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## Many break a sweat before dawn

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Birds chirped in the darkness as stars dotted the spring sky.

Mist coated the grass. The streets were nearly empty. Most household windows were dark.

It was 5 a.m. on a Monday and most of Williamson County was still asleep.

But there was plenty of movement at D1 Sports Training in Cool Springs, where 12 women climbed stairs, sprinted on the artificial turf, lifted dumbbells and sweated through pushups during a boot-camp workout.

And they're not the only early-morning athletes. There are plenty of others throughout the county who arise before the sun to work up a sweat.

Carter Hays of Franklin teaches exercise classes at 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. every weekday at D1.

"Most of the people I train are business people, and a lot of them need to get this done before they go to work," Hays said. "And 5 in the morning is usually a very good time because it gives you a chance to shower and go on with your day. It's a fantastic way to start your day because you're kind of paying yourself first. I just love the morning."

Renee Yarbrough of Brentwood sets her alarm clock for one hour before the 5 a.m. class.

"At first, it was so hard, but now it's like all of us can't wait to get here because of the camaraderie," Yarbrough said. "It's still dark when you come, and it's peaceful. Every morning when I drive here, the moon is just on the horizon, and I love the peace of it."

The 90-day class emphasizes a whole body makeover, monitoring things such as blood pressure and cholesterol, for total wellness. There are 22 women in the Home Stretch HealthQuest program, and they inspired Yarbrough's parents, both in their 80s, to join a fitness club.

The women's age range is 38 to 55 and one class member, Allyson Neuhaus of Brentwood, has eight children, including six-month-old twins.

"We have some 70 children between us, although 20 are grown, and five grandmothers," Yarbrough said.

### **Marathon mornings**

Scott Alexander of Nolensville started his training runs for Saturday's Country Music Marathon at 5:30 a.m. four days per week.

"There aren't many people out that early," Alexander said. "A couple weeks ago I had one of my more eventful long runs. It started pouring and there were cars that sort of slowed down to look at this idiot that was out there at 5:30 in the morning running in the pouring-down rain."

The only people Alexander usually sees that early are a couple ladies from his subdivision who were training for their first marathon.

"Typically, it's sort of me and my iPod," said Alexander, who saw some deer and coyotes during his training runs. "Training early takes your mind off all the pressures that hit you during the week with work and a couple kids and that type thing. It is relaxing. It sort of gets you away from the hustle and bustle of the daily activities."

Alexander was hoping to shave 18 minutes off his time of 4 hours, 8 minutes in his first marathon last year in Nashville.

"I've fallen in love with the sport," Alexander said. "It keeps me in shape and I've lost about 25 pounds since I first started running. It's sort of a love-hate relationship. I love the benefits and sometimes I hate the fact that the alarm clock is going off at 4:45, 5 o'clock in the morning, but it's been worth it."

### **Spin zone is crowded**

So many people attend the 5 a.m. spin class on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Brentwood YMCA that participants must arrive early to assure themselves of having a stationary bike.

"There's like 25 or 30 participants," class member Joe Zarccone of Brentwood said. "You've got to get there at least 10 minutes before it starts to guarantee yourself a bike or you play musical bikes for the last bike."

The early start gives Zarccone, 49, enough time to make it to his job at Publix on time at 7 a.m. He usually goes to sleep about 10 p.m. and wakes up at 3:30 a.m.

"(Instructor John Farkus) almost has a cult following," Zarccone said. "When you tell people you exercise that early, they all think you're a little screwy. Typically, the only cars I see are the cars that are heading to the Y."

### **Trainers answer bell**

Personal trainer Lori Shepard of Brentwood trains six of her clients between 5-6 a.m.

"Luckily I have a bunch of early a.m.'s and then later p.m.'s so I go home, get cleaned up, have lunch and I take a little siesta," Shepard said. "I'm not a morning person, but I can fake it and it's OK because I know what value it is to her to get that workout in (at 5:15 a.m.). As long as I go to bed at night I'm cool, but boy, when I push it, it's not pretty."

Greg Luken of Brentwood hates waking up early to exercise, but he does it anyway, twice a week at 5 a.m. with personal trainer Christopher McClintock at Personal Best Fitness in Maryland Farms.

"I only have myself and my alarm clock to argue with at 4:15 a.m.," Luken said. "It changes your life. I had guests come into town last week and they wanted to go out on Thursday night. I said I'll make reservations for you, but I have to be home by 8:30 p.m. because I have to get up in the morning."

Developing the discipline to wake up early has created a ripple effect in all aspects of his life. Now, it's easier to resist the temptation of junk foods such as cheesecake because he doesn't want to regain the calories he burned off earlier in the day.

