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April 1, 2009 - **Health and Fitness**



Author: **Tom Vachét**

Tom Vachét is the founder of Elite Performance Management, a company specializing in keeping athletes in top condition both during and off-season. Tom has worked with some of the greatest professional athletes in the business. We get some of Tom's secrets on getting in shape, getting lean, and getting in top form, even if you're not a pro.

David Chen



Tom works with professional volleyball player Paige Davis  
Photography by Randy Angel

**SOAK: Why did you start Elite Performance Management?**

**Tom:** I started EPM because I saw an opportunity to provide a unique concierge service to professional and elite athletes. I had a conversation with one of my clients, who was explaining to me that on the business side of his career he had a number of professionals; sports agent, entertainment attorney, investment banker, real estate broker, etc. His complaint was they were all stovepiped. None of them spoke to one-another, they did not communicate with each other, and there was no cohesive plan. My background was in medical case management consulting as a rehabilitation specialist. In that role, I took complex medical cases, created a team of specialists in different disciplines, wrote a plan, and then managed its execution. At EPM, I do exactly the same, except all the services are related to elevating performance, reducing injury risk, and managing the injuries that do occur.

**SOAK: What makes Elite Performance Management different from a gym where they set you up with personal trainers/nutritionists etc?**

**Tom:** First, I use a consulting model. I generally deal with four types of clients:

- Athletes that I am on year-round retainer with
- Athletes that I may only see for off-season conditioning
- Athletes that come to me for injury management
- Athletes that I simply assess for their functional capacity and injury risk

Second, mine is a virtual business, based on an intellectual property and a service. I have a terrific local facility in Hermosa Beach, *Unlimited Fitness*, which provides me the opportunity to work some clients that come here to see me. When I travel, I will arrange to work at a facility convenient to my client. I have never had a problem gaining access to a gym. Most are very welcoming to me as they enjoy hosting a professional athlete.

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Fall Out Boy	16.0%
Coldplay	12.0%
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Sapheria ...



CJ \*



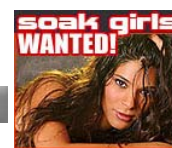
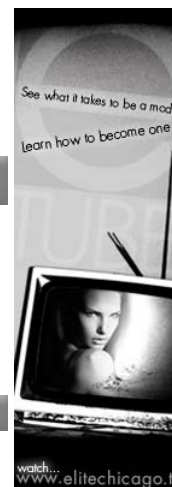
Charlene M. McGlashan



Sarah Ellena



latest models



Third, I use the analogy that the majority of trainers are like the Ford mechanic who changes the oil and spark plugs in order to maintain your performance. I'm the Lamborghini technician, who with subtle adjustments and the assistance of a specialist team of tire, fuel, and aerodynamic experts, will increase your efficiency; adding horsepower while dropping your 0 - 60 time on the track. When you're looking to tweak your performance up, or break a disabling cycle of career threatening injuries, I'm the person to come to.

Fourth, I include a number of specialists in the process; primarily physical therapy, nutrition, and sports psychology.



**SOAK:** What's your philosophy when training someone?

**Tom:** My off-season training regime is simple:

I provide a comprehensive assessment to every new client. I use the *Functional Movement Screen* developed by Gray Cook, PT. By taking my clients through seven simple movements, it allows me to determine areas of opportunity for improvement, as well as potential for injury. In addition, I assess for posture, symmetry of strength, balance, and core endurance.

The first half of the off-season program takes place in the gym. My athletes do no skills work during this period. Once we have established a strong base of conditioning, the second half is dedicated to improving sport specific skills. Over the entire off-season period, an athlete works twice daily for two consecutive days, then once on the third day. Then he rests for the next four days. Sounds simple, but the workouts are brutally hard. I believe that to elevate the performance of an athlete, their conditioning program intensity has to exceed anything they will face in competition.

We start by re-developing core strength, and more importantly, core endurance. Then we add balance and stability in an unstable environment. Finally, we add power as an expression of work efficiency over time. Most of my athletes will lift no more than a forty-pound dumbbell over the course of the off-season. All their endurance work is accomplished in three, twelve-minute, high intensity interval workouts, which serves as the warm-up for their conditioning routine, performed on an Elliptical Trainer on three consecutive days. The average male athlete will gain five to seven pounds of lean muscle and drop their body fat by two to five percent.

That last day is comprised of two supersets intended to test both the endurance and the desire of the athlete. The program consists of a lower extremity bodyweight routine, comprised of four movements, each with twenty repetitions, for eighty repetitions, completed in ninety seconds. We will repeat, sets, back to back, with a one-minute rest interval between each set. Then, after a four-minute recovery, we move on to complete a similar upper body superset, with similar repetitions, time constraints, and numbers of sets. I challenge the athlete to select the number of sets to do in any given day, equal to their desire for improvement. We begin at four sets. I have had athletes, one in particular from the NBA, that have worked their way to twelve, back-to-back sets by the time the season is set to begin.

