

Tri-Ready Pilates

THE ULTIMATE SWIM, RUN & CYCLE ENHANCER

Jade Winter, Director of Studio Pilates International® in Brisbane, gives Ultra FIT readers this exclusive sneak peek into the secret training method used by Felicity Abram to get to the top of the world rankings in the ultra competitive sport of Triathlon.

By Jade Winter



Triathlon is a gruelling sport at the elite level. Some of us think we're 'ultra fit' but let me tell you, individuals like Felicity Abram are in a whole other league. Let me paint you a picture. On a good day some of us might go for a 100km bike ride or if you are a keen runner perhaps a 20km run, or if you can swim perhaps a lazy 6km in the pool... try doing all three of these things in one day! Then if that wasn't enough for you, then try backing up and do it all again the next day - and then do it seven days a week!

This is the level that an elite Triathlete trains at when in peak condition. So what type of cross training does an athlete like Felicity choose to use to increase their athletic performance? That's right, it would be Pilates, and not just your Pilates mat class at the local gym, this is the real deal using the Pilates Method and apparatus.

You see Pilates is used by athletes the world over and is the most advanced core stability training on the planet! How can that be you ask? When performed correctly Pilates (using the Pilates equipment), is the best way to do functional, core and global strength training and excellent for athletic conditioning and performance enhancement.

How does it work? When doing Pilates you firstly start with learning how to effectively recruit the stabilising muscles of the body. Then you learn how to hold these 'on' whilst doing more functional movements and working more peripheral muscles.

For example when training the core or abdominals with Pilates, you must first learn how to engage the Transversus Abdominus (or TA) and keep it on and engaged before you then progress through more challenging exercises. As you are able to maintain the recruitment of the TA (in addition to

not letting more dominant abdominals such as the Rectus Abdominus take over) when performing more complex movements you then create a more effective and stronger core. You see the TA is the main core stabiliser and is often either never trained or ineffectively trained. Sure you need global strength through all of the abs and more than that for great functional core stability. But how can you have great core stability if you don't train your TA or even worse, don't know how to actively recruit and activate it let alone have it strong enough to be able to keep it engaged whilst doing a 20km run or a 6km swim?

Felicity's Pilates training focuses though not just on core stability. Because of the multi-disciplinary nature of her sport she must train the entire body.

FOR SWIMMING:

We work to improve Felicity's scapular stability and arm

strength to enhance her swimming. To be specific we target her Lower Trapezius muscles to enhance the catch phase of her stroke (freestyle of course); the Latissimus Dorsi for power and speed through the stroke and the Triceps to gain acceleration and increased distance per stroke, which gets her further with less effort. This is combined with core stability to prevent sagging through the middle of the body, which in turn would cause a less streamlined body position in the water and therefore slow her down.

FOR RUNNING AND CYCLING:

We target her gluteal and pelvic stability as well as her core stability, calf, hamstring and quad strength and endurance. Glute stability is critical for running and cycling. Without the gluteals working effectively to stabilise the pelvis when running there is an incredibly high risk of injuries to

the lower back, knees and more; especially with the volume of running Felicity does. It's not the Gluteus Maximus that we target; it's the training of the smaller glute muscles such as the Gluteus Medius that is the real secret to pelvic stability and fast running and cycling.

For athletic conditioning we work on building the individuals' body from the ground up, or in other words we target the smaller muscles before the larger ones. We focus on exercises that are targeted to very specific muscles, and choose exercises that are functional and replicate movements that they use in their sport to enhance muscle memory. In addition we work exercises through a wide range of motion to give strength through a wider range than they had before training in this manner.

The exercises that make up Felicity's program are ones that have the body generally unsupported, so that she is forced to use multiple muscles to stabilise her body and to maintain good technique.

Because Felicity is an endurance athlete, multiple repetitions of each exercise are performed without rest. This helps to improve her muscle endurance and aids in training her body to tolerate and remove lactic acid more efficiently. This then gives her the edge over her competitors as she has the ability to put in that extra sprint to the finish line when needed and take out the title.

Pilates is such a versatile form of exercise and in the right environment can be tailored to individuals of all fitness and ability levels. The ability to use Pilates to increase fitness, core stability or enhance athletic performance often comes down to the level and style of training the instructor has experienced.

Great instructor training combined with good personal athletic and fitness experience then enables the instructor to enhance an elite athlete's performance and help turn their body into a weapon capable of total annihilation of their competitors.

Here is a sneak peek at just a small sample of some of the exercises Felicity performs in a typical Studio Pilates International® workout. For reference, in these exercises we catch phrase the recruitment of the Transversus Abdominus and Pelvic Floor as the T-Zone.

