



# STRENGTH IN UNITY

New fitness groups give women the opportunity to find a workout that accommodates them.

BY EMILY MCINTYRE | PHOTOS BY ALEX CENCI

When it comes to fitness, Athens is a melting pot of possibilities. Between the bike path along the Hocking River, Ping Center, intramurals and more, students can choose a workout that best suits them. If that isn't enough of a variety, Athens and Ohio University developed a few new programs and fitness opportunities for women who are looking to step away from the treadmill or elliptical and find a new pace.

## BOBCAT BARBELLES

The crowd of men that typically takes up the weight rooms in Ping may intimidate a female student and cause her to shy away from the idea of stepping foot in there for weightlifting. This is where the Bobcat BarBelles Women's Strength Training program comes in.

Joe Schillero, the assistant director of Campus Recreation, created the Bobcat BarBelles using the model of a similar program he directed at Ohio State University. The eight-week, barbell-focused program kicked off Sept. 21 and quickly sold out all 35 slots. Each week of the program consists of a lecture day and a small group day. The small group day is where participants go to Ping and

through the barbell movement they learned about in the lecture earlier that week.

"This program is very much not trying to tell them how to exercise, more so giving them all the tools to build it to how they would like to do it," Schillero explains. "I'm kind of taking what I've done in the past and making some tweaks to it, and expanding upon that with my graduate assistants."

The biggest thing that Schillero wants to focus on is educating and empowering women to properly take advantage of the weight room landscape at Ping. With the overwhelming amount of interest in the program, he and his graduate assistants are planning on making Bobcat BarBelles a progressive program that will continue in the future.

"I think it's been good for us to see that the need is absolutely there for programs like this," Schillero says. "So if there's students — especially the male students — who use the weight room that maybe ... they start to see like, 'Oh man, it's really cool there's a lot of women in here lifting.' I think it's kind of opening everybody's perceptions up."

## W.O.W. HOUR

OU's Multicultural Center reached out to Ping last spring looking for a solution for females from different religions who are unable to work out in front of the opposite gender. Soon after discussing what would work best, the Women of the World (W.O.W.) Hour group fitness class was born.

Ping staff approached group fitness instructor Emily Free because they thought she would be a perfect fit as she has taught a wide repertoire of fitness classes for three years, including PiYo (a fusion of Pilates and yoga), Turbokick, Zumba and Cardio Dance.

At the beginning of class, Free always sets up thick, black curtains that cover the windows and entrance of the Group fitness room in order to create a completely private and comfortable environment for participants. Whereas other popular classes such as Cardio Dance and Zumba are held more than once a week, this small class only meets on Thursdays from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

"When they were in the process of planning this class, they found out that specific group's availability, so they could put it on a day where a lot of them could come," Free says.

Free uses the same choreography and music in W.O.W. Hour that she does in her other classes. Giving the participants the same experience as she would other students is very important to her.

Free picks a different exercise format every week, but Zumba and yoga are the group's favorites because they can really let loose and enjoy themselves.

After one Zumba-themed W.O.W. Hour last year, some of the participants came up to Free and asked if they could play some music and show her one of their culture's dances.

"I thought that was really special that they wanted to share that with me. They were really appreciative of the fact that they have a class and they're really excited to be there," Free says with a smile. "You're still making a difference, no matter how many people show up."

## CROSSFIT SEO

For women who are looking for a tougher, more competitive workout, there's CrossFit SEO, which is the only CrossFit affiliate in Athens. Its mission is to develop mental toughness and improve the growth and confidence of the participants.

Associate Professor for Sports Administration Dr. Heather Lawrence-Benedict joined CrossFit SEO a year after having her second child and now holds a CrossFit Level I Certificate. Lawrence-Benedict explains that women (including female OU students) come to CrossFit SEO to get one-on-one coaching that they might not find elsewhere, or simply to fulfill a healthy drive for competition.

"I think a lot of people do think that [CrossFit SEO] is really male-dominated, but the reality is, I think ... like 70 percent of the members are women," she says.

Beyond the local perspective, Lawrence-Benedict says the CrossFit Games — which is basically a world championship competition sponsored by CrossFit Inc. — awards equal prize money to both men and women.

"It's never been unequal. The amount of TV coverage is the same for men and women, brands are endorsing men and women at the same top level," she says. "You look at other sports and there's still a pretty big gap in pay for winning."

For about 10 years, Lawrence-Benedict has been the adviser for Women in Sports, which is an organization aimed at female students who want to work in the business side of the sports industry.

"We needed to do a better job of letting them know everything from barriers they might face with salary negotiation to helping each other throughout their career," Lawrence-Benedict says.

Even if a career in sports or CrossFit doesn't exactly match the preferences of all college women, Lawrence-Benedict — who has tried just about every exercise option in the community — has something to say to her active ladies out there.

"I would say that [in] Athens overall, on campus and off, women should be able to find something ... I think we're really, really lucky." **B**

