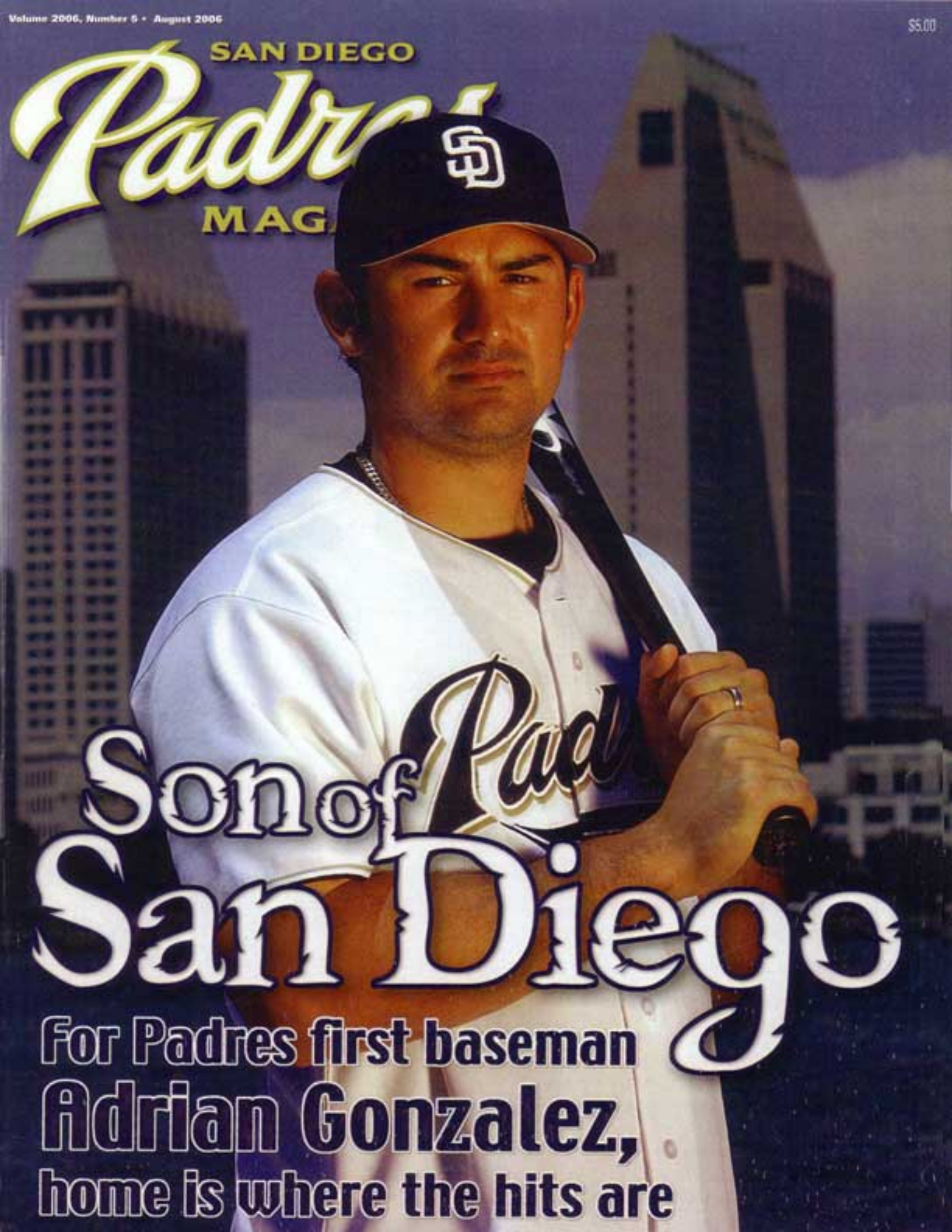


SAN DIEGO

Padres

MAG.



