

CREATING

Mind-Body

BOOT CAMPS

With Emphasis on Maximizing Benefits and Minimizing Time

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

Boot camps figure among the most popular of group fitness class types because they appeal to a wide variety of teaching styles, offering quick, effective benefits to the participants. Often categorized into a more aggressive type of class, boot camp-style training to some degree reflects a military influence of challenging intensity and seriousness. Sergeant Ken Weichert, U.S. Army Master Fitness Trainer based in Nashville, Tenn., characterizes boot camps as “military initial entry training where new recruits perform countless tactical skills at extremely high standards for several weeks, turning them into ‘warriors.’” Similarly, a “Mind-Body Boot Camp” offers many of the benefits of ancient, mindful disciplines through an intense, concentrated approach and, coincidentally enough, many of the most powerful poses in these practices are called “Warrior” poses. Moreover, to the participant who otherwise may not try traditional

mind-body programs in their original format (such as a long yoga class), a Mind-Body Boot Camp gives an introductory, intense experience appropriate for participants looking for a more rigorous class type.

Similarities and Differences

Mind-Body Boot Camps offer similar strength benefits to the more traditional boot camps. Whereas the boot camp class may use loud rock music with recognizable, motivating lyrics, a Mind-Body Boot Camp may offer louder, spirited instrumental music that complements a mindful approach without sacrificing intensity.

Whereas a traditional boot camp instructor may wear fatigues and a whistle, the Mind-Body Boot Camp instructor may dress in the traditional colors appropriate to his/her mindful discipline, (e.g., in white for yoga). Instead of blowing a whistle to signal a

movement change, the teacher of a Mind-Body Boot Camp may ring a chime or gong, or simply state, "We say 'namaste' to that series, which is a 'goodbye' to that and a 'hello' to our next series."

Yury Rokit Miankovich, an AFAA certified instructor of Mind-Body Boot Camps based in Hanoi, Vietnam, agrees, claiming "instead of blowing a whistle and screaming, I keep a mindful, yet authoritative, tone in my voice and signal changes and intensity in the same way that I would do during the most difficult sections of my mind-body traditional class. Sometimes the way to get them to work even harder is to scream at them *less* and teach them how to recruit their own inner mindful strength *more*."

Requirements

The Mind-Body Boot Camp instructor needs experience in at least one mindful discipline. Because a Mind-Body Boot Camp does not have to be a fusion experience, an instructor with a background in yoga, Pilates, T'ai Chi, Gyrokinesis®, Feldenkrais, and other practices can create a Mind-Body Boot Camp class by linking the intense moves deriving from that discipline. "The key is the approach," says Lyndsay Murray, a teacher of Mind-Body Boot Camps in Dallas, Texas. "The important thing is to extrapolate and link the most difficult movements from your traditional class without the longer warm-up and meditative sections at the end. Just like a regular boot camp class, a Mindful Boot Camp will still be multi-level, so the requirement for the instructor is to show progressions of moves first, and then quickly offer regressions for others with issues."

Participants

Ideally, the Mind-Body Boot Camp participants should have some fitness experience, although not necessarily in mind-body formats. Because the emphasis is on maximizing benefits and minimizing time, just like in a traditional boot camp class, students have to be able to flow through appropriate progressions or regressions, so some kinesthetic awareness of their own bodies is necessary. For those who are completely new to the fitness environment, a multi-level boot camp class or a more traditional mind-body class should be a prerequisite before participating in the Mind-Body Boot Camp.

Class Design

Like all successful group fitness experiences, the Mind-Body Boot Camp needs programming in terms of teacher preparation of choreography and room setup.

Setup:

Students should place their mats in a "T" position with the vertical mat on top. In this way, when teachers change the orientation and plane of exercises, everyone saves time without having to reorient because there is a mat under the body in all three planes of movement. Participants should gather any necessary equipment before the start of class to maximize time.

