

More than a s-t-r-e-t-c-h

Fitness boot camp is more than a workout; it's a lifestyle change

By Tammy Lloyd Clabby, Special to the Daily Report

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Lauren Gunnels' boot camp includes stretching, running, sprinting and intense calisthenics. Her sprint time of nearly a mile improved by more than a minute by the end of her camp.

Dirty, messy, wet and cold. That's the memory of the 5:45 a.m. March startup of boot camp for Lauren M. Gunnels, 31, an associate at Weisman Nowack Curry & Wilco.

Boot camp combines an hour of running with calisthenics and other exercises frequently designed for an outdoor environment.

"I wore runner's leggings, and layers of clothing, a tank top, shirt and jacket," recalled Gunnels. "After the first few days I added clothing, and gloves. It was so cold, and everything gets so dirty. It's comical. You don't have time to look for a patch of grass to get down on!"

As rough-and-tumble as it sounds, Gunnels finds the exercise regimen both healthy and inspiring. So much so, she decided to become a boot camp instructor.

Unfortunately, while leading the group's final pre-dawn exercise in late September, she broke her foot. "I was jogging into this grassy area for the final routine, called "Abo-licious"—yes, lots of abs—and I stepped right into a hole. It was horrible."

Gunnels did not let the injury stop her. She went home, iced her foot and appeared at a hearing in Fulton County Superior Court later that morning.

"I don't think the judge accepts doctor's notes!"

Gunnels recently explained the program and why she's sticking with it.

Q: What made you decide to try boot camp?

A: I was always into running, aerobics, tennis, hiking, really anything. But in college and then later in law school I found I was not as active. My husband, Damon, and I studied for the bar exam at the same time. It took a lot out of us. As an attorney, you have ambition and want to work all day and then go to the gym. But it's a 50-50 shot as to whether you'll make it after work. We felt bad, complained a lot and realized fitness was not our primary focus. In March, we decided to get into shape for our June wedding. Friends in Kennesaw had tried boot camp and recommended it so we signed up with BTB Boot camp.

Q: How was it?

A: We did the first month together and saw definite results. After the first week, I was so sore I could barely sit or stand at work without groaning. When you first start they give you a PT test, check your weight, body fat, time your run under a mile, and the number of sit-ups, push-ups, squats and dips you can do. Then they recheck that as you progress.

They also give you dietary restrictions based loosely on the Zone Diet, where you eat five to six meals a day, always with protein. You keep a food diary that is checked each morning. You also work on learning about food portions and what are good and bad carbs.

If you deviate from your diet plan, you get put in the X-Box and have to do another workout, but you get one cheat a week. At the end of the month, many of the campers actually want to do the X-Box to get an extra workout.

Q: Give us the schedule for a typical morning workout.

A: We meet in front of the Vinings Bottle Shop on Cobb Parkway, then run down to the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. Then we do intense stretching and maybe move into squats, or push-ups or other movements. You are supposed to be moving 100 percent of the time. You follow the leader in a series of calisthenics. You may drop to the ground, then get up and sprint across the park, then drop to the ground again. The campers and the instructors are very encouraging.

Q: Is it called boot camp because instructors yell at you?

A: It's nice yelling. Not getting in your face, more of a loud encouraging. If people are standing around talking or the majority is not listening, they might yell out, "You're not listening; drop down and do 20 push-ups." In my first group there were only 12 campers, with four or five instructors. In the summer the groups are larger. If they get too loud, we might move to the boat ramps and go up and down the ramp with certain movements.

Q: You describe boot camp as inspiring. How so?

A: We had people in various age groups, in their 30s, 40s and 50s. Some are heavier than others, too. There is one vicious hill we must run up, and one fellow simply could not do it until the second month. Then we all ran up the hill with him, cheering him on, letting him know he could do it. It was all about setting small goals. Just making it up the hill was a success. It opened my eyes to the fact it's easier if you set small goals.

One camper wrote on our blog that we should not laugh when he shared his important moment with us. He brought his wife to camp this particular morning, and they sat in the car for a long time. In the blog, he wrote that for the first time, when he snapped his seat belt, he could actually see the buckle. That's inspiring.

Q: Can you see the changes in yourself?

A: Dramatic changes. I'm much more muscled and toned up, and shed two minutes off my mile run. I can do 60 push-ups in a minute and am much stronger. Our main goal now is to make exercise a priority in our lives. With starting careers it is sometimes difficult. But once you let it go, it's hard to get it back. This makes me a better attorney and a better person.

Tammy Lloyd Clabby is a freelance writer who contributes to the Daily Report.

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