Son of Padres
San Diego

For Padres first baseman
Adrian Gonzalez,
home is where the hits are

Body Moves

Popular exercises such as Pilates common in MLB

BY CHRIS POSTIZZI, SCRIPPS HEALTH

Pilates, an innovative system of mind-body exercise that can dramatically transform the way a person's body looks, feels and performs, often conjures up images of professional dancers, Hollywood celebrities and supermodels. But what if I told you Pilates is becoming common practice in the rough-and-tumble world of Major League Baseball? That's right — the exercise method that teaches body awareness, good posture and easy, graceful movement is quickly finding a home in MLB training circles, including right here in San Diego.

Padres manager Bruce Bochy is one of the leading supporters of Pilates around baseball. A lifetime of squatting behind the plate as a catcher, including nine years at the major league level, left Bochy with aching knees, a sore back and diminished flexibility. But, after watching a demonstration by renowned Pilates instructor Julian Littleford two years ago, Bochy decided to give the exercise method a shot and the results have been dramatic.

"Since getting involved with Julian and his Pilates program a couple years ago I have experienced less knee and back pain as well as more flexibility and range of motion," says Bochy. "Pilates is not easy. It incorporates the whole body, not just individual muscles, and that is what I think makes it so effective."

Littleford, who owns and operates J.L. Body Conditioning in Del Mar, has been a Pilates instructor for 28 years and knows this form of exercise not only benefits former players like Bochy, but also current players, regardless of their position.

"All baseball players require exceptional range of motion, flexibility, muscle strength and stamina if they want to compete successfully," says Littleford, who has worked with several MLB players, including former Padres Steve Finley and Adam Eaton. "And conventional training — the weight lifting and conditioning — will help the player develop in these areas. But with Pilates, athletes are able to work the whole body at once,

not just isolated muscle groups, which occurs with most weight exercises. Pitching a ball or running to first base is not the work of isolated muscles, but instead requires the whole body to be in motion. This is why Pilates is so well-suited for baseball players at all levels — from kids dreaming of playing in the pros to the guys who play in front of thousands of fans every day."

Bochy could not agree more. "I think it's one of the best training and conditioning options for players," he says. "More and more guys are doing it and realizing the benefits. Players at all levels need to not just be concerned with building strength, but also with elongating the muscles and keeping that flexibility. That is a big part of the game. I think the use of Pilates also helps keep injuries down, such as strains and pulls, and on top of all that, it's extremely beneficial for players who are rehabbing different injuries."

Dr. Jan Fronck, the Padres' head team physician since 1990, also encourages a Pilates program for healthy as well as rehabbing players.

"Particularly for the baseball players, where intermittent, but sudden, all-out activity is required, the Pilates program offers a healthy combination of both stretching and strengthening," says Dr. Fronck, an orthopedic surgeon at Scripps Clinic. "As with any type of exercise program, people must closely analyze it and study the data behind it before getting involved. Ideally, they must take the time to



find an instructor who has a lot of experience and communicates well."

Littleford echoes Dr. Fronck's sentiments and encourages everyone, whether it's the weekend warrior who is trying to get in shape for their softball games or the professional athlete getting in shape for the upcoming baseball season, to do their homework before choosing an instructor. He recommends individuals conduct an extensive search before making any decisions and they should require their instructor to have at least 10 years of teaching experience.

"To me, Pilates is perfect for athletes of all ages and skill levels," he says. "This work is so intelligently hard. Each exercise only requires 10 repetitions because of how tough it is to do them, and I am positive players will see a significant difference in just 10 sessions. Their flexibility, range of motion, postural alignment, and speed will all improve. But one of the most important things to remember is that it's your body and with Pilates you can get severely injured if you are not doing it correctly. Therefore having a quality instructor makes all the difference — both in the way the body responds and the results you will see in the end."

Chris Postizzi is the corporate publications manager for Scripps Health and is reporting on health care related issues during the 2006 season. Scripps Clinic has been the official health care provider for the Padres since 1981.