**Houston Chronicle Identifies Tyler Hobson of
Pendulum Fitness**

**Weights and Means**Written by:  Richard Justice (Houston Chronicle)

Tyler Hobson vividly remembers that day a couple of years ago when he walked into the University of Michigan´s weight room and saw the Wolverines using his equipment.

All of a sudden, he remembered why he´d worked two jobs for almost a decade, why he´s learned to live on three hours of sleep, why he´s seen so little of his family and why he didn´t give up when no one seemed much interested.

And then that day, he saw the Wolverines using his leg press, the one he was convinced was better than any on the market, the one that would put less stress on the joints and allow players to get stronger quicker.

With a drawer full of rejection slips and a book of unreturned telephone calls, he could not help but smile.

"That was probably the high point", he said.  "You don´t get into that weight room unless you´ve got something pretty good.  That´s when I know I´d achieved something."

He´d done the design work at his Conroe home, often rising at 3 a.m. for three or four hours before reporting to his regular job at a Conroe ceramics factory.  He´d bout the steel and the roller bearings, did the cutting, drilled the holes and went through dozens of prototypes before finally getting it right.

"I can´t count how many I designed, thought it would be right and then ended up taking a blowtorch and cutting it in pieces,", he said.

When he finally got one right, he gave a few dozen away before convincing Michigan to buy one, and before shipping it, he made sure he had the color - Michigan´s colors - just right.

He bolted it together and tested it in a nondescript corner of a Conroe storage facility where he still spends 18 or more hours most days welding, drawing, cutting and constructing.

All for that moment in Ann Arbor.

In an industry frilled with multimillion-dollar corporations and sometimes vicious competition, his Pendulum Fitness, a small Conroe‑based operation, had elbowed its way in among the giants.

Later, there would be other special moments.

He would take pride in knowing the Tamp Bay Buccaneers used his equipment during their run to the Super Bowl.

He would hear from Bucs fullback Mike Alstott, who thought so much of the Pendulum leg‑press machine that he bought one for his home.

He would hear from offensive lineman Randall McDaniel, who asked him to help furnish his home weight room after retiring from the NFL.

He would hear Denver Broncos tight end Shannon Sharpe announce that the Pendulum squat machine is one of the reasons he´s still an elite player at age 34.

He would receive orders from a hotel in Kuwait City, a health club in Austria and a host of other places.

What began as his goal of doing one thing better than anyone else ended up with a classic pursuit of the American dream.

These days, the Houston Texans are regular customers.

"He has provided us with a tool to get stronger,", Texans strength coach Dan Riley said.  "It´s only a tool.  We still have to put it to use, but it´s a way to get stronger."

Hobson´s customer list includes the Jacksonville Jaguars, Detroit Lions, Baltimore Ravens, Philadelphia Eagles, New York Giants, Cincinnati Bengals and others.

Notre Dame, Michigan State, Air Force and Penn State are among a long list of college and high schools using Pendulum.

He has a backlog of orders and attempts to fill them even as he continues to design new equipment when he´s not building a piece or driving to, for instance, Cincinnati, as he did last week, to make a delivery.

He has given up his second job, dreams of a day when he can streamline the manufacturing process and still wonders if a passion can turn a profit - but he´s still at it.

When Jacksonville Jaguars strength coach Mark Asanovich telephoned at 4 one recent morning, he´d planned on leaving a voice mail.

Instead, Hobson answered the phone.

"We were both already in our offices," Hobson said.  "I guess it´s a sickness."

That "sickness" is one of the reasons NFL people are so impressed.

"In my field, what happens a lot of times is the cookie‑cutter approach," said Asanovich.  "These big manufacturers say, ´Here´s our product, take it or leave it.´  Tyler comes in and says: ´How can I help you?  What can I design that´s best for your athletes?´  That´s pretty impressive.

"I´m totally ignorant about design, but I know what I want.  He´s a guy who makes it a reality.  Beyond this skills and design is his passion for what he does.  When people have a sincere love for what they´re doing, that´s huge."

When a reporter jokes about this being the classic American story of being rewarded for building a better mousetrap, Hobson interrupts.

"Well, I´m not sure about that," he said.  "I´m still not certain about making this a profitable business, but I do have a passion for it."

Hobson grew up outside Anchorage, Alaska, where his father was in the oil business.  He graduated from high school and went to work in the oil industry himself.  He was transferred to Houston, laid off and enrolled at Sam Houston State when a part‑time job at the ceramics factory turned into a full‑time gig.

In his spare time, he became a competitive weight lifter and was so good at it that his office is lined with an array of trophies.

Because he was training at home, his garage became so cluttered with weight‑lifting equipment that his wife, Traci, implored him to throw some of it away, or at least give here enough room to park her car.

