

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Ninja Warriors

Our children could become Canadian Ninja Warriors

By Stephen Somerville

As a society, we have to be generally concerned about children's lack of physical activity and the dietary challenges that many have. I don't see any kids playing street hockey or any kids getting together to play baseball or football in the park anymore.

As a child, I recall playing street hockey from morning until night with my buddies. We would even take on other 'streets' where I grew up. First team to twenty was usually considered the winner.

Maybe it takes too much effort to get everyone together today or maybe kids just like to play in their leagues and want their free time to do other things.

The problem is that this 'free time' - in a great deal of cases - leads to children playing video games on the computer for countless hours.

I am probably just as guilty as the next guy in that I sometimes let my son play more of these games than I should, but he is an active boy who likes playing soccer, golf, skiing and other sports.

It does seem to me, however, that there are more young coach potatoes today than I was growing up.

And the Federal government has tried to do something about it over the years - including tax credits for certain activities for children - although I don't think enough has been done.

According to Wikipedia, ParticipACTION is a national non-profit organization, originally launched as a Canadian government program in the 1970s, to promote healthy living and physical fitness. It shut down due to financial cutbacks in 2001, but was revived on February 19, 2007 with a grant of \$5 million from the Federal government.

ParticipACTION is well known for its television public service announcements and segments such as Body Break during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. A 1973 commercial, comparing the health of a 30-year-old Canadian to a 60-year-old Swede, started a national discussion on the state of physical education in Canada.

If you are of my vintage, then you may recall one of the programs associated with ParticipACTION - the 'Awards of Excellence'. I believe the government was doing this program in concert with Montreal hosting the 1976 Olympics.

The physical fitness program consisted of a number of activities in which a student would be graded against an aged adjusted standard. I can't recall all of the activities that were measured, but I do remember the shuttle run, sit ups and the dreaded flexed arm hang.

If you were in the top for each category, then you were awarded the Gold 'Award of Excellence' patch. There was a Silver and Bronze level as well.

I still have my patches somewhere in the house.

I don't know why the program was stopped; maybe they should resurrect it in concert with the introduction of a 'Canadian Ninja Warrior' reality television series.

This show would be based on the successful 'American Ninja Warrior' TV program that just wrapped up its seventh season and was a ratings hit. This TV program is not to be confused with that other reality show - 'Wipe Out', which is more comedy than athletic endeavor!

In the course of a season, contestants from around the U.S. attempted to get through various timed obstacle courses.

The obstacle courses required competitors to exhibit strength, endurance and balance.

The 2015 season started out with over 3,200 contestants, all competing in both city qualifying and city finals around the country.

According to the show's website, 'those who successfully complete the finals course in their designated region move on to the national finals round in Las Vegas, where they face a stunning four-stage course modeled after the famed Mt. Midoriyama course in Japan. The winner will take home a grand prize of \$1,000,000 (U.S.).'

These contestants were regular folks from across the U.S.

These men and women contestants come from every walk of life and many had compelling life stories.

One thing all contestants had in common was that they were in terrific physical shape.

I know that my son and his friends really liked the TV series and I must admit that I became hooked this season as well.

I think this type of TV program could be inspirational to kids here and might induce them to get away from their personal entertainment devices for a while.

Why not resurrect the awards of excellence program to include some of the obstacle course items that would be shown on a

Canadian Ninja warrior TV series.

I could envision a national corporate sponsor (like a milk producer, for example) promoting this TV program heavily and then in concert with the Federal government, revamping and rebranding the award program for kids.

Anything that can be used to encourage and promote healthy and active lifestyles for our children needs to be undertaken.

Stephen can be contacted at stephengsomerville@yahoo.com