“My Journey to Teaser”

Savoring the Journey, Aiming for the Destination

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

My parents that taught me to trust myself and my instincts.

My husband, Kostas for supporting me unconditionally in this journey.

My girls, Melina and Daphne for you, above all, have taught me what dedication means.

BASI and to Rael for creating such an inspirational program.

BASI Faculties Patricia, Tash and Maro for expanding my horizons in my practice.

Exhale Studio for hosting the BASI course and allowing me endless hours of practice.

Lucy who was there to support me, and us all, in the first ever BASI course in the UAE.

My dear friend and colleague Fenia for being there every step of the way.

All of my students that I ever had the honor of teaching all these years.
ABSTRACT

This long study is about The Teaser exercise. About a year ago when I first started the BASI Comprehensive course my body was not able to perform any version of this complex exercise. The frustration was so great that the mind kept blocking whenever I heard the word Teaser. However the very thing I wish I never had to do in my life, soon became what my body was craving.

This paper is a deconstruction of the exercise and a diary of what I had to do to get closer to the Teaser. It certainly is not about the destination but about the Journey...and it has been an amazing journey full of discoveries!
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**WHAT IS A TEASER?**

**THE ANATOMICAL DECONSTRUCTION OF THE TEASER**

The Teaser exercise, as it is clearly shown in the illustration below, requires strong abdominal engagement and strength to maintain the trunk and leg position. This alone is not enough: hip flexor strength and control is of paramount importance to ensure that the pelvis will remain stable and an anterior tilt (hyperlordosis) which would, in turn, create pressure on the back is avoided. Furthermore the back extensors need to be strong enough to bring the body in extension at the top of the movement (not shown in the illustration).

Although all the Teasers are classified under the Abdominal BASI Block system, it is clear that the entire body has to work synergistically to support the body in this position. More specifically, the Targeted muscles, as cited in Pilates Anatomy book (Isacowitz and Clippinger, p.93), are:

![Teaser illustration with labeled muscles](image-url)
Spinal Flexors: rectus abdominis, external obliques, internal obliques
Hip Flexors: iliopsoas, rectus femoris, sartorius, tensor fasciae latae, pectineus.

**Accompanying Muscles**

Anterior Spinal Stabilizer: transversus abdominis
Hip Adductors: adductor longus, adductor brevis, adductor magnus, gracilis
Knee Extensors: quadriceps femoris
Ankle-Foot Plantar Flexors: gastrocnemius, soleus
Shoulder Flexors: anterior deltoid, pectoralis major (clavicular)
Elbow Extensors: triceps brachii

The Teaser has elements that can be found in more basic mat work exercises like the Roll-Up, Rolling like a Ball and the Open-Leg Rocker. To be able to perform any of the previous exercises correctly you need to have acquired a deep and precise understanding of the most basic mat work exercises; namely the Chest Lift and the Pelvic Curl. By practicing these two exercises one will strengthen the abdominal muscles, mobilize and articulate the spine, develop body awareness and bring focus to the powerhouse- all of which are necessary for the successful execution of the Teaser. Going back to the basics and building up to the more demanding exercises is of paramount importance.
INTRODUCTION

The Teaser is one of the most recognizable and photographed poses in the Pilates repertoire. There was a stage of my life when I couldn’t get anywhere near performing this exercise. This is when a journey begun: first I deconstructed the Teaser to its most basic elements, gained a deeper understanding of these elements, started gaining control over my body and moved to practicing the more challenging repertoire.

During my practice I could feel how my body and brain were longing to achieve it and a big question rose: what does the Teaser mean to me? The more I practiced the more clear it became to me that I was already on a Journey with a very specific Destination.

My Destination is to be able to perform the Teaser on the mat as seamlessly and effortlessly as possible.

My Journey is to work through the basic steps with the aim of strengthening my body and for my mind not to feel threatened by this very advanced and complex exercise. Soon I found I was working towards what Pilates states so beautiful in his book Pilates’ Return to Life Through Contrology.

"be certain that you have your entire body under complete mental control...Good posture can be successfully acquired only when the entire mechanism of the body is under perfect control” (Pilates and Miller, p. 13)

Here Pilates is referring to good posture. Good posture requires the presence of good control of the body which, essentially, is a balance between strength and flexibility.
CASE STUDY

My name is Maryliz, I am 39 years old and I am a Pilates teacher. I have two small children (aged 7 and 3). I have always been physically active. As a teenager I was diagnosed with postural kyphosis and a small degree of scoliosis (something my family, from my mother’s side had quite severely). At that point I was given exercises by the physiotherapist that looked a lot like the pelvic curl, the chest lift and the back extension exercises we teach in Pilates.

