

Area athletes flocking to BlueStreak Fitness Center

By Dave Ruden

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STAMFORD -- It is an early weekday afternoon, and as Phoebe Maglathlin goes through one of her two-hour workouts at BlueStreak Sports Training, the sweat glistens off her face.

Maglathlin, who graduated from Darien High School last month and soon will be leaving to begin her freshman season with the Duke volleyball team, is being led around by her trainer, Jenna Tammel, through a rapid-fire routine of agility, sprinting and weight drills, often using space-age-looking equipment.

Maglathlin had trained the previous four winters at the facility with the Darien girls lacrosse team. And when the time came to find a place to conduct her summer conditioning, she did not have to look far.

"BlueStreak is the best place around," said Maglathlin, who exercises there three days a week. "I immediately thought of coming here because of lacrosse. This is the first time I'm doing something like this on my own, and with a different sport. Duke is going to be very rigorous so I couldn't do it by myself."

Maglathlin is not alone. As BlueStreak prepares to celebrate its fifth anniversary, it has become a popular destination for many of the area's top high school and college athletes.

Max Pacioretty, who grew up in New Canaan and plays for the Montreal Canadiens, is a BlueStreak alumnus. Khairi Fortt, the Stamford High School senior linebacker who is being recruited by many of the nation's top colleges, is at BlueStreak two to three times a week, often with Silas Redd, the King senior who recently committed to Penn State.

"The trainers there really push you and they have a good program," Fortt said. "I've definitely improved my running ability and flexibility. It's how I got faster and quicker."

BlueStreak is a member of Athletic Republic, a network of 160 franchised high-performance sports clubs.

"I think what we have done is tested and proven, and gets results," said Matt Cole, who has been BlueStreak's president since 2006. "We can help athletes make improvements and customize programs to meet everyone's needs."

BlueStreak was started in 2004 by Cole's father-in-law, David Neeleman, the founder of JetBlue Airways, who had moved to New Canaan and wanted to find a facility similar to the one his son Daniel, a high school football player, used at the family's former home in Salt Lake City.

The 14,000-square foot building has two levels, with open group space, a turf area, a basketball court and synthetic ice on the first floor, and weight, cardiovascular and strength equipment on top.

BlueStreak has sessions geared for athletes in almost every sport, with 20 full-time and five part-time trainers. It is one of the few places that offers a treadmill designed specifically for hockey, which may explain why the greatest number of the club's current 800 members are hockey players, followed next by football and lacrosse.

It opened a second location on Long Island in 2006 and at Chelsea Piers in New York the following year.

According to information provided by BlueStreak, it has trained 11,000 athletes at its three sites, including 26 high school and college All-Americans, 14 National Hockey League draft picks and 308 college athletes.

Cole, 28, a former football player at Utah and Fordham, left the financial industry to join BlueStreak. His mandate was to increase the client base, which he said had 100 members in Stamford at the time, and make the club more profitable.

"My passion has always been sports, and I also wanted to run a business as well," Cole said. "Things were not running smoothly on a day to day basis. The way my father-in-law works, this was an opportunity and not a handout."

Many members of the New Canaan and Darien High School football teams have been holding their preseason workouts at BlueStreak for several years. This summer players on the Stamford High, Westhill and King teams are also training at the club.

When Peter Stokes was named football coach at Trinity Catholic last winter, he wanted to improve his team's conditioning. Several of his former players had good experiences at BlueStreak, and now he has over 20 working out three days a week to get ready for the start of preseason practice.

"Matt made a strong presentation and I knew we had to do something," Stokes said. "They have crazy stuff there, good stuff. We had to do something to catch up with the Joneses, or Marinellis."

Lou Marinelli, the football coach at New Canaan High School, has won three straight state championships since his team started spending their summers at BlueStreak.

"I'm not going to say it's because of that, but we have been successful so there has to be some correlation," Marinelli said. "I was skeptical at first, but I've seen how much faster my kids have gotten. They are certainly more battle ready."

BlueStreak claims that its programs have led to an average of a 0.2-0.4 second decrease in 40-yard dash times, a 33 percent improvement in foot speed, a 2-4 inch increase in vertical jump and 20 percent greater leg strength.

While BlueStreak has a reputation for attracting the more serious athlete, Cole said they account for less than half of his business.

"I would say that 60 percent of our kids don't want to be picked last in gym class or want to try and make the team," Cole said.

BlueStreak also offers adult classes and several programs for kids.

Because it is more upscale than an average gym, Cole said the greatest percentage of its members come from Darien, followed closely by New Canaan.

"From a business standpoint we picked this location because it is in a good region and more affluent," he said.

As BlueStreak looks to the next five years, Cole said there have been discussions about opening new locations, but there are no changes planned for the Stamford branch.

"We're going to keep doing what we're doing and keep getting better at what we're doing," Cole said.

As with any business, BlueStreak's biggest selling point might be the word of mouth generated by the athletes themselves.

"They all really know what they are doing," Maglathlin said. "It's fun in that you have someone to talk to while training, but they also push you hard. I enjoy going there and I think I will see the benefits when I get to Duke."