

Message in a Hamstring

My high school years began with an invitation by two coaches to join their sports teams as I was known to run fast and hit hard. As a freshman to be asked by track and field as well as the varsity softball, was flattering, I declined, because I was competing in gymnastics and my loyalty was to the gymnastics team. Still, I never forgot the attraction especially to softball, and thought one day I'd pick up my mitt again. A decade later when I discovered Pilates, I knew instinctively that this body conditioning method would be a perfect partner for all types of sports. When my earlier softball passion emerged again, bringing with it an unexpected injury, it didn't take long before I saw the potential in this partnership.

It happened during the second week of my city's recreation co-ed softball league. I was standing at home plate, waiting for the pitch. The pitcher threw, I hit, and when sprinting to first base, I suddenly felt an unfamiliar muscle spasm in the back of my thigh. Stunned by the intense pull, I hobbled to first as the umpire asked if I wanted a runner and gratefully, I nodded. When I limped back to the bench, I was certain of two things: I was out for the rest of the game and that my ego had just had a smack down.

Based on my sobering experience, I developed exercises utilizing the Pilates technique, but with focus on creating more explosive actions for the hamstrings. Pilates lengthens and strengthens the muscular skeletal system, but the hamstrings, comprised mostly of fast twitch muscle fibers, need more specific attention because they play a dominant role in all leg movements. In my case, I was not warmed up enough and my hamstrings fired too quickly and caused a deep pull. If there isn't enough warm up time, you are likely to sustain the same type of injury.

I've always told my students that injuries are our best teacher, if we are aware and present; however, the ego is quite a formidable opponent, and it can get the best of us. But if willing, our lessons and teachers show up in the most unique manner, and, this time, the teacher was my left hamstring.