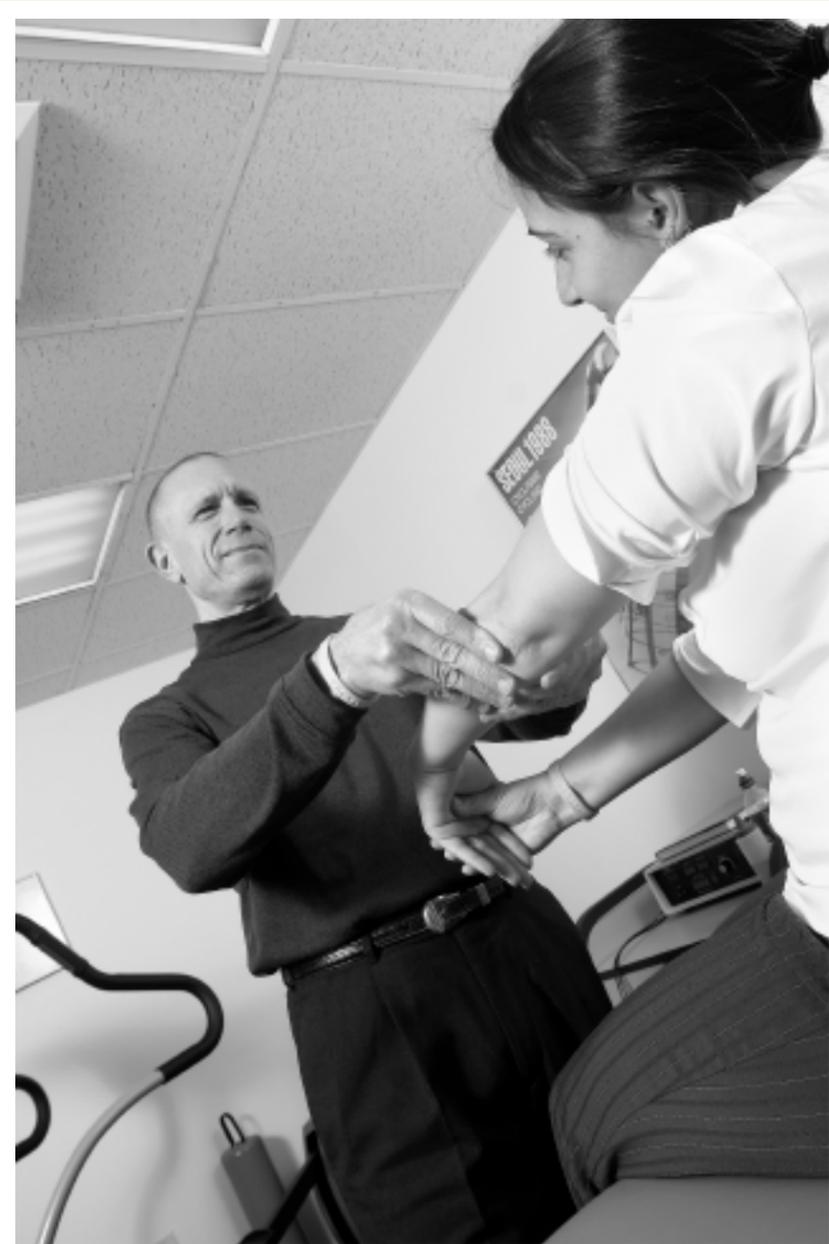


Rocky Mountain Reaches for Fitness Heights *By Chris Gregor*



Steve Black

HOW DID OLYMPIC GYMNAST Paul Hamm recover from a tragic fall, successfully finish his last routines, and win his gold medal? How did Lance Armstrong muster the power to capture his sixth Tour de France after overcoming cancer? As any Springfield College student or graduate can tell you, there was probably more to it than just the body; it required the mind and the spirit, too.