"It has affected every aspect of my life: emotionally, interpersonally in my relationships and spiritually," Luken said. "It's affected my work. The biggest thing for me has been that sense when you say you're going to do something to actually do it."

McClintock said Personal Best is booked solid from 5 a.m. to 10 a.m. every weekday. Personal trainer Oliva Faziani is the ultimate early bird: She works out for one hour before training clients at 5 a.m.

**Gym never closes**

Members of Anytime Fitness in Cool Springs can use a key card to access the facility 24 hours a day, 365 days per year.

"If you were a member, you could come work out at 3 o'clock in the morning if you want to," general manager Adam Ehlers said. "A lot of shift workers will come in after work."

Several doctors and nurses work out at Anytime between midnight and 6 a.m. after their shifts end at the hospital.

**Ice time forces issue**

Hockey teams and figure skaters have early-morning practices at Southern Ice Arena in Cool Springs. During this past hockey season, Ravenwood and Independence/Page both skated through 5 a.m. practices.

"Ice time is difficult in this (area) because there are only four sheets of ice to work with, but if I chose to want afternoon practices, then your schedule varies drastically because there are so many groups vying for that hour of ice time," Ravenwood coach Tom Bradbury said. "But by agreeing to go to a 5 a.m. on Mondays and Thursdays like we did, I was able to be very consistent throughout the season."

Some of the Independence/ Page players had to wake up at 3:30 a.m. to make it to the rink on time and sometimes they had late games the night before practices. So one night during Thanksgiving break, three of the players camped in a tent near the rink, hoping to squeeze an extra 30 minutes of sleep. The plan backfired when they stayed up most of the night talking.

"It was difficult getting to the rink, but once you were on the ice, it could be noon, midnight or 5 in the morning — once you hit the ice, you're awake, you're sharp and you're focused," Independence/Page coach Jack Flynn said.

Laura Sanders, the Southern Ice Skate School director, begins many of her weekdays at 6 a.m. for skating lessons and often wakes up at 3:50 a.m.

"Ice time is more available and less expensive early in the morning," Sanders said. "Pretty much all throughout history it's been an early-morning sport. I can't imagine getting up and not putting my skates on and getting on the ice in the morning. It's a very soothing feeling."

**Dawn dips are intense**

Many of the county's top swimmers go to practices early in the morning, including Ravenwood's Tyler Shedron.

"We've got two practices at 5 o'clock in the morning and then one at 7 o'clock on Saturday," Shedron said. "My alarm goes off at 4:30 a.m. and you get awoken abruptly. It's not too fun a lot of the times, but you've just got to push through it and focus on what your goals are."

Shedron tries to go to sleep by 9 p.m., but sometimes he can't resist the temptation to watch college basketball games on TV.

By the time Shedron arrives at school, he's raring to go while most of his classmates are still sleepy-eyed.

Former Stanford swimmer Shaun Phillips of Spring Hill endured three 5 a.m. practices per week while swimming with the Nashville Aquatic Club in high school.

"Because I lived in Spring Hill, I woke up at 3:40 a.m.," Phillips said. "I know that my mom always hated it. She would buy me bags of candy like York Peppermint Patties and insist that I eat them on the way there because she was always terrified I would fall asleep at the wheel. I would try to have

some kind of snack to keep me awake and sometimes I would drive with the windows down."

Phillips said the only other drivers on Interstate 65 were a few truckers. Training early gave him the feeling he was gaining an edge on any of his competitors who might still be asleep.

"The entire workout happens during the dark, and you watch the sun come up as you're getting out of the pool," Phillips said. "It's a pretty intense lifestyle, but it definitely develops that base that when you get to the end of the season, you know you've done everything it takes and you can rely on that like money in the bank."

Phillips, who is training for the U.S. Olympic Team Trials, said there were times his peers fell asleep in their first few classes and he occasionally missed an exit on the way home because he was so drowsy.

Phillips and the other early-morning athletes believe waking up before dawn has more positives than negatives.

"The downsides of waking up that early brought a positive with it because I really enjoyed being out there on the road on my own, being awake and feeling alive when it was still dark," Phillips said. "It gives you a unique feeling like you're doing something nobody else is, and it's kind of fun. It's almost exciting; it's a bit of an adventure.

"Successful athletes are always adrenaline junkies and waking up early and doing those things gives you a sense of accomplishment. When I went through job interviews, people asked me, 'Why am I qualified?' I'd say, 'Well, for most of my life I've accomplished more before 7 a.m. than almost anybody else on the planet.' It's a sign of character and strength that we hold dear to us."

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