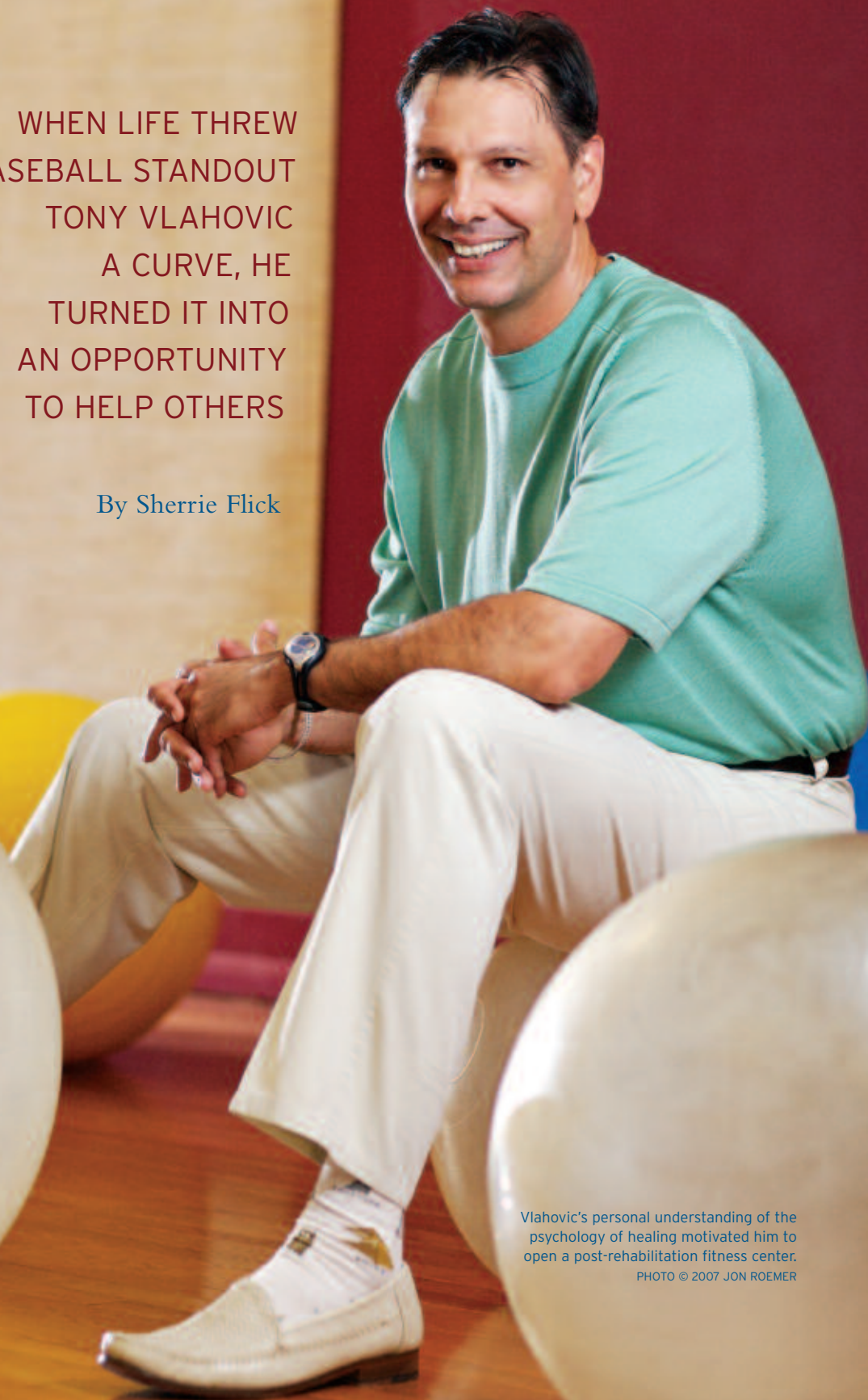


Bounce Back

WHEN LIFE THREW
BASEBALL STANDOUT
TONY VLAHOVIC
A CURVE, HE
TURNED IT INTO
AN OPPORTUNITY
TO HELP OTHERS

By Sherrie Flick



Vlahovic's personal understanding of the psychology of healing motivated him to open a post-rehabilitation fitness center.

