

NEW TRAINING FACILITY Helps Create New Culture of Fitness at Fort Bragg

When Fort Bragg, N.C., opened its new Tucker Soldier Performance Enhancement Center in May of 2009, it represented an innovative new approach to soldier performance training. For soldiers and special operational forces at Fort Bragg — such as the 3rd Operations Group and the 82nd Airborne — this functional combat training facility provides cutting edge tools to better prepare them physically for the rigors of combat environments they must excel in. The success of Tucker — and the Soldier Performance Enhancement Program (SPEP) that was launched in conjunction with the new performance center — opened the eyes of many on the installation, and in the Army, to the effectiveness and validity of this new approach to training soldiers as tactical athletes.

“Right after we got Tucker up and running, people took note of what we did and we got a great response from leadership here on post,” says Casey Gilvin, fitness coordinator, SPEP. “The success of Tucker also gave us the impetus to transform another fitness center that was up for renovation on post into a second soldier performance-training center to support our SPEP program.”

PHOTOS COURTESY OF FORT BRAGG



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Run by Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR), the new \$3.6 million, 26,585-square-foot Frederick Physical Fitness Center is modeled after the Tucker facility and includes \$700,000 in new equipment specifically chosen to meet the needs of the SPEP program. The ribbon cutting for the Frederick Physical Fitness Center was on Dec. 14, 2010, and included a ceremony and walk-through with Lt. Gen. Frank Helmick, commander of XVIII Airborne Corps and Fort Bragg. Helmick stated at the ribbon cutting that the new facility represents “what we want all our facilities to look like.”

The Tucker facility was used as a template for laying out Frederick, and allowed Bragg to improve on the original design. “Implementing Tucker for roughly a year and a half, we saw some things that we liked and some things that we didn’t like, so Tucker is version 1.0 and Frederick is version 2.0,” notes Gilvin. “It was a total renovation so we designed a facility that was 100 percent conducive to our program.”

With more funding than what was available for Tucker, and the luxury of creating a facility from the ground up, Frederick is designed to meet the needs of the large units and groups that will be coming in for training.

“Because it is an old basketball facility, we decided to put in some mezzanines on the main floor to get some of the equipment off the floor, which created more floor space to do more agility stuff and for whatever big group trainings we want to do,” Gilvin explains. “The biggest upgrade and difference was the use of the space. With the equipment on the mezzanines, the floor space is more open than it is at Tucker.”

BUILDING IT BETTER

Learning from some of the lessons at Tucker, Bragg was able to maximize floor space and create a very versatile facility.

“At Frederick, we did something a little different with the Olympic platforms than what we did at Tucker,” notes Gilvin. “We took a cue from a lot of what you will be seeing in collegiate training facilities by utilizing the existing flooring as opposed to a platform, so it is all on one level.”

The platforms each have special shock-absorbing flooring, which allows for Olympics lifting without the actual raised platform. “We don’t have the two-inch platform on the ground,” notes Gilvin. “So, when I am not using that space for a platform, I can roll the benches out and still use the area for agility, and there is no safety issue or dead space. This facility supports the type of training that we do here at Bragg.”

In an effort to provide even more versatility, Bragg purchased half racks from UCS for Frederick, instead of the full racks used at Tucker. “We wanted to be able to still do the Olympic movement but then also support the other accessory movements, such as your bench pressing, and your tra-



ditional barbell movement,” Gilvin explains. “The racks are one of the best ones out there. The specific rack that we went with, the inlay platform, is a smaller footprint, which is what we wanted. It does everything that we need, but it doesn’t have a big footprint and allows us the freedom to do some other things.”

In addition to the Olympic lifting stations, the facility features Cybex ARC Trainers, Life Fitness Treadmills, Woodway Dezmo and Force Treadmills (user-driven treadmills with no motor in them), Concept2 rowers, VersaClimbers, VersaPulleys, Jacobs Ladders, Power Blocks, Werksan bumper plates and barbells, TRX from Fitness Anywhere, Jump Stretch bands, Dynamix fitness balls and D-Balls. Bragg also purchased some fitness accessories to complement its inventory of plyometric and functional fitness equipment, such as Sorinex Landmines — barbells that fit in a sleeve for functional movement exercises.

Similar to the Tucker facility, Frederick uses the iMet system from Woodway for VO2 testing, as well as Polar heart rate monitors and a BodPod for assessment purposes.

