

Fitness Ideas

Give the Girl a Ring!

By Angela Arnold | 26/01/2006



If you're like many Canadians, your New Year's resolution to make fitness a priority conjures the grim prospect of airless aerobics studios and weight room waiting lines. Feeling restricted by winter weather, we pledge to learn to love the treadmill and optimistically register at our local gyms by the thousands every January. Not surprisingly, few of us are still using those facilities three months later, our fitness vows dying long before becoming part of our daily routine.

If this sounds like "ghosts of resolutions past" to you, then it's time to reconsider your exercise options. Why not take up a winter sport that offers not only a great workout, but also the thrill of competition and the motivating rewards of team membership? You'll find all three in ringette, one of Canada's quintessential winter sports!

Did You Know?

Originally dubbed "Hockey's Sister Sport," ringette was invented in 1963 in North Bay, Ontario by Sam Jacks who wanted to design a winter game for girls and women. There are obvious similarities to hockey: it's played on ice, and players use sticks to shoot the ring into the opposing team's net. While the rubber ring and bladeless stick are two signs that this game is unique, it's the rules of play that really set the sport apart.

Three main rules guarantee wide-open play. First, players cannot carry the ring across the blue line—they have to pass it. Then, only three players from each team (plus the goalie) are permitted in the end zones at once. Finally, intentional body contact is not allowed. These rules foster a game culture that emphasises skating and playmaking skills. As a result, ringette is hailed as "The Fastest Game on Ice!"

It's also one of the fastest growing sports in Canada. Alayne Martell-Crocker, Media Relations spokesperson for Ringette Canada, reports that there are nearly 26,000 athletes playing on some 2000 teams across Canada. Factor in coaches, officials, and volunteers, and there are over 50,000 participants in the sport. Despite the fact that more girls and women are joining hockey teams, there is tremendous support for this faster, less physically antagonistic game. The growth of the sport has continued beyond our borders, with the formation of associations in the U.S.A., Finland, Sweden, Russia, and France. At this rate, ringette may soon be introduced as a demonstration sport in the Olympics!

The Workout

TSN reporter, Reed Holmes, remarks that "Although it may not be as aggressive as hockey, ringette is not any easier. Because there are no offsides and no body contact to slow down players, ringette is faster, more wide-open and is arguably more aerobically challenging."*

Tracey Tulloch, from Bedford, Nova Scotia, agrees: "No matter how hard a workout I may do at a gym, I never feel as exhausted and exhilarated as I do when I've played ringette." A series of 45 second shifts over two 20-minute periods "get me going more than any 40-minute circuit training session!" In addition to speed, strength and stamina, ringette athletes are also known for their balance, timing and precision.

Women seeking those kinds of fitness benefits are lacing up in droves despite often knowing little about the game before joining! Krystle Hussey, who plays for the University of New Brunswick club team, had never even heard of ringette before she moved to campus and learned that her roommate was an avid player. Although initially reluctant to step on the ice, she was immediately welcomed: "The team embraced me and was very supportive because they simply love seeing new girls trying out." She's thrilled that she gave it a shot and has been playing for five years now: "Ringette has offered me the opportunity to stay physically fit, gain confidence as I become a better athlete, travel with other women my age, and experience unforgettable moments and friendships."

A Healthy Lifestyle

Players often see the rewarding fitness benefits as "a bonus" next to the real pay-offs of being part of a team. They credit their love of the sport, the thrill of the competition, and lifelong friendships for keeping them coming back to the rink. A 25-year participant in the sport, Tracey is now a mother of three who makes the game a family affair by serving as coach and referee for her daughters' teams. While she agrees that ringette has been an effective "boot camp for getting back in shape after having a baby," she is just as excited to be involved in her children's activities and to role model healthy behaviour for them: "I hope that being active in the sport as a mother shows them that you can play for life."

By taking up an activity that you can easily make an enjoyable part of your social and family life, you'll greatly improve your chances of keeping at it. And that's when resolutions pay off!

NEXT STEPS

Is your interest in ringette tweaked yet? To learn more about this uniquely Canadian sport and get information on teams, leagues, and clubs, check out www.ringette.ca

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