and "after" simulated pictures.

For instance, a person can see how his body would appear if, say, 35 pounds lighter if following a 20-week plan. It is an attention-getter.

One piece of equipment gaining a lot of tryouts from the health club operators was the NuStep "recumbent cross-trainer," which is part recumbent bike and part step machine. It targets both cardiovascular training and muscle toning by inviting the exerciser to pump the legs and arms in a step motion while sitting in a back-neutral position. The machine's self-proclaimed "most comfortable seat in the fitness industry" swivels to make easier getting on and off.

Group exercise class was a hot topic among attendees, both on the exhibit hall floor and over lunch or dinner. Club Industry magazine, which sponsors the show, reported that the latest survey of health club owners shows yoga and Pilates continue to be strong (if old news) while core conditioning, stability ball training, group strength training and senior-specific classes are popular this year.