



Featured - 3/23/11

Outdoors | Getting your kicks at boot camp

By **Trevor Record**

When I arrived at the Birdcoop's noon boot camp, I wasn't expecting anything too extreme. The instructor, UBC Kinesiology and Health Science alum Amir Mirbagheri, joked he would "go easy on me." But looking



around the class I saw students of a variety of weight levels, most of whom were female. In the manner of a chauvinistic villain setting himself up for defeat, I decided that I wasn't in for anything too difficult—if the rest of those people could do it.

An hour later, I was drenched in sweat and was barely able to hold myself up. The class, which involved pairing up students and sending them in a circuit of core and cardio exercises, seemed unbearable only 20 minutes in—leaving me to stare at the wall clock as it mercilessly ticked away at a sluggish trickle. Even days after the class, my legs were constantly aching. It was as intense and challenging of a workout as its military drill-referencing name might imply.

Leigh Striegler, owner and operator of the Survivor Bootcamp franchise in Kerrisdale, compared boot camp fitness programs to hiring a personal trainer.

"I think the difference [between boot camps and individual exercise regimens] is that there's someone pushing you," said Striegler. "It's like having a one-on-one with a personal trainer, but in a group setting."

This intensity, in addition to the rise of television shows such as the Vancouver-based *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*, is what has made the classes so popular. Survivor claims to be the largest boot camp company in Canada, as well as the first to come to the lower mainland. Striegler began working with the company five years ago, after trying it out and becoming “addicted” to the workout. In the seven years since Survivor was created, dozens of other similar programs have popped up in the area.

Laura Jeary, Birdcoop Fitness Centre manager, said that the group setting of the course also increases its popularity.

“Many people also find if they have a commitment to a date and time to exercise they tend to work out more,” said Jeary. “A group setting also encourages people to support and challenge each other to improve.”

Striegler said that she personally phones students whom she believes to be considering skipping out on classes for an extra bit of encouragement. From my experience, I noticed that students are usually too busy trying to keep up with the instructor to support one another. However I did get a push when feeling too exhausted to do real push-ups. I noticed my partner was doing wall push-ups instead and followed suit. In response she said, “I’m a girl!” with a somewhat disgusted look on her face. My initial chauvinism had already been exhausted by an out-of-shape body too tired to care, so this ‘encouragement’ was wasted on me.

Of course, not everyone gets “addicted.” I personally was left with the impression that although I could imagine using boot camp as a way to get into shape quickly, I would probably not continue going to a boot camp fitness course for long if I enrolled. Joy Butler, a UBC curriculum and pedagogy professor whose specialties include human movement and physical education, said that those who don’t enjoy this type of course should find something else.

“Find things that you enjoy doing, because if you don’t enjoy it you’re not going to stick to it,” said Butler. “Boot camp...I mean, I think it’s nice for people who are into it...but just the name of it kind of turns my stomach.”

However, Butler said that the social support offered at boot camps is a key component to keeping up with exercise. She is currently participating in the Faculty of Education’s annual Walkabout

Nine Week Fitness Challenge, a team charity event which encourages group exercise at a pace of the participants' choosing.

Striegler said that while some students only sign up for a short period to get in shape for bathing-suit season or an event, she does have many students who remain in the course for the entire year, or at least half the year. She also said that fitness programs like hers are not going away any time soon.

“It was fitness-forecast [by various fitness magazines] that boot camp will be the fitness trend of 2011, and it appears that is true,” said Striegler. “What I thought might be a trendy fitness fad is actually holding its own.”