He had a better idea.

Instead of dozens of work stations, he´d build a multi‑station weight‑lifting machine that would incorporate a dozen or so different exercises.

Then he had an even better idea.

He would sell the machines to trainers and health clubs around the country.  Instead of rows of weight‑lifting equipment, health clubs could purchase his one piece and be set.

He would create a new wave and would ride that wave to fame and fortune.

He spent two years building a prototype machine in his spare time, sometimes sleeping an hour or two at night.  Then be placed it in a trailer and rove around the country visiting conventions and personal trainers, believing he´s discovered the next great thing.

I thought it would be a new trend and I´d be able to catch that wave," he said.  "That seemed to be something that was coming about.  I was wrong.  I did not sell any of them."

Yet one day while showing off the station, one guy told him:  "Hey, I like that squat machine you have on there.  If you could just build one of those, I´d buy one."

He drove back to Conroe and went back to work.

He sold a couple of the squat machines and heard such rave reviews that he believed he´d found the thing that would get his company off the ground.

He began calling potential customers.

"Some people begin trying to sell to high schools and then work their way up," he said.  "I started at the top."

Sometimes his calls were returned.  Most times, they weren´t.

Instead of making sales, he began shipping the equipment to schools with big‑time weight‑lifting programs, telling them that if they didn´t like the stuff he´d send a truck and haul it back to Texas.

He also telephoned Asanovich, then the strength and conditioning coach of the Buccaneers.

He asked for five minutes of his time.

"Come on down," he was told.

"I was shocked," Hobson said.

He hurriedly assembled a couple of pieces, packed them in a trailer, asked for a couple of days off of work and made the 1,020‑mile drive to Tampa.

Asanovich wasn´t sold on what he saw.  But he was sold on Hobson.

He suggested some design changes and sent Hobson back to Conroe.  When he left Tampa, Hobson believed he´d opened a door into the NFL.

He had.  While Asanovich tested the prototype machines, other teams began to purchase it.

Michigan became a customer.  Then Notre Dame.  And Air Force.

As strength coaches gossiped, his name became familiar, and where he once begged for five minutes, he now regularly fields calls from teams asking to place an order.

His five machines sell for anywhere from $895 to $2,900.  He has designed five more he hopes to have on the market within a couple of years.  He still builds every piece himself.

"Relationships are the key to what I do," Hobson said.  "I don´t have a lot of money.  I drive 23 hours, and the coaches let me sleep on their couches.  The friendships have been priceless.  I don´t think they´re millionaires, either.  They seem to live pretty modestly.  Most of them are incredible people.

"The thing about these NFL guys is that if they have something really good that they like, they´ll talk about it.  If they have something they really don´t like, they´ll talk about it.  I´ve been able to stay small and yet have a strong presence."

How is Pendulum better?  For one thing, the machines are custom‑built.  Athletes tell him his machines are more comfortable and put less stress on the joints.

"I´ve made machines that can be adjusted to fit the lifter," Hobson said.  "The problem with machines is that they´re very linear.  When you take different bone lengths, it can interrupt with the line of movement of the machine.  You have shear factors on the knees.  It may feel good to someone 5‑4, but not to someone 6‑4.  By having a machine that would adjust to their weight, these guys are able to position themselves any way they want.  They can squat in complete comfort.  You have the benefit of a machine with the effect of a free‑weight squat.  No one had one that before.

"I had enough experts, like Anthony Clark, the first person to squat over 1,000 pounds, say they were blown away by it.  The players are thoroughbreds.  They´re elite genetic athletes.  They´re incredible - and very valuable.  The better‑conditioned they are, hopefully the more injury‑free they´ll stay.  An hopefully, that could add longevity to their career.  Everything has to be joint‑friendly."

One strength coach tells Hobson his is a "boutique" weight‑lifting business.

"I don´t know if I want to have ´boutique,´" he said, "but I appreciate what he meant."

He meant customer service, which extends in a lot of different directions.  When a piece broke on an Eagles machine last season, Hobson dropped what he was doing, flew to Philadelphia and repaired it within a day.

Traci Hobson takes many of the orders by telephone and is on a first‑name basis with a dozen or so NFL coaches.  When the Baltimore Ravens played in Houston last fall, their strength coach left with a box of her homemade chocolates.

"When I pack the truck to make a delivery, she gives me homemade salsa to take to the coaches," Tyler Hobson said.  "She exchanges recipes with a few of them."

Without the security of a primary job, he frets about how to make it work.  He has established a loyal, growing client base, so much so that he has been forced to limit the orders on some machines simply because he can´t get them all built.

He plans to hire at least one full‑time employee by the end of the year and has some part‑time people around the country who´ve agreed to go set up the equipment in various weight rooms.

