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Robertson using Pilates to get in shape

Southpaw hopes to improve physique, remove team's doubts

By Jason Beck / MLB.com

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Robertson's bio and statistics

DETROIT -- Nate Robertson is walking in temperatures around 10 degrees Tuesday as he leaves the comfort of his car for Calihan Hall on the campus of the University of Detroit Mercy. His mind, meanwhile, is all the way down in the warmer climates of Florida. It's the power of positive thinking.

And at this point, he's very positive about the way he has prepared for Spring Training.

He has never really been jealous of those players who live and train in Florida. The Kansas native has always considered himself a winter guy, and prided himself on being the only Tiger who lives in the area year-round. This is the first winter, he admits, that has gotten to him. Weather-wise, it's the toughest winter he can remember since moving to Michigan in 2003.

Baseball-wise, it's also the most important winter Robertson has faced since coming to Detroit. It's not simply about working hard; he's always done that. This year was about working smart.

Robertson ended 2008 facing questions about his shape as much as his pitching form. The Tigers' diagnosis was that his flexibility was gone, and it wasn't allowing him to pitch the same as years past. He was a strong pitcher, but stocky, and he couldn't afford to be. As team doctors also discovered, he also had a bone spur in his left hip that was throwing off his motion.

Immediately after season's end, Robertson was stretching out that big frame in a Pilates class. He didn't want to wait and stew. He jumped into his offseason workout program from there. Three weeks before pitchers and catchers report, it's almost done, and he can feel the difference.

"I feel that flexibility. I really do," Robertson said. "I think it's worked out real good so far. Everything feels more loose."

On this particular day, he's feeling good, weather aside. He has Pilates three times a week with an instructor. In between, he's here on campus, doing more traditional work under the watch of Nick Wilson, a strength and conditioning coach at the university who used to work with the Toledo Mud Hens.

Tigers strength and conditioning coach Javair Gillett, who designed Robertson's program and set him up with Wilson, is also here on this day. He has been traveling to check on players all winter, including Carlos Guillen and Miguel Cabrera in Venezuela, but he's in town this week ahead of team physicals and the Tigers' winter caravan.

Together, Robertson and Gillett go through the whole program -- stretching, jumping, agility drills and resistance work in the workout area. Robertson gets to put country music on the radio, but Gillett and Wilson get to supply the chatter.

The workouts are specific. Picking up a weight ball while balancing on one leg strengthens his back. Other exercises focus on strengthening his push-off leg for his delivery, or the other leg for getting down and fielding ground balls. Most of the exercises are focused on his lower body and core, where the power for the pitches is generated, with some targeting his shoulder. By workout's end, his calves are barking.

"You figure you're pushing off that back leg [a hundred] times in a game," Wilson said. "That's really the focus."



"I think it's worked out real good so far. Everything feels more loose," Nate Robertson said. (Duane Burleson/AP)

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