I practiced ballet for 14 years, studied dance at Surrey University and have been teaching Pilates for twelve years. I gave birth naturally both times and I am still breastfeeding my younger child. Last year I attended the BASI Comprehensive course to further deepen my knowledge and that is when I started to really challenge and re-discover my body. At the start of the course my younger daughter was 1 ½ years old, my kyphosis had worsened due to the long breastfeeding and caring hours. The Pilates routine I was practicing at that stage was thankfully enough to support my body (so I was not experiencing any pain), however, it was always within my comfort zone.

At the beginning of the course, I had weak abdominals with a small diastasis, my hip flexors, inner thighs and back extensors were also weak and my lower back and hamstrings were tight. My shoulders were very rounded and my head more forward than its ideal position which meant that there was an imbalance of muscles in the upper back and neck. The pectoralis major and minor muscles and the muscles in the back of the neck were shortened and tight. The muscles at the back of the shoulders and upper back (trapezius, latissimus dorsi and rhomboids) were weak and stretched.
Lastly, the breastfeeding meant that there was a chance (there are not many studies or evidence about this) that the hormone Relaxin is still present in my body. Relaxin, is the hormone that allows the woman’s ligaments to loosen so that the baby can be born. The area that is mostly affected by the hormone is the pelvis. This hormone is at its highest levels during the transition from the first to the second trimester of pregnancy and then also at birth. Relaxin is also known to be present in lower levels, in a woman’s body until breastfeeding has stopped. If that is the case, then this could be one of the reasons why I have not yet acquired total control of the abdominals and stability of the pelvis, something which would make the Teaser much more challenging.
BASI CONDITIONING PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Since I am generally in good shape and I have been working through the BASI Comprehensive repertoire for about 10 months, I have been able to experiment and see what could work towards the Teaser, both physically and mentally.

I have created three different programs to alternate through my practice. The first program is more fundamental and the other two more advanced. I have included the pelvic curl in all three warm ups as I truly feel it is one of the exercises that helps me create awareness and flexibility in my lower back.

The aim of the programs are to strengthen the body as a whole with a specific focus on:

- strengthening the abdominals with a very good activation of the TA and the pelvic floor, inner thighs, hip flexors, hip extensors, back extensors.
- stretching the pectoralis muscles, neck muscles, lower back muscles, hamstrings, hip flexors.

One of the things I noticed was that I had lost awareness of how to stabilize the body by keeping the abdominals engaged on the inhalation phase of the breath, something that is vital for such advanced and demanding exercises as the Teaser.

Another discovery I made is that, contrary to what I thought, I had not been engaging the inner thighs effectively through my practice. This meant that while attempting the Teaser I did not have the necessary support from the adductors either. For the first time I truly understood the concept of how activating the inner thighs will engage the pelvic
floor and the transversus abdominis and I began applying this consciously to the whole repertoire starting from the very basic exercises through to the most advanced.

The Cadillac has been very helpful in this Journey as the use of the springs have provided me with the necessary support I needed to refine of the movement whilst keeping my brain calm. I was able to recruit and “dig deeper” into my abdominals, to maximize the spinal articulation and engage the back extensors at the top of the movement. In the Conditioning programs I have designed, I have only included the Teaser Prep on the Step Barrel and the Teaser 1 on the Cadillac. The rest of the Teasers I only practiced from time to time to check to what extend I have improved.

This journey is about getting to know my body: its strengths and weaknesses. It is about gaining control over my body and making changes. It will be a long process and dedication is key to this. Rael is a big inspiration to this when he wrote the below text as he managed to put into words what I felt every day I practiced;

“...Pilates is not a potion that cures all and brings about miraculous changes immediately. Change takes time, commitment, and discipline...Although certain changes can and often do occur immediately- for instance, a change in body awareness, muscle activation, or alignment- it takes time for most changes and adaptations to become imprinted in the neuromuscular system, for muscles to transform and for the transformation to be integrated into a person’s life.” (Isacowitz, p. 3)
# BASI CONDITIONING PROGRAMS

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**Note:** The table lists various exercises and movements for different categories under BASI BLOCK.
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</table>
CONCLUSION

Through my practice of the above programs I have seen a tremendous improvement in my diastasis and my overall posture. These programs helped me re-establish the strength, flexibility and control over my body. I feel closer to my goal than ever before and determined to keep working until I get there.

Applying the BASI block system has proved to be very beneficial in working on the body in a well rounded way and there is not a single exercise that did not contribute to the goals I had set from the start.

Pilates is a very powerful method; it is the silent power that can assist everyone in their personal goal and this is how I introduce Pilates to my students.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Website


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