

# Feldenkrais Is Worth The Search, Fans Say

by Jack Williams

All Gary David wanted was relief from chronic back pain. What he got was the kind of side effect most racquetball players are aching for: a peppier, more focused game. His serve became smoother, his forehand more forceful, and the monkey was off his backhand. The catalyst, as he sees it, was the Feldenkrais Method®, a form of sensory motor learning designed to promote efficient and pain-free movement.

Its roots go back some 60 years to the late Moshe Feldenkrais, a Russian-born physicist and judo expert who found ways to address his disabling knee injuries. Yet the discipline is as obscure as it is profound. In a world abounding with alternative health care and exercise options, you might have to do some digging to find a certified Feldenkrais practitioner. An estimated 20 to 30 in San Diego County have completed the 800 to 1,000 hours of training over three to four years required by the Feldenkrais Guild of North America. The guild's web site, [www.feldenkrais.com](http://www.feldenkrais.com) lists 371 certified practitioners in California).

David, 59, said he noticed results "quite suddenly in response to a specific set of exercises" after one-on-one lessons with Mary Debono of Encinitas. Among the drills: pelvic movements coordinated with eye movements. "I found it very difficult at first, but as I got into them I found them very easy - and that's precisely when my racquetball skills changed," David said. While his back pain subsided, he was more impressed

with what he calls "the by-products of Feldenkrais." Sharper hand-eye coordination, for example, and a natural flow that seemed to reduce the need for a conscious mental processing of every move.

Kathy Pickard, 53, tried Feldenkrais to enhance her equestrian skills after seeing the results of a hands-on process known as Functional Integration on her horse. "In dressage, it takes a lot of fluidity to basically dance with the horse," Pickard said. "If you're not balanced and precise, the horse can't respond." Pickard, who began her sessions about a year ago, feels more confident, effortless and comfortable in the saddle these days. Moreover, she's moving with greater grace in general, free of the chronic shoulder pain that made throwing a baseball or serving a tennis ball an ordeal. "It has to do with freeing up your spine and your sternum, allowing the body to move easily," she said. "In our society, we get locked into a curling position - over computers, over sinks, doing busy work. We forget about breathing and freedom of movement."

Because optimal movement should occur naturally and never be forced, there's only one way to learn the Feldenkrais Method: slow and relaxed, letting the body rediscover the path of least resistance. "The slower you go, the more you can be aware of," said Gary Waskowsky, who teaches Feldenkrais at various venues in San Diego County. "In most kinds of exercise, you stretch and push to your

limits. Feldenkrais works on the other side of the scale." David noticed it on the racquetball court, Waskowsky in basketball. Naturally right-handed, Waskowsky began going to his left more efficiently in recreational games.

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