Conditioning and skill work is only a portion of the preparation for sport. My athletes are all evaluated by a Sports Nutritionist,

and provided a detailed strategy for nutrition. They also are placed on a program of supplementation that supports strength development and recovery. Finally, based on initial evaluation findings, I will arrange for a physical therapy assessment and concurrent treatment.

**SOAK:** *You've trained professional athletes from the NBA, NHL, Volleyball and PGA players...do you have any funny/interesting stories about working with them or others?*

**Tom:** Don't forget the NFL, MMA, and a few souls from the military and police ranks. There are obviously lots of stories. I suppose the most interesting things I find are that many athletes I begin to work with are weak functionally. They can't do a single proper pull-up, or hold a "plank" for more than a minute. Most don't even know how to activate the single most important muscle set in sports, the glutes. It's amazing! But then, I tell them all these things they should do, but cannot, just suggest an incredible opportunity for improvement.

**SOAK:** *For someone who almost never exercises, but just signed up for a gym membership, what are the best exercises to do, to ease into it?*

**Tom:** Statistics taken from the Surgeon General indicate that over 50% of people undertaking a new program of fitness will injure themselves in the first six months. The best preventative to an injury is to first consult your physician regarding any restrictions or precautions that may be suggested. Then, join a gym where you have nationally certified trainers who can provide an initial assessment similar to my own. Then, bodyweight-only work is desirable for the first few months, using multiple planes of motion. Move slowly, with a focus on body control, and in good form. Remember, my professional athletes do the same for the first part of every off-season. Adding Yoga for flexibility and Pilates for core strength development is a great idea, and getting some advice on healthy eating strategies helps to secure a good fitness outcome.

**SOAK:** *What's the best thing to do for someone who feels that they've plateaued, or are not seeing any more gains.*

**Tom:** Plateaus occur when your body adapts to patterns of movement or even patterns in your exercise routine. In order to avoid these patterns, and to provide accelerated and continuous improvement, I developed an approach called *Chaos, Accelerated Performance Training™*. For every client I will develop an individualized overarching plan that is periodized to core strength and endurance, balance and stability, strength in an unstable environment, and then explosiveness. I never, ever plan an individual workout. Every workout is completely extemporaneous. I let the client's response to the work dictate the direction I go in. I often make up completely new exercises on the fly. Afterward, we review every workout, and I give them an opportunity to write every exercise down in a spiral notebook in their own words. I tell them to then take pieces of paper, and write down their name for every exercise on each one. Then, when a client leaves me, goes on a trip, etc., I tell them to put all the pieces of paper with the exercises on them in a bowl, or a hat, and drew out six to ten randomly. Since I never do isolation work, and every exercise requires a multiple muscle group contribution, with these random exercises they are guaranteed a great full-body workout completed in a fully functional style.

**SOAK:** *Trainers tend to give nutritional advice to their clients, what is your take on this? What are your reasons for this?*

**Tom:** Trainers do this for three reasons primarily:

- They do not respect the qualifications of someone who has undertaken the effort to be college degreed as a Nutritionist or Registered Dietician
- Providing nutritional advice is a secondary revenue stream
- They are afraid of referring out because they think they may lose their client



**SOAK:** For someone who can't afford a gym membership, what are some exercises that they can do at home to get in shape?

**Tom:** Start with plank and side plank. They will begin to build core strength and endurance, and shape your midsection. Add single leg sit-to-stands from a kitchen chair for glute strength and hip stability. Alternating leg lunges are great for quads. Pushups with one leg in the air will build chest and shoulder strength. Alternating leg bridges will condition hamstrings and integrate the glutes.

**SOAK:** How can someone prevent injuries when working out?

**Tom:** Warm up with a little work on an elliptical trainer, stationary bike, or rower. Then take it slow, move with control, and use good form. Take time afterward to get a stretch. It's part of the workout, so don't leave it out. Finally, rest is underrated. Work two or three days with good intensity. Then take the next few days off to recover. The average length of a career in the NBA is 6.4 years. It's half that in the NFL. I tell my athletes their careers aren't measured by a sprint. Their career is like a marathon. So, pace yourself, and take care of yourself, and you'll enjoy a long, injury free career.

**Keywords:** [Tom, Vachet, fitness, professional, athlete, exercise, warm up, work out, NBA, NFL, MMA, fit, gym, weights, diet, EPM](#)



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