

ONLINE: Q&A WITH
IRA WINDERMAN

Sun-Sentinel.com

GET THE LATEST BREAKING NEWS



Sports



STAYING IN SCHOOL

The UM basketball team will get its leader back next season — Darius Rice decides to stay with the 'Canes rather than take a shot at the NBA. **PAGE 15**

NWS

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN-SENTINEL | FRIDAY | MAY 2, 2003 | SECTION C

DOLPHINS
MINI-CAMP

Seau's workout is tough to stomach

BY MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM
STAFF WRITER

DAVIE • It is called "Puke Hill" because that's what they tell Liba Placek they feel like doing after running up it.

Yet it wasn't a hill to Junior Seau. He looked up at it, already near the end of an exhausting workout and with Placek hanging from his broad back, and it was a mountain.

"You are only a quarter of the way up, and you are done," Seau said.

Except that you are not. Placek makes sure of that.

"I had fun with that," Placek said. "I don't know how much he enjoyed it."

He didn't.

"She is lucky she is a girl because I would have cussed her out," Seau said on the eve of his first minicamp with the Dolphins.

She said she enjoys pushing her charges at the Egoscue Clinic in Del Mar, Calif. Not that she wants to come off as sadistic. She joked that maybe it's not a good idea to talk about "Puke Hill."

"Then maybe people won't come and see me," Placek said.

But they do. Not just Seau, but plenty of athletes train at the Egoscue Clinic, run by Pete Egoscue, a proponent of therapeutic exercises that use "body alignment" techniques.

Placek directs the athletic section of the clinic, where postural exercise techniques



Seau

■ DOLPHINS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1C

are combined with an intense specialized training program. Seau endured it for six weeks before he arrived in South Florida and will continue for two more after the second minicamp next week.

It is a demanding, intense workout that Seau says makes playing football seem easy.

"During the course of a game you are going to hit the wall, where you have to dig deep and find a higher source or find some kind of strength within," Seau said. "Doing this workout with Liba, this Egoscue Method, you hit the wall 10 times during that workout, so you can imagine how much stress that you must have going through."

"It is not just stress. It is breaking you down mentally, physically, emotionally."

To prepare the body for that, Placek said she first gets it in alignment using the Egoscue Method. She met with Seau twice a day for the first two weeks, with the morning session devoted to "trying to balance everything," Plesak said.

Plesak said she can tell if there is a problem with alignment and posture by watching a person stand and walk.

Fixing poor alignment involves stretching and functional exercises meant to promote posture and strengthen the small muscles that control it.

Placek said top athletes like Seau typically focus on the muscles in front of the body while neglecting the muscles that support the spine and pull the shoulders back. She said once those are in alignment, it is possible to stand straighter, run faster and breathe easier.

"The first few weeks, the athletes get the feeling that they have grown two inches and their shoulders are broader," Placek said. Seau said the adjustments make a difference.

"It gets your alignment where your ankles, knees, hips and your shoulders are in line for you to perform efficiently," Seau said. "Then they break you down."

There really are no barbells or treadmills in the program. Instead, the focus is on "classic exercises" that use bodyweight as resistance, Placek said. That means lots of pull-ups, sit-ups and even handstands.

There are drills on "Puke Hill" and at "The Patch," the nickname for a demanding obstacle course cut through a strawberry field. Seau also climbed fences and tossed logs on the beach.

"Lots of climbing onto things, toppling over things," Placek said. "Old-

fashioned exercises. We go through every range of motion."

Then there is what Placek said may be the most demanding exercise, "The Bear Crawl." Start at the top of the stairs, then crawl down them face first, with just the hands and the feet touching the stairs, no knees. Now crawl back up the stairs, still facing forward.

The athletes often want to quit, but Placek provides motivation.

"I try to push them," she said. "And if they protest, I show them how to do it."

Seau may not have appreciated it while considering "Puke Hill", but he said the results make it all worth it. He worked with Egoscue for his first two years in the league, "then I thought I grew out of him and I tried to get too smart and left." He went back four years ago and, at 34, remains in fine shape.

He said working with Placek and using Egoscue's methods has helped him maintain a physical edge.

"There is only so much weight you can lift," Seau said. "I am not saying weights are bad. You need the power, you need the strength. But once you believe in the structure and having the body work efficiently, it is amazing how much strength you have."

"The body is an amazing thing. You treat your body to a great workout, and your body treats you right mentally, physically and emotionally."