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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

WHAT'S YOUR WORKOUT | NOVEMBER 24, 2009

BY JAMES WAGNER

For an Architect, the Bike's the Thing

By JAMES WAGNER

Joe Spear knows baseball. As the senior principal at architecture firm Populous, he has helped design nearly a dozen baseball stadiums, including AT&T Park in San Francisco, Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia and Camden Yards in Baltimore. But it's biking that really gets him going. On average, Mr. Spear bikes 60 miles a week, often biking to and from his office in downtown Kansas City, Mo., six miles from his home.

Mr. Spear, 56 years old, founded Populous, formerly HOK Sport, 26 years ago. It's a job that could have him home for two weeks then in three different cities the next. When he was in Washington, D.C., from 2005 to 2008 overseeing the construction of the baseball stadium Nationals Park, he brought his bike so he could exercise and ride in the city.

Nearly eight years ago, Mr. Spear weighed 260 pounds. He was always tired, his back hurt and he wasn't sleeping right. When he would give prospective clients tours of baseball stadiums he designed, he would come back exhausted. Mr. Spear changed his diet and started biking more, dropping more than 60 pounds in 2½ years. He gained some of that weight back while in D.C., where he was eating out most nights, and now weighs 220 pounds.

Mr. Spear, who is six feet tall, rides the city streets and country roads of Missouri hoping to stay in shape and lose some more weight. Biking "feels like skiing and flying," he says. "It's just a cool sensation."

The Workout

Mr. Spear's mornings often begin around 5 a.m., when he walks to a park a half-mile away. There, he jogs two to three laps on the track, about two miles, in 20 to 30 minutes. He then goes home and takes his Gordon Setter for a one-mile walk.

Three times a week, Mr. Spear bikes the 12-mile round trip between his home and office. In the mornings, he coasts down a large hill on his route. But on the ride home, it's a steep challenge. "It's a low-impact workout," he says. "You're not pounding your legs and knees."

Mr. Spear wears a heart monitor on his rides and aims for 140 beats per minute. It will start beeping at 165 beats per minute, indicating an extra-hard workout. "Climbing the hill, that thing is beeping," he says. "It's good to know you're working." Mr. Spear tries to average 16 miles an hour overall, but on flat, straight portions he tries to get up to 24 miles an hour. He monitors his speed and distance with bicycle computers mounted on each of his two bikes.

On weekends, Mr. Spear often rides 20 to 30 miles, or three hours, by himself or with a friend. Once a month, he rides longer with a local cycling group. A typical group ride covers nearly 40 miles to Belton, Mo., south of Kansas City.

When he is busier than normal or when the weather is bad, he jogs on a treadmill at home for 45 minutes. "I don't like to ride in the rain because you get pretty grimy and have to clean the bike," he says.

The Routine

Three days a week: 45 minutes of jogging and walking

Three days a week: 12-mile bike trip to and from work

Saturdays: 20- to 30-mile bike ride

The Diet

Mr. Spear eats breakfast every day. Recently, he has been eating high-fiber cereal with milk. A favorite breakfast meal is lox and a bagel, but he doesn't indulge in it often.

His secret to losing weight and keeping it off is to pare his meals, especially lunch. For the midday meal, he will typically eat a cup of fruit-on-the-bottom yogurt with a piece of fruit, often a banana.

Dinner, when he's in Kansas City, is normally at home, where he and his wife will often eat salmon, which they grill with asparagus in the summer and broil in the oven during winter.

Mr. Spear has two weaknesses: a sweet tooth and a love for beer. A couple of times a month he will eat ice cream or apple pie. Mr. Spear will drink as many as five beers a week, especially after long rides during hot Missourian summers. But by biking as much as 80 miles weekly, he's more willing to eat what he wants. "I just like beer," he says. "So I have one when I feel like it."

The Gear

Mr. Spear owns two bikes. The older one is a mountain-road bike hybrid, which he calls "the giant," because of its size. He says he bought it more than seven years ago for about \$750. The one Mr. Spear uses more often is a fitted titanium road bike that he bought for about \$5,000. In over five years of use, Mr. Spear has put nearly 5,000 miles on the bike.

Mr. Spear wears carbon-fiber cycling shoes made by Specialized (about \$200) and a lightweight helmet by Giro, which cost about \$175. He owns three pairs of cycling shorts—a good pair is worth the \$120 price, he says—and eight bike jerseys, which cost between \$50 and \$60 each.

His Polar heart monitor can sell for as little as \$60, and a good bicycle computer retails for about \$40, he says. When jogging, Mr. Spear wears Nike Dri-Fit shirts and gym shorts. He paid about \$1,500 for his treadmill 10 years ago.

Fitness Tip

When Mr. Spear decided to lose weight eight years ago, he got overambitious on the treadmill and jogged 10 miles on his first day. He pulled an Achilles tendon. His advice: Take it easy. "If you need to get into shape, start slow and don't expect overnight results," Mr. Spear says.

Quick Fix

"Even if I can get 10 minutes of a workout, I feel like I've done something," Mr. Spear says. If the week's schedule is tight, Mr. Spear will squeeze in a brisk 10-minute walk. His reasoning: A quick walk will burn almost as many

calories as a jog of the same distance, he says. A quick bike ride isn't worth the effort, he says, as getting ready might take just as long as a walk.

The Playlist

Mr. Spear is a noise purist who prefers keeping his iPod stashed at home during workouts. When he is jogging or cycling, he would rather hear the squirrels chattering or birds singing than music buzzing through headphones, he says.

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