

Up Close

# On the Flip Side

*Champion golfer Gail Flanagan traded in a Wall Street career for another type of riches, and she has never looked back*

BY GREG MIDLAND

Anyone who starts their own business knows that you need a good idea, a smart economic plan and a tireless work ethic to have a chance at success. On all those counts, Gail Flanagan has a perfect record. However, it didn't happen overnight. The story of how she got to where she is today began more than 20 years ago.

Flanagan does handstands, which build arm and core strength, as part of her fitness regimen.



STUART BAYER

**At the 2006 Women's Met Open, Flanagan sunk the winning putt on the last hole.**

To the outsider, it would seem Flanagan had it pretty good. After graduating from Arizona State University in 1984, the native of Rye, New York returned close to home and began a successful career on Wall Street, where she was a Second Vice President at Smith Barney within five years. Plus, as a scratch golfer and successful Met Area amateur, she took time off to compete in top-level tournaments including the U.S. Women's Amateur, U.S. Women's Mid-Amateur, and once at the LPGA's Big Apple Classic at Wykagyl Country Club.

Hers was a lucrative professional life, but after a while, Flanagan yearned for something more. "I got tired of working for someone else. I liked the idea of creating my own business and doing things the way I want to do them. What's great about it is that you're not accountable to anyone else, and it's not someone else who's going to get you ahead. It's very motivating."

She was already growing tired of the Wall Street scene when, in 1992, she developed a severe sinus infection. A doctor told her it was related to food sensitivities, so she worked with a nutritionist to change her diet, which, like many young executives, wasn't a healthy one. It was during this self-described "low point" that Flanagan became more interested in health and nutrition, and the seeds were planted for a career change.

Still, it took more than five years for Flanagan to make the leap and leave corporate life.

In the fall of 1998, she enrolled at Columbia University, taking a couple classes and also working as an assistant coach of the men's golf team (the team won the 1999 Ivy League Championship). Both the class work and the coaching suited her, and over the next five years Flanagan increased her course load and graduated in 2003 with a Masters in Applied Physiology and Nutrition.

The dual major and nutrition certification meant that it took a little longer to make her dream a reality. "A good friend of mine is a cardiologist and she kidded me to hurry up and graduate so she could start referring patients to me," recalls Flanagan with a chuckle. In 2003 she founded Balanced Health Center, and today she leases space in White Plains and Midtown Manhattan, where her clients visit for nutritional consultations and fitness training sessions.

Owing to Flanagan's high profile in local golf circles, many of these clients are other good players. This year she started working with 31-year-old Ray Floyd Jr., son of the three-time major winner. "She's really helped me in the conditioning and training areas, and I've dropped about 25 pounds as a result. I also have a much healthier lifestyle and am smarter about what I eat," says Floyd, who is a big believer in how being in better shape improves his golf game.

While Flanagan has a natural interest in working with elite golfers, she relishes the chance to work with athletes in other sports

## Stretch your game

**G**olf exacts a toll on the body, and many of you feel it in your lower back. Here are two stretches to help.

### Torso Twist:

- Sit on a mat with your legs extended. Cross your bent right leg over your straight left leg (photo 1).

- Bring your left arm over your right knee and rotate your upper body to the right. Your eyes should look over your right shoulder (photo 2).
- Reverse the stretch by straightening your right leg and bending your left leg over it. Then bring your right arm over your left knee and rotate your upper body to the left.

### Leg it out:

- Lie on your back and extend your arms out to the sides, then raise your right leg until it is perpendicular to the mat (photo 3).
- Lower your extended right leg to your left hand, or as close to is as possible (photo 4). Keep your shoulders on the mat and try not to let your right leg turn in or bend.
- Repeat stretch with your left leg.



JEFF WEINER PHOTOGRAPHY



or non-athletes who are looking to improve their overall health.

"My first clients were some assistant golf pros in the area, but also referrals from doctors, as well as people I know from triathlons," said Flanagan, whose athletic prowess extends to Olympic-length triathlons and masters swimming. "Now I work with a lot of people who have diabetes, cardiovascular disease, eating disorders, people who want to maintain their weight or teenage boys who want to add muscle. There's a lot of variety."

One of her proudest success stories is Kathleen Maurer, a 44-year-old who was referred to Flanagan by her doctor. "I've lost 110 pounds since I started working with Gail, and the key is that she is so encouraging. Her plan for me was so well-explained and easy to follow," says Maurer, who will be among the 35,000 runners in November's New York City Marathon.

It is clients like those that make the hours of paperwork, bill-paying and other necessary rigors of entrepreneurship worth it for Flanagan. Her involvement covers the gamut from preparing nutritional analyses, reading medical journals to learn about new research and coordinating her scheduled sessions with clients. Flanagan is an energetic, intense person who, at her White Plains facility, has no office chair. She stands, with her laptop computer propped on a high desk. "It's better for my posture," she cheerfully points out.



## Can potassium equal pars?

If you're feeling low on energy during your rounds of golf, especially on hot summer days, eating something with potassium may be just what the doctor ordered. Potassium is critical to the maintenance of fluid balance and nerve transmissions, and therefore is especially helpful to golfers. When you expend energy on the golf course, you lose water and electrolytes, including potassium. Therefore, having a mid-round snack with potassium can give

you a welcome boost.

It is best to get potassium from fruits and vegetables and other whole foods rather than a supplement. On the golf course, try one of any of the following nutritious foods:

- low-fat yogurt (8 oz.)
- orange juice (8 oz.)
- banana
- pineapple juice (8 oz.)
- raisins (1/4 cup)

It should also be pointed out that Flanagan's devotion to her new career has not taken away from her golf game. She is a five-time Westchester Golf Association Player of the Year, and won the 1996 and '97 New York Women's State Amateur and '98 Metropolitan Women's Match Play Championship. However, her victory in August at the 2006 Women's Met Open stands as her crowning achievement, as it was the tournament missing from her resume and the one she most wanted to win.

"The work that I do has definitely made me a better player," says Flanagan. "There are three components to being in shape: strength training, cardiovascular exercise, and flexibility. They all help with golf, and I'm more aware of them."

After those long days and nights on the trading desk, you might think that Flanagan is enjoying a more leisurely lifestyle now. You'd be wrong. "I put in more hours than I did on Wall Street!" she says. In fact, her commitment to golf is continually balanced with her dedication to her clients. "During the tournament season, I feel bad when I travel, losing that consistency with the people I train. I try to write out instructions for them to keep going when we can't meet."

At no time was this dedication more apparent than on August 23, the day she won the Women's Met Open. After her biggest victory, Gail Flanagan didn't stick around long to party it up with friends or soak up the atmosphere. Instead, she drove to White Plains for a 5:00 training appointment. It's safe to say that both she and her client that day got their money's worth. ■

## Open for business

To contact Gail Flanagan and for more details about the various programs on health and nutrition she offers, visit [www.balancedhealthcenter.com](http://www.balancedhealthcenter.com). Rates and location information are provided.



Flanagan's recent play, especially her power off the tee (left), has given her plenty of reason to smile.