Until then, it´s he and his wife and other family members.

"You work all night long and you come up with this piece of equipment," he said.  "And then you drive hundreds of miles to deliver it.  A coach or an athlete gets on it and says, ´Wow, this is incredible.´  At that point, you´ve achieved such a sense of satisfaction.  To make a living doing this is a dream.  That´s what I hope to do.  It´s really a passion."

Some large manufacturers appear to be attempting to copy his design, but he says:  "They will never do what I do because they can´t.  When I´ve tried to mass produce pieces, that´s when I´ve gotten in trouble."

Still, he has goals.

"Eventually, I´d like to have 10 pieces to sell," he said.  "I´ve got five now, and that´s not enough to attract a sales force.  I´d like a more refined manufacturing system.  Right now, its just me and family sitting here putting it together.  I don´t want to get bigger just to be big.  I want to be a small custom manufacturer.

"I want it to be a tool that everyone wants to get their hands on."

**Worth The Weight**Written by:  Richard Justice (Houston Chronicle)

**Many Texans find that Conroe man´s machines to just what they want in workouts**

Texans defensive end Corey Sears has been a serious weight lifter for most of his adult life.  Having used a variety of equipment over the years, he believes the little company in Conroe - Pendulum Fitness - got it right.

"This is the first machine that really simulates the way you move on the field," he said.  "It´s very joint friendly.  It´s the first machine I´d like to have in my home.

Once upon a time, NFL players were not serious about weight lifting.  They typically showed up for training camp out of shape after a summer of relaxing or working a part‑time job.

Even when teams began encouraging players to lift weights, it was spotty.  Many teams asked them to train only during the offseason, meaning that by the end of the season they lost most of the added strength they´d acquired on the first day of camp.

These days, it´s different.

When Texans strength coach Dan Riley joined the Washington Redskins from Penn State in 1982, he convinced coach Joe Gibbs that weight lifting must be done year‑round.

Gibbs became the first NFL coach to give up practice time in training camp so that players could lift weights, and they continued until the final day of the season, took a month off and were right back in the weight room.

Texans coach Dom Capers, a weight lifter himself, agrees with Riley that it´s important.

So even though the start of training camp is more than two months away, the Texans are back at Reliant Stadium at least three days a week pounding the weight machines in the NFL´s largest weight room.

The Pendulum leg press machine designed and built by Tyler Hobson, a 39‑year‑old Conroe man, is one of the machines Riley uses.

"I´ve been lifting weights for years," Sears said.  "If you do it correctly, if you set the seat right, it hits you in the right places.  A lot of machines don´t give you the full range of motion.  But the Pendulum put you in there just the way you squat on the field.  I´m a big weight‑lifter, and this one takes the stress off the lower back.  The angle of the set is just right."

The equipment has become so popular among NFL teams that Hobson has a backlog of orders.  Tamps Bay Buccaneers fullback Mike Alstott and former Minnesota Vikings offensive lineman Randall McDaniel purchased Pendulum equipment for their homes.

"In being a smaller vendor, he needs to make a niche for himself," Jacksonville Jaguars strength coach Mark Asanovich said.  "That´s what he´s doing.  He provides good customer service and has an open ear to modification.  He´s both a designer and a manufacturer.  He listens."

When he worked in Tampa Bay, Asanovich was the first NFL strength coach to install Pendulum equipment in his weight room.  Since then, others, including Riley and the Texans, have followed.

"I don´t want to oversell the equipment," Riley said.  "It´s compatible with our program.  We have two pieces, and our players like them.  But remember that it´s a tool.  There still has to be the commitment from the players.

"The thing about Tyler is that he´s got great customer service.  He´s very interested in doing anything he can to improve the product.  He wants feedback from the players on things they like or don´t like.  He really has a passion for strength training."

Hobson began building weight‑lifting equipment in his spare time.  He eventually became convinced that some of his stuff was better than the equipment now on the market and began building it and trying to get strength coaches to use it.

He believed it was better because it was adjustable to fit every body type and that, in turn, put less stress on the joints.

"You can imagine what those guys are like three weeks into a season," he said.  "They´re all banged up and bruised up.  The last thing they want to do is crawl onto a machine that hurts their joints.  You almost have to design the equipment knowing they´re going to be training in pain.  They´re already hurt.  The machines are more of rehab tool.  It´s to maintain that high level of conditioning.

"Most of the bigger companies have engineers come up with a concept, and then they sell the coaches on why they need this stuff.  My approach was, ´You tell me what you want, and I´ll come up with it.´  It was a backdoor way to get into this industry.  Because of who I´m dealing with, I´ve gotten incredible feedback from orthopedic guys and others.  They´re not going to put a player on a piece of equipment without thoroughly checking it out."