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Taking up a sport fosters both fitness and friendships

JENNIFER KELLETT



Although I have never considered myself an athlete, I have always been involved in some kind of sport or physical activity. As a child I spent one year in gymnastics, one year tap dancing and a few years playing softball and soccer.

I was on my junior high school basketball and volleyball teams for two years, during which the former squad won one game and the latter fared only slightly better.

My high school years included a brief but disastrous foray into cross-country running, as well as a bronze medal in the city track and field championships in the triple jump, which I'm pretty sure was the result of a measuring error.

Based on that history, one would perhaps be justified in assuming that I have a short attention span or that I was so uncoordinated that there was simply no activity that could accommodate my shortcomings. Despite the evidence to the contrary, those assumptions would be wrong.

There were two sports -- and I realize that there are those who would dispute my use of the word "sport" here -- to which I devoted several years each: rhythmic gymnastics and cheerleading. Both of these were loads of fun and took me on trips around the world, but I later learned that prized skills such as juggling and back flips were not particularly useful in more mainstream sports.

At the end of high school I took up running, following the example of a friend whom I would describe enviously as a natural athlete. This interest in fitness for its own sake was useful at the University of Western Ontario, where I got a part-time job at the gym that generated enough spending money to cover expenses that students tend to incur on weekend nights.

In 2003 my husband and I joined an "ultimate frisbee" team. We both loved it immediately, although I'm not sure our teammates would agree that our enthusiasm made up for our lack of skill.

Five years later, we have improved, and the Waterloo Organization of Disc Sports has grown to more than 600 players from beginners to nationally competitive touring teams. (Other local organizations offering ultimate leagues for a wide variety of skill levels are the Community Adult Recreation Leagues at RIM Park in Waterloo and Perpetual Motion Sports & Entertainment and the Guelph Ultimate Players' Association, both in Guelph.)

In late 2005, I was contemplating my first marathon, and decided that it would be a more enjoyable experience if I could train with other people. I joined the Cambridge Harriers and although running a marathon didn't change my life, being a member of the Harriers certainly had an impact. I never would have guessed that there were so many local runners that another club, Run for Life, also boasts a sizeable membership roster.

Advice columns will tell you that a good way to meet people is to join clubs and pursue hobbies. Although that wasn't my reason for joining WODS or the Harriers, all the friends I've made since moving to Cambridge in 2001 have some tie to those organizations. Sometimes just one common interest can form the basis of a friendship when you aren't even looking for one and I'm grateful that the lifestyle I chose has proven so fruitful in that regard.

We are fortunate to live in a region that is well serviced by recreational facilities and organizations. City-owned pools and gyms, YMCAs and individual sport leagues are just a phone call or click away. I'm not sure what I'll try next, but I'm looking forward to it. After all, you can never have too many friends, right?

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