Choreography for Three Class Sections:

The Mind-Body Boot Camp needs three sections: a warm-up, class body and final phase. The warm-up should not only increase core temperature, but include movements in all three planes of motion to prepare the body for imminent work, from the sagittal, frontal and transverse planes, respectively, for a rehearsal effect. Instead of

EXAMPLES OF MIND-BODY BOOT CAMP CLASS PROGRAM

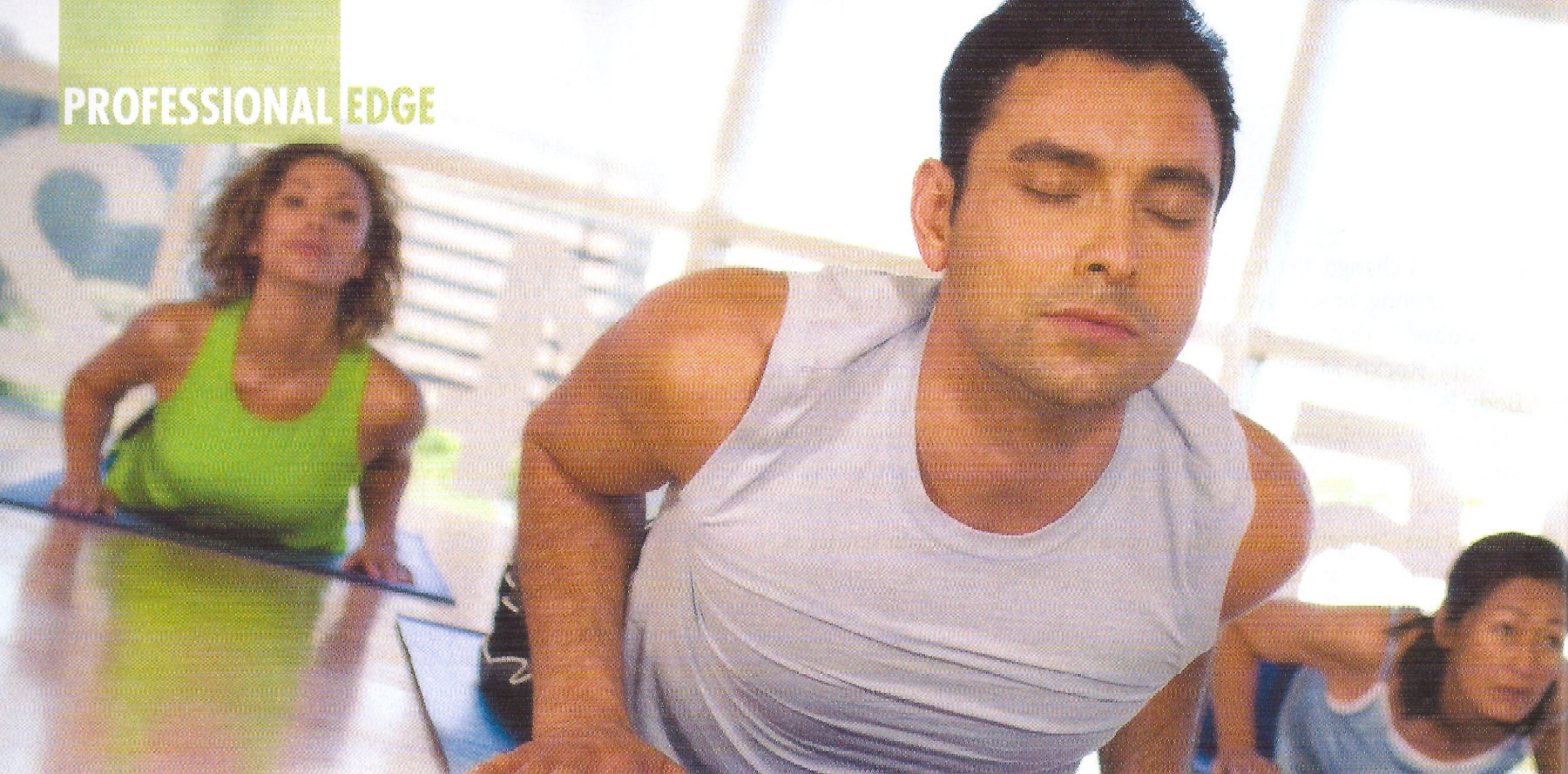
Design and Flow

FROM YOGA ALONE:

Sample Vinyasa: Warrior #1, Triangle (Trikonasana), Side Angle pose (Konasana), Upward-Facing Dog (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana) Downward-Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana), Chair (Uktatasana), repeat other side.

