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## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: Former Seahawk brings no-excuse attitude to 'sweat camp'

MICHELLE NOLAN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

As a student at an inner-city high school in Cincinnati without either a running track or hurdles, Alex Bannister finished fifth in the Ohio 300-meter hurdles championship.

To play college football, Bannister had to walk on as a freshman at Eastern Kentucky, yet seven years later he played in the NFL's Pro Bowl as a special teams standout with the Seattle Seahawks.

If you get the idea that Bannister isn't big on excuses, you'd be right.



He isn't interested in hearing excuses about why someone is out of shape, but he promises that his six-week "sweat camp" approach will get anybody fit fast.

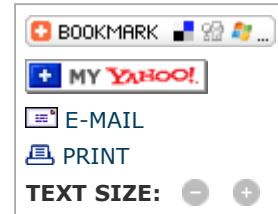
The multi-talented 29-year-old athlete likely would still be causing havoc on special teams in the NFL if he had not suffered five serious injuries in a three-season span.

He has settled in Ferndale, and he and his fiancée, Joy Restia, this week opened Lex Bannister Fitness, a series of cross-training fitness boot camps at the North Coast Gymnastics Academy in Bellingham.

Bannister says his camps offer six weeks of "sweat and burn," with three 50-minute sessions of cross-training, plyometrics, isometrics, calisthenics, abdominal exercises and kick-boxing training routines.

"My goal is to bring the 'inner pro' out in every person," he said. "I eliminate every excuse. What I tell people is to just show up and I'll take care of the rest. I like to say that fitness is a lifestyle, not a goal."

He offers camps starting at 5:30 and 6:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. Workouts began on Monday, Jan. 5, but he says he can pro-rate his first camps for those who begin no more than two weeks into training.



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"Eventually, I want to own my own gym," he said. "But for now, we're introducing something to Whatcom County that people here haven't seen, thanks to the folks at the North Coast Gymnastics Academy."

Bannister, who was an All-America wide receiver at Eastern Kentucky, was Seattle's fifth-round draft choice in 2001. He avoided major injuries for three seasons and emerged as a special teams captain, capping a three-season stretch with his Pro Bowl appearance after the 2003 season.

He missed part of 2004 with a broken collarbone and almost all of 2005 with a recurrence of the injury.

"The Seahawks took me to the Super Bowl (at the end of the 2005 season), but I was on injured reserve and couldn't play," he said.

The 6-foot-5, 220-pound athlete spent a short time with the Chicago Bears and Baltimore Ravens in 2006, including a playoff game with the Ravens, before his physical limitations led him to call it a career.

Bannister, a certified physical trainer, said his fitness regimen is "what I've lived by. I've been training like this throughout my life. This is not something I'm trying to do; this is something I am."

He welcomes a variety of people to his fitness boot camps, which run \$200 for 18 sessions over six weeks.

"Our camps are designed for people from their 20s to their 50s," he said. "But we'll take kids as young as 9 or 10. The camps are really for pretty much anybody who seriously wants to live fitness."

"We've done two demonstration camps, and the reaction we've received is that the people loved them," he said. "I've learned how to test people. Now I feel I'd like to give back."

Coming from what he called a "dysfunctional" background in inner-city Cincinnati, Bannister sought discipline in sports and found it would become his way of life.

Bannister recalls that his high school, Hughes Center, didn't even have a weight room for the football players, much less a football field.

"We trained in a park and we traveled for every game," he said. "All public schools in Cincinnati are poor."

"I had to come up out of the ashes. I feel you get tested in life, and that's where the fire is ... You can't let negativity keep you down. I feel it really is easier to work hard than not to work hard. And I had to work hard."

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