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Parkour - more than just a sport

If you've seen Madonna's video for her single 'Hung Up', or the documentary 'Jump London', then you might remember the breathtaking moves of a Frenchman performing leaps and spins across buildings. This was Sebastien Foucan - the world's greatest free runner and co-founder of Parkour. As the 'extreme sport' takes the world by storm, Sebastien begins to achieve his dream of communicating this art to the world.

The art of Parkour was born and developed in the Parisian suburb of Lisses in the 1980s by Sebastien and his childhood friend David Belle. Through developing what David learnt from his military father, the boys came up with Parkour - from the French word meaning route or course. Sebastien recalled, 'I was like every child - I climbed everywhere, ran everywhere - but the difference is we never stopped and this became our lifestyle.'

Parkour is a physical discipline in which participants (called traceurs) practise fluid movement over, under, around and through whatever obstacles may be in their path. They must adapt their move to the obstacle - be it railings, stairs or walls - and use their quick thinking and physical agility to overcome the situation. The idea behind it is that life is made up of obstacles and challenges and to progress you must overcome them, in a fluid combination of moves.

It is easy to see why Parkour often comes under the category of extreme sports but Sebastien sees it as more of an art form. He explained, 'It's not a sport; it's more than a sport. Parkour is a way of living and a state of mind.' It's a way to develop yourself, not to be in competition with others.

Sebastien is very passionate about Parkour and his philosophy behind it, but, surprisingly, he doesn't really have a fitness or diet regime, though he tries not to eat too much fat. He practises daily and makes sure he does stretching exercises, but as Parkour has been his life since he was a child he finds it as natural and as essential as drinking water. Sebastien says: 'When you're starting out you need to work hard to develop yourself but after that you keep the skill, and as long as you practice you are always ready to do Parkour.'

Not only can Parkour be practised anywhere, there's also no need for any specific equipment. So if you want to give it a go the first thing you will need to do is get to grips with the basic techniques of good jumping and landing - these are explained on Parkour.com

Sebastien's advice is: 'Start slowly and practise walking and climbing on a low level. You just have to follow your rhythm. What can you do? How far can you jump? In Parkour things happen naturally and a question forms in your mind - can I really do this? You need to be guided by someone who knows the techniques involved in it and is able to give you good advice. There is a danger element involved in Parkour, but this all depends on what you do. It's like anything you do in your life - if you start something too quickly or take on something too big you're putting yourself at risk. I started the discipline sixteen years ago and my skills have grown gradually. You can't expect to tackle the biggest obstacles straight away.' ♦

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Helen Jones, BA

Helen has recently entered into the field of sports journalism in the UK and works for FitPro, the largest professional membership organisation in the world. Helen manages FitPro Business magazine and contributes to other FitPro publications and their web site.