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Yoga key training tool for Appleton North players **By Dan VanderPas**

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Some high school boys become young men through the trials they face during football practice.

They learn to deal with adversity, including heat, cold, thirst, exhaustion, hunger and physical pain.

But once in a while they are deceived. At first, Appleton North senior Kyle Srnka figured that doing yoga under the direction of a mother of one of the varsity football players would be an insult to their strength and stamina.

Srnka, a 6-foot-3, 215-pound offensive lineman, figured that there was no way a petite mother could provide the team with a valuable workout. But Srnka got fooled. Pleasantly surprised might be a better way to describe his feelings.

"(Defensive coach Rob Salm) introduced us (all North athletes) to power yoga last summer," he recalled. "When I first heard about it, I kind of thought it was a girl thing to do."

Turns out the girl — Jan Marnocha, mother of senior running back/defensive back Ryan Marnocha — knows her stuff. She's a certified and registered yoga teacher with Yoga Alliance.

Now on Wednesday afternoons for half an hour, Jan has the big varsity toughies working on core strength, endurance, flexibility and balance. Her power yoga workouts take their bodies through a full range of motion to help avoid injuries as they flow through a sequence of exercises.

But back to Srnka, the guy who thought power yoga might be a soft touch for veterans of helmet cracking Fox Valley Association warfare.

"I went in there expecting an easy workout," Srnka said. "I was drenched in sweat 30 minutes into it."

His abs were sore and he was sick of situps. In the end, this yoga stuff is proving to be beneficial for the program.

"I think the biggest thing is it stretches us out. It strengthens all muscles," said senior defensive back Ian McIntosh. "It focuses on the hips, back and gets the kinks out."

Added senior lineman Cam Kerkhoff, "We haven't had as many injuries as last year and I think yoga helps us."

Meanwhile, Ryan Marnocha said that at first it was a little awkward having his mother leading the team.

"But it became a normal part of practice," he said. "During that time I don't see her as a mom, but as someone who comes in and helps the team avoid injuries and become more flexible."

Salm and head coach Paul Engen also are sold on the benefits of power yoga. Salm said participants are on their feet a lot and then go into different positions. He pointed out that there are professional teams that are into yoga, too, and that his kids look forward to it.

"There's great flexibility and balance, and you feel good after doing it," he said.

Engen sees it as a way to keep his players in shape and curtail injuries.

Power yoga isn't a drag, according to the players. It's a valuable tool. Once in a while, there's even comic relief, like the day 323-pound David Gevelinger struggled with a flexibility exercise. It was all good fun, though, and probably made the team even closer.

During the final couple of minutes of the session there's meditation. Players said they use the time to focus on the upcoming opponent and what they had to do to contribute to victory.

It is supposed to be a quiet, gentle, peaceful moment as participants gently bring their thoughts back to the next phase of football practice. Near the end of one of those early sessions, Engen blew his whistle and startled those meditating back to reality. It was good for a chuckle.

Jan, who has been an exercise leader for years, enjoys volunteering to help the team. She strives to avoid the limelight, preferring to focus on the positives her sessions are doing for the team. "I wish I could work with them for an hour instead of a half-hour per week," she said.

She's a valuable team player, like the rest of them.