Hundreds - This exercise works the abdominals and challenges the core endurance

Set Up

Lie on the back on the Reformer, hands in straps and arms straight up towards the ceiling. Spine imprinted, take legs into tabletop position knees together.

Breathing and Movement

INHALE: t-zone

EXHALE: curling the ribs to the hips lifting the head and shoulders, sweep the hands down by the hips and taking the toes to the ceiling with legs; squeeze the knees together, keep t-zone flat. Hold this position and pulse the arms up and down. Inhale for 5 pulses and exhale for 5 pulses until you do 100 pulses or 10 breaths.

Concentrating on

T-zone, maintaining an imprinted spine, keeping the ribs to the hips and using the abdominals, keeping the shoulder blades down and back.



Criss Cross - This exercise works the abdominals and the obliques

Set Up

Lie on the back, hands in the straps, arms to the ceiling. Spine imprinted, take the legs into tabletop position hip distance apart. **INHALE:** t-zone.

Breathing and Movement

EXHALE: curl the ribs to the hips lifting the head and shoulders, draw one ribcage towards the opposite hipbone rotating the upper body to one side as you curl up and extend the other leg out straight. Sweep the hands down so that they are either side of the bent leg.

INHALE: return the hands up towards the ceiling, lowering the head and shoulders back down to the carriage, legs back in tabletop position.

Concentrating on

T-zone, maintaining the imprinted spine, drawing the ribcage to the opposite hipbone. Use the abdominals, keeping the shoulder blades down and back, keeping the pelvis still, not posteriorly tilting the pelvis and lifting the tailbone, and reaching the arms past the body.



Long Stretch - This exercise works the abdominals

Set Up

Stand on the carriage with the hands on the footbar shoulder width apart, shoulders down and back. Feet should be against the shoulder rests, knees off, legs straight in a push up position so that the shoulders hips and knees are all in one straight line. Carriage should be out slightly. T-zone, neutral spine.

Breathing and Movement

INHALE: slide the carriage out, maintaining the plank position
EXHALE: use the abdominals to draw the carriage back into the start position

Concentrate on

Keeping the body straight and no dipping through the back. Use the abdominals to keep the hips and spine up and to draw the carriage back in, keep the shoulders down and back, prevent the abdominals from sagging.

Note – lighter springs are harder on the abdominals, heavier springs harder on the arms. The carriage doesn't have to come all the way back in – only go as far as possible maintaining the plank position.



Knee Stretches with the knees off – This exercise works the quadriceps, abdominals, arms to support

Set Up

Kneeling on the Reformer carriage facing the footbar; soles of the feet against the shoulder rests, hands shoulder width apart on the footbar. Press the carriage away, lower the head down between the arms and make a flat back with a neutral spine. Knees will be underneath the body and the weight back on the legs.

Breathing and Movement

EXHALE: lift the knees just off the carriage, keep the knees up and press through the feet to press the carriage away, and taking the thighs just back past the hips.

INHALE: draw the knees back in under the body to the start position keeping a neutral spine. Continue to press in and out with the legs quickly.

Concentrating on:

Keeping the knees low to the reformer and aim to keep all of the body weight on the legs not the arms.



“I feel Pilates is paramount to have the strength and muscle balances to stop preventing any injury.”

Overhead Triceps – This exercise work the triceps the deltoids, scapula stabilisers and the abdominals to stabilise

Set Up

Kneel on the reformer with the knees hip width apart, hands in straps, arms overhead, elbows bent and facing forwards, hands touching behind the head. Neutral spine, t-zone, shoulder blades down and back.

Breathing and Movement

EXHALE: straighten the elbows letting the hands come apart slightly, extending the arms up straight.
INHALE: slowly bend the elbows and control the return to start position.

Concentrating on

Keeping the elbows close to the ears and elbows pointing forwards, don't let them wing out to the sides. Move only from the elbow – the upper arms and shoulders stay still, shoulder blades down and back. Hold abdominals strong to maintain neutral spine – no arching or leaning forwards/backwards and keep the upper trapezius relaxed.



Reverse Biceps – This exercise works the biceps and scapula stabilisers

Set Up

Kneel on the Reformer with the knees hip width apart, hands in straps, arms extended long behind the body, palms facing down. Shoulders down and back, chest open, body vertical with a neutral spine, t-zone.

Breathing and Movement

EXHALE: bend the elbows and slide the hands up along the sides of the body up towards the armpits. Keep the upper arm still, just move from the elbow.
INHALE: straighten the elbow the extend arms long behind to body again.

