

Cross Training with a Purpose

By Fiona Green

For years experts have touted the benefits of cross training for runners. For years I have thought about what I should be doing but never quite got around to doing it. With the realization that my body was not getting any more flexible as it aged, I was leaning toward yoga and pilates. Full of good intentions, I bought the stability ball, foam roller and DVD. In the comfort of my own home, however, it was hard to motivate myself to follow any kind of program on a regular basis, so when a friend asked if I might be interested in taking over her membership for the local recreation center, I jumped at the chance. For a small fee I could attend unlimited yoga and pilates classes - and even spinning and strength training if I were so inclined.

One month later while I am still clearly a yoga newbie who can barely stand on one leg without falling over, I have started to feel the benefits of all that stretching and ab work although I am convinced that my body is made differently from that of my *bendy* yoga instructor.

While attending a class one morning, however, I suddenly felt guilty about spending this extra time on myself. If I could afford time for yoga classes, I should also have the time to volunteer at the animal shelter across the street. Since moving to Keller two years ago, I had convinced myself that this would be too hard on me emotionally, but I finally decided that it was not about me but about the animals.

When my class finished, I crossed the street and filled out an application form. Volunteer duties basically entailed feeding and cleaning the cats and walking the dogs.

Having owned only cats, I had never walked a dog in my life, but was assured by another volunteer that they were all very friendly and that it was important for them to have a break from the shelter. I quickly became familiar with the dogs and their unique personalities. Most were content to simply sniff around while others just wanted some love and affection. One dog, however, stood out -- Snoopy.

Snoopy is an 8-year- old Beagle, apparently surrendered by his owners after he developed some minor skin condition. The skin condition cleared up but Snoopy sadly remains at the shelter. He must sense that I am a runner because as soon as we leave the shelter, he starts to run. He doesn't run in front of me or run circles around me but he runs by my side at a nice steady pace - not too fast and not too slow.

On Saturday (July 5), I ran my best 5K since October. Perhaps the yoga or pilates had something to do with it, but I'd like to give some credit to Snoopy, who clearly shares my love of running and enjoys feeling the wind blow in his face.

I would highly recommend dog walking as a very rewarding alternative form of cross training. I hope that Snoopy finds a home soon. I know he will make a great pet for someone if he is fortunate enough to get a second chance in life.