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## Technology, athletes unite at The Players Choice

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UTICA —



Doug Owen, owner of The Player's Choice, analyzes his son Doug's swing as instructor Anthony Coromato corrects his batting form on Sunday Nov. 14, 2010, at the facility on French Road in Utica.

Doug Owen wanted to give athletes cutting-edge tools as well as offer another venue for youth and adult indoor soccer leagues and sports clinics.

Toward that end he opened The Players Choice on French Road earlier this month.

Owen is a former Utica Free Academy baseball player, and he's been active in Utica Muni softball for more than 25 years.

The Players Choice reflects his interest in those sports. The facility is well equipped for baseball and softball training with two machines that focus on athletes' hitting and pitching skills.

The crown jewels of The Players Choice experience are three systems that take sports training to another level.

“They’re the newest in technology,” Owen said. “No one else has them, and we’re trying to separate ourselves from Field of Dreams (in Schuyler). This is a convenience thing, and it teaches kids how to do things properly.”

One of the systems is the light-resistance Vertimax, a high-speed training apparatus where athletes perform sport-specific exercises for baseball, soccer, football and track and field.

Another is the Pro Mirror System, a video analysis terminal with a touch-screen computer and a camera to snap specific shots of an athlete’s motion to help identify and correct flaws.

The third is the Pro Batter System, a pitching simulator widely used in Major League Baseball and at major college programs, Owen said. The simulator allows hitters the chance to face players such as Randy Johnson and Roger Clemens, with adjustable speeds and release points.

There are human coaches, too. The staff instructors are:

- Andy Weimer, former professional baseball player and current Utica College baseball coach.
- Audrey LaFountain, former softball player at the University of Louisville and player in the National Pro Fastpitch League.
- J.T. LaFountain, former Thomas R. Proctor High School and Louisville standout who played in the New York Yankees minor league system.
- Former Notre Dame baseball standout Anthony Coromato, now playing in an Italian professional league.
- Former Notre Dame standout Chris Mahoney.
- Longtime Utica School District coach Ralph Lupia.

Owen’s attitude about his new business is summed up best on The Players Choice website:

“My philosophy in sports is to make every athlete not only a better player but a better person through hard work and dedication, building respect and integrity,” Owen wrote. “The life lessons one can learn through sports can stay with them for the rest of their life.

“At The Players Choice, our motto is, ‘Define yourself, don’t let others define you.’”

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