While Stephen Black '75, G'77, has not coached Hamm or Armstrong, he sees their recent high profile athletic triumphs as perfect examples of the holistic approach to health and fitness he advocates. The way these and other athletes facing extreme adversity overcome obstacles takes more than physical prowess; it demands highly developed psychological, emotional, and even spiritual characteristics. At his Rocky Mountain Human Performance Center, a year-old lifestyle and fitness facility in West Springfield, Mass., Black is putting the Humanics philosophy to work. Utilizing the skills and experiences he has learned over the past 30 years, he is helping people from all walks of life achieve their highest level of performance in a unique fitness setting—with a decidedly no-nonsense approach.

The mission statement displayed on RMHPC's Web site has the fire and brimstone of a Marine recruiting commercial: "RMHPC was created from the demonstrated need for quality research leading to the development of population sensitive wellness programs.

"It's in the eyes of Cal Ripken Jr., spotting the seams on a full-count heater. The wrist of Natasha Zvereva, raising the racket for match point. The legs of Hiroyasu Shimizu, slicing the ice of 500 meters. The lungs of Elana Meyer, gulping the last

twenty-six miles. The hands of Michael Jordan, ramming a ball down the throat of an eighteen-inch hoop.

"It's the will to win. It can't be stopped. It can't be silenced. But it can't survive without a price. The true competitor knows that the road is long, filled with sacrifice and sweat. Not all battles bring victory, but as long as the fire rages, victory will be ordained."

After receiving his BS in physical education from Springfield College, Black taught anatomy while earning a master's in education from Springfield in 1977. He then founded a company called START, a sports medicine, orthopedic, physical therapy, and athletic training practice that eventually grew to 16 locations including free-standing sites and some corporate sites in the Springfield area. START also offered athletic training to many area schools.

In 1991, Black sold his interest in START and moved to Boulder, Colorado, to pursue a new way of helping people—an approach that focused on prevention to reduce injuries and enhance the overall quality of life through proper preparation and lifestyle choices. His vision came to fruition when he formed the first Rocky Mountain Human Potential Center. The facility consisted of Black, a nutritionist and two interventional cardiologists creating a group practice for preventive cardiology, preventive wellness, as well as cardiac rehabilitation and sports specific training. Boulder, a magnet for all types of endurance and extreme sports addicts, turned out to be the perfect setting for the new venture.

Black's inspiration for starting RMHPC goes back to his days at Spring-

field College. "When I was doing athletic training at SC, we saw so many kids coming in with high school injuries that had ended their playing careers. They could not participate in college athletics because of improper training or inappropriate care in the high school setting. Those experiences provided a kind of 'light bulb' moment that told me there had to be a better way. The other thing that drove me to the preventive side of things was the big change in health care that began in the late 1980s and '90s and is continuing today, where insurance companies dictate how we care for people if they

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use their health insurance. I decided to pioneer a radical approach in the physical therapy arena that does not depend on physician referral and third party payment. I wanted to cater to people who need exceptional care, charge them a reasonable rate, and get great results," he tells "Triangle."

While Black's clients may not make headlines like Hamm and Armstrong, many begin writing their own success

stories at RMHPC. Women of all ages are particular beneficiaries. "In general, women in their late 30s and older have been underserved. They never had the opportunities to participate in athletics as young people because there was no Title IX. But now, even though they're older, they want to get involved. One of the goals of RMHPC is to provide women with sports and health opportunities. We empower women to do the things they want to do and achieve tremendous goals athletically and in their lifestyles. They may have to go about it slowly but it's all possible. In fact, my oldest client is a woman in her early nineties, so age is no obstacle.

"There are numerous examples of the center's success in helping women athletes. We have a 58-year-old lady who is an avid runner and decided to take up cycling in preparation for a duathlon. We helped her get the right bike and other gear, and I am coaching her and setting her up with a training regimen. We work with a 38 year-old, former national mountain biking champion. After taking years off to have a family, she now wants to come back and re-establish her athletic prowess in the triathlon. An inspirational example is a 78-year-old lady who had a knee replacement and after working with the center won her age group in a 10K race," he said proudly.