In addition to the open floor space, and equipment on the floor and mezzanines, there is a dedicated combative room that is utilized by the garrison for the combative courses. There is dedicated office space for the program, a conference/teaching area, an assessment lab, men’s and women’s locker rooms, and a main lobby area with a smoothie bar.

The facility also houses a rotating climbing wall from Freedom Climber, located on one of the walls on the main floor.

“With space limitations and cost factors, we decided against a full climbing wall but opted for the rotating climbing wall,” notes Gilvin. “It is a great piece of equipment that is used as part of the program as well. We can get about four people on the wall at once, and it can also be used by individuals looking to complement or enhance their workouts.”

SOLDIER PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

The Tucker and Frederick functional fitness centers are both founded on SPEP. “The program is the software of this place,” says Gilvin. “It is what makes us tick.”

As part of the SPEP, the Soldier Strength & Conditioning Course (SSCC) focuses on developing skills soldiers can utilize to increase performance by emphasizing mobility, strength, restoration and energy system development.

“These sixty minute group training sessions are designed to enable soldiers to improve physical fitness and functionality to a heightened level by utilizing concepts in athletic devel-



opment,” notes Gilvin. “In addition to providing a first class physical training session, each session incorporates hands on instruction in proper techniques and protocols designed to increase operational development.”

He points out that with such a large and continually growing population at Fort Bragg, the educational component is vitally important, especially with units only having a small window of time to train together.

“The initial thrust of the program is education, because we are not going to reach everyone on this installation — the numbers just make it impossible,” he points out. “Because of that, even if we get these guys for 6-8 weeks, that is a small time frame for training. And with our training programs, not every unit can devote 6-8 weeks of guided group training, which is why education is the prime tool. Our goal is to teach them the right techniques and provide them with the strategies and programming guidance to help them reduce injuries during training, and better prepare themselves for combat.”

He points out that by incorporating the athletic training model, it is providing soldiers with, and opening their eyes to much more than just the “sit-ups, push-ups and run” mentality. “That is the biggest culture shift that we are striving for here: They need to not only train to pass the test but also for performance in their jobs,” he adds.

Two training tracks, the Army APFT Improvement Program and Tactical Performance Program, are designed for specific goals. The two training tracks provide real help and guidance for those who need help in passing or improving their scores on the PT test, and also provides the education and training to prepare them operationally.

“The PT course focuses on helping them improve on their PT test and we have seen over the last 12 months an increase of 21 points from those participating in the 6-week course, which is pretty good,” notes Gilvin. “The other training track

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apy and integration back to the unit. Once they go back they must be at 100 percent, which is very similar to an athlete.”

The facility also supports the wounded warrior battalion, such as soldiers who are ready to begin training after rehabbing a traumatic brain injury (TBI). “We are trying to integrate more effectively into the Wounded Warrior battalion, and we are outlining some more ways to do that,” notes Gilvin.

As an MWR facility, Frederick is open to everyone, which is a challenge with so many soldiers coming in. “Our programming is 100 percent for the active duty soldier but the facility is used by dependents, retirees and DoD Civilians,” he explains. “There is a challenge in implementing a performance center in a traditional recreation model. No one has really done it and we are two years into the process and we are just figuring out how to make it work.”

Although there is still a long way to go, he is confident that Bragg is getting closer and closer to its vision.

is on tactical performance, which is everything else under the sun in athletic training that is going to help us improve their performance operationally.”

Gilvin is encouraged to see the commitment from both leadership and soldiers to this new type of training. “We’ve made some strides but we are just now — two years out — getting total buy-in from the units. The culture change takes time but this is an initiative that we are embracing and are in it for the long haul.”

With so many soldiers and units to reach, train the trainer sessions are providing unit PT leaders and others with the knowledge and expertise to start and run a program. “We ramped up the education and train the trainer piece in the last 6 months,” notes Gilvin. “We get into the physiology behind the training and workouts, and how to put together a good workout that will allow soldiers to peak at the right time. We are here to provide the guidance and support they need. It is quality over quantity with this approach.”

The facility is also tied into physical therapy, and the reconditioning aspect of the training is vitally important. “Physical therapy sends us people who are ready after rehabbing and we get them up to full speed,” Gilvin explains. “We act as a buffer between the physical ther-

“We now have two big time facilities to help us to train soldiers as tactical athletes, and better prepare them for combat,” he says. “Culture change is happening and we see that the people we are influencing are the younger guys, the captains who see the validity of this training because of their background as an ex-athlete, for example, and they will become majors and colonels and generals, and that in itself will go a long way in changing the culture.”

—GRF