FROM YOGA/PILATES FUSION:

1. Start with Yoga Plank and transition to Pilates Leg Pulls; lower to Pilates Double Leg Kicks; repeat Yoga Plank and Pilates Leg Pulls on the other side.
2. Start with Yoga Camel pose (Ustrasana) and transition to Pilates Thigh Stretches.
3. Start with Yoga Side Plank on forearm or palm; lower to any Pilates side leg series. Turn prone for Pilates Swimming. Repeat side series on other side.
4. Start with Yoga Cobra (Bhujangasana) and transition to Pilates Single/Double Leg Kicks.
5. Start with Yoga Star (Tarasana) and transition to Pilates Pliés.



gathering the students for a centering, chanting or breathing exercise (à la a traditional yoga class), the Mind-Body Boot Camp sets a theme, reminds the students of the importance of breathing throughout the class, and commences with regressions of more difficult moves that will occur in the body of class, quickly increasing intensity. “I start with flows of Sun, Moon, and Earth Salutations that boost intensity during each cycle with progressions of lever length, resistance and range of motion,” says Miankovich. “Then we move on to variations of the Pilates hundred.” Weight-bearing movements are key since the goal of a Mind-Body Boot Camp is primarily strength/endurance over cardiovascular or flexibility aims.

Murray’s warm-up draws from yoga and commences on the floor in the quadruped position with Cat and Cow in the sagittal plane, followed by kneeling Side Planks in the frontal plane, followed by quadruped Thread the Needle with rhythmic, active and dynamic limbering. “These movements not only warm up the major joints for the class, but also are mostly weight-bearing to increase quickly the intensity of the warm-up,” she adds.

Class Body:

In the body of the Mind-Body Boot Camp, moves should progress with a flow that achieves a consistent energy appropriate for the participants. For yoga, a Plank often appears far more than a Child pose, for example. Similarly, in Pilates, a Teaser appears far more than Spine Stretch Forward. When students are new to the format, an instructor cues both visually and verbally but, as the participants become familiar with a move or sequence, the instructor can cue that move verbally, usually while walking around to coach the way a boot camp instructor circulates.

When choosing moves, a Mind-Body Boot Camp instructor incorporates the same choreography from a traditional mind-body class, leaving out any meditative exercise setup or segments that reduce intensity, such as some rest breaks that occur in yoga or Pilates. “My class design comes from stringing together the most intense parts of the traditional yoga class I do,” says Miankovich. “If we’re going to spend a few minutes in Planks, then the next sequence isn’t shoulder weight-bearing, but it is nevertheless just as intense, such as Single Leg Bridges. We’ll surely return to the

Planks, but it’s best to alternate prime movers to keep intensity high but reduce any risk for overtraining at any one particular time.”

The actual abilities of the participants will set the appropriate speed and flow of class. Instructors should choose a pace that is comfortably challenging for the majority of participants as they find the progressions and regressions of moves that prove most appropriate for them to maintain a consistent energy throughout the workout experience.

Final Phase:

Whereas some traditional mindful classes finish with meditation, repose and quiet, the Mind-Body Boot Camp works the participants until just a few minutes before its close. Since this experience consists primarily of strength/endurance-based training, static stretching must be a part of the closure to ensure maximum muscular benefits. Teachers should encourage static stretches for most major muscle groups for 10 to 30 seconds, combining multiple body parts to save time. “Since a yoga Bow pose stretches almost every major muscle down the front of the body,” discloses Murray, “I often use that in my final phase because it’s simultaneously effective and intense.”

Conclusion

Mind-Body Boot Camps allow instructors of mindful practices to capture the buzz and popularity of the boot camp craze without sacrificing the integrity of their disciplines. What is more, the chances increase that those unfamiliar with mindful approaches in the group fitness environment may open their minds to the benefits of mindful movement. Ultimately, the goal of mind-body classes of any type is, to quote Sergeant Weichert, “to help people find their warrior within and gain the glory of a truly healthy and productive life.”

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