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Black, the “point person” for all Rocky Mountain clients, interacts with each individual personally before prescribing any exercise or nutritional programs. Part of the initiation is a ten-page lifestyle questionnaire and a physical activity readiness questionnaire. These tools help Black determine the best path to success for a given individual. As part of the regimen, clients work with the other two members of the RMHPC team, a personal trainer and a massage therapist.

“The fundamental motivational technique is setting up individuals for success instead of failure. After meeting with a client and analyzing the data from the questionnaire, I can size them up by determining what they’ve done in the past, understanding any past failures in not achieving a goal, and identifying obstacles to success—what I call ‘saboteurs’ in their lifestyle. For example, if their family lifestyle isn’t set up so they can achieve their goals, it won’t happen. If I want them on a six day a week exercise program and they travel five days it won’t work—I need to know a lot about them and work around their obstacles and make opportunities out of them,” Black explains.

In the case of an individual seeking a weight management program, Black has no patience with trendy diets and quick fixes. “Therein lies the whole lifestyle component of our approach. I want to know their family and work dynamic and whether their goals are realistic. That is really getting into the Humanics of their situation and then creating a lifestyle program that includes nutritional balancing and exercise. I will evaluate them using sophisticated equipment usually only found in hospitals and clinics and not in private facilities

such as mine. I’ll make my diagnosis and recommendations for a specific exercise prescription and using a coaching philosophy, monitor them throughout the process. Clients have the choice of working out at my facility or I can set them up with a home gym—whatever it takes to have them achieve success.”

The number of times a client visits depends on how much attention Black feels the person needs. “I work with business people who have trained themselves to be very disciplined in

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pursuing their objectives. Once a month might work for them because they are self-motivated. For less motivated individuals, once a week sessions for the first 12 weeks are required before moving down to once a month,” he told us.

When asked who Rocky Mountain’s competition is, Black does not see anyone providing the same kinds of unique services. The center’s stated goal to “emerge as the preeminent leader in research, program development, and implementation within the wellness industries” puts the facility in a different niche than health clubs, gyms, or rehab centers. Black also considers his experience and expertise comprised of over 30 years of education, training and life experience in fitness, rehabilitation, wellness and healthcare, as a major point of difference.

One of Black’s favorite mantras: “The body is the vehicle, the mind is the engine, and the emotion is the fuel,” would make Vince Lombardi proud. And in the truest sense, Black

sees himself as every bit the “coach,” keeping his charges on task with a combination of tough love and other forms of “stimulation.” Calling on his own athletic background as a Springfield College gymnast and veteran of endurance torture tests such as the Ironman World Championship in Hawaii, he is a role model who never asks his clients to do what he doesn’t do himself.

The coaching aspect of the RMHPC program is vital to success. Whether the goal is overcoming the risks of heart disease and diabetes or training for a triathlon, Black instills the values of dedication, diligence, and discipline as the groundwork to achieving the mission. His methods are often drawn from his years of experience with professional sports teams—as a strength and conditioning coach for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, working in the NFL Combines, doing NBA rookie testing, and consulting with the Dallas Cowboys and Denver Broncos.

He also looks back on his experiences at Springfield College and the influence of the Humanics philosophy as foundational to his work. “It really made an impression on me. I use my SC experiences in everyday scenarios and find them very empowering. I had great mentors who embraced the philosophy and I frequently quote my professors. Springfield College professor Al Petitpas, who worked at START, influenced me with the psychological approaches he used that achieved tremendous success,” he remembers.

So what’s next for Steve Black? “I plan to open another location in Wilbraham, Mass., soon and continue on from there.” And no doubt he’ll be spreading the word to bodies of all ages, shapes and sizes: “Anything’s possible if you put your mind to it.” ▽