Concentrate on

Keeping shoulders down and back, using bicep to bend elbow, keeping the upper arms and shoulders still, use abdominals to keep spine neutral and still.



Scooter – This exercise works the gluteus maximus or the pressing leg, gluteus medius/hip stabilisers on the standing leg, both quadriceps to assist and abdominals to stabilise the pelvis

Set Up

Stand alongside the Reformer, facing towards the footbar end. Place the outside foot right next to the Reformer in line with the end of the carriage; foot facing directly forwards, and maintain an arch in the foot. Place the inside foot against the shoulder rest. Arms behind the back. Bend the front knee slightly and lean forwards slightly, neutral spine, t-zone.

Breathing and movement

EXHALE: press the carriage out straightening the back leg.
INHALE: control the carriage back in, bending the back leg.

Concentrating on

Keeping the pelvis, body, feet and knees square to the front. Use the buttocks on the stabilising leg to keep the pelvis and keeping the front leg stable. Tighten the abdominals to prevent the back from arching as you press the carriage out. Only press the carriage away as far as possible without arching the lower back. Squeeze the buttocks on the standing leg to press the carriage out.

Don't let the front knee and foot roll in – think of turning the knee out from the hip and lifting the arch of the foot.

Back Splits –This exercise works the buttock and thigh on the front leg

Set Up

Stand on top of the Reformer facing the headrest. One foot back with the ball of the foot on the standing platform, heel up on the footbar. The other foot out in front on the carriage, feet hip distance apart, facing forwards. Stand up tall, neutral spine, arms out to the sides at shoulder height, palms facing down, shoulder blades down and back.

Breathing and Movement

EXHALE: lunge the body forwards, bending the front knee to a 90 degree angle and pressing the carriage out;
INHALE: straighten the front knee to press the carriage out;

EXHALE: bend the knee back to 90 degrees so the carriage comes in slightly. Repeat several times then **INHALE:** slowly return the carriage back in and stand up in the start position.

Concentrating on

Keeping the body upright throughout the movement – don't lean forwards. Lunge so that the hip and knee are bent to 90 degrees. Press through the front leg to press the carriage out, squeezing the buttock and the thigh. The knee should be facing straight up, not rolling in or out and maintain the arch of the front foot. Keep the back leg straight and the pelvis square to the front, shoulder blades down and back.



When performed correctly Pilates (using the Pilates equipment), is the best way to do functional, core and global strength training and excellent for athletic conditioning and performance enhancement."

Side Splits – This exercise works the gluteus medius and minimus, plus the deep hip rotators

Set Up

Stand facing sideways on top of the Reformer with one foot on the standing platform, the other on the carriage near the edge. Hands either on the hips or out to the sides at shoulder height. Weight evenly between both feet, feet facing forwards, maintain the arches of the feet. Neutral spine, t-zone.

Breathing and Movement

EXHALE: squeeze the buttocks and press the carriage away evenly with both legs, hips stay directly between both feet.



INHALE: control the carriage back in.

Repeat multiple times then swap sides to face the other direction.

Concentrating on

Squeezing the buttocks to perform the movement and try not to use the thighs to do the work. Pressing evenly with both legs and control the carriage in both directions. With strong springs this exercise works the buttocks, with light springs more distance is travelled and the inner thighs are worked.



“Whenever I am consistent with doing Pilates I feel a lot stronger and more stable. My posture also improves and I definitely feel more toned.”

SP: How do you feel Pilates has helped your athletic performance and in what way has it benefited you the most?

F: Whenever I am consistent with doing Pilates I feel a lot stronger and more stable. My posture also improves and I definitely feel more toned.

SP: Can you attribute Pilates to an improvement in one of your 3 disciplines the most?

F: I reap the benefits in all 3 disciplines but probably find that the better posture and core stability and strength from Pilates is a big help in my swimming.

SP: Do you feel you have a competitive edge over others when doing Pilates?

F: Definitely.

SP: What has been the biggest physical benefit you feel you’ve received from doing Pilates? Core stability? Glute and pelvic stability? Muscle endurance? Flexibility? Strength?

F: All of the above! It’s very much the key to staying injury free.

SP: In your training you put your body under immense pressure, do you feel Pilates has helped you reduce injuries overall? And if so what does that mean to your performance?

F: Injuries are an athlete’s worst nightmare. It simply can stop us from training and competing, which is ultimately what we do! I feel Pilates is paramount to have the strength and muscle balances to stop preventing any injury.