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GROWING UP, TONY VLAHOVIC '82 was what they call “a natural,” a standout in basketball, baseball and football. When cancer and a drunk driver nipped his achievement on the athletic field, they fueled his desire to help others with his own unique mix of fitness and psychology.

At age 14, testicular cancer left him frail and compromised his immune system. “It was a real shock,” Vlahovic says, a setback that would have ended most young athletes’ dreams. But with the help of supportive coaches, he began a health and weight-training program that restored his athleticism. “I think maturity-wise I moved ahead then. My friends might laugh — I have a good sense of humor — but I looked at life differently. It took on a different

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feel. Headed me on a journey I really wasn’t sure where I was going.”

By his senior year, large universities came courting. But then an injury cost him their scholarship offers. Wilkes College baseball coach Gene Domzalski saw past the injury. “He came to see me in person and said, ‘We have a place for you. Here’s a great opportunity to get a great education, go to a smaller school and play in college.’”

The psychology major’s college athletic performance didn’t escape the notice of professional baseball scouts. After a year-long stint in a European league, he signed with the Boston Red Sox as a left-handed pitcher in 1983. A childhood dream fulfilled.

But more challenges lay in store. On his way to spring training in 1986, a drunk driver rear-ended him. “It destroyed both my truck and my left leg.”

Depressed and immobilized, he started physical therapy. “I had to go from my childhood dream of being a pro athlete to learning to walk again,” Vlahovic

recalls. After a frustrating experience with rehabilitation, he realized a desire to help others. He continued his psychology studies, earning a master’s degree from West Chester University of Pennsylvania. He ran the physical therapy department at University Medical Center at Princeton before opening Momentum Fitness, a post-rehabilitation facility addressing both mental and physical health, in 1997.

Vlahovic had found his niche. Personal experience combined with his psychology education translated into professional success. “I went through it myself. I lived it. ... I’m able to make my mark by being empathetic — understanding the psychology of healing.” Vlahovic sought out supportive staff members who would say to clients, “We can do this. This is our first goal; this is where we’re moving to.”

Vlahovic originally set up the business near his residence in New Hope, Pa., but moved the center to Princeton, N.J., to be closer to the university medical center. Until June 30, the two-story facility housed 14 personal trainers, 25 specialized instructors, and weight training for all ages and phases of conditioning using top-of-the-line equipment. Momentum offered yoga, meditation and pilates classes, along with a heated resistance pool for training and aerobics.

Vlahovic closed that facility to open a new one in Hopewell, N.J., this September. The expanded facility will allow more special programming. He plans to offer training for young athletes while continuing special fitness programs for people living with cancer, diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. The move will also shorten his daily commute and give him more time with wife Nina and children Anthony, 9, and Sabrina, 5.

“I think if you can find something that has some other value to it,” Vlahovic says, “it doesn’t feel like work. You can contribute something while you’re on this earth.”

Vlahovic’s best friend of 25 years, Ivan Shidlovsky '81, confirms Vlahovic’s dedication. “His character is above reproach; honest and caring, always trying to figure out how to help others to improve their lives.”



Tony Vlahovic’s baseball card shows him as a rookie for the 1983 Red Sox.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY VLAHOVIC



During his years at Whitehall High School, Vlahovic played both football (number 3) and basketball (number 24). PHOTOS COURTESY OF TONY VLAHOVIC

Tony Vlahovic
New Hope, Pa.

B.A., Psychology 1982

Career: Former pro baseball player who owns a fitness center.

Notable: Overcame cancer and an auto accident injury to help others through post-rehabilitation fitness programs.