

## Canadian Health & Fitness - Spring 2003 Issue

by Marylene Vestergom

Left, right, left.

Left, left - right, right.

Now, down low in a flurry!

Background music pounds the beat we all dance to. Our hands bound with heavy strips of cotton are encased in their boxing gloves. We pummel the heavy bags to former Canadian Boxing champion Wayne Bourque's commands. This is only the beginning of the first of 4 - 3 minute rounds. Each drill working on different punches - the jab, the hook, combination. The routine is punishing, yet the sensation of power exerted onto the heavy bag is thrilling. Every time you connect with the bag - that force of energy flows through your body - making your muscles stronger.

With so many activities available - from running, to spinning, aerobic classes - why boxercise? If you're looking for a serious workout, involving intense cardiovascular work, demanding strength and flexibility from every major muscle group - then boxercise is the answer. The added bonus - you get to blow off a little steam and gain a level of self-confidence. From a cross-training perspective, you would be hard pressed to find an activity that will provide a high level of complete fitness. (70% aerobic, 30% anaerobic). It quickly improves your upper body strength and really gives a boost to your daily cardio workout. And don't think for a moment that boxercise is for men only. Women and men, box side-by-side at Toronto's Centre Ring. For Olga, a 26 year old Graphic Designer, "Working behind a desk all day, I was feeling pretty drained and I needed something to boost my energy level. It's amazing!"

But Wayne is used to seeing the dramatic changes of those who attend his gym. "As an all-round physical activity, that not only burns fat but also improves cardiovascular conditioning and muscle toning - it's probably the best activity to take up. What's interesting is to see how women change - not just physically but emotionally. Their level of self-esteem, self confidence is raised."

Hitting the bag, making contact is exhilarating. And although everyone boxes at their own pace, everyone hits the 120 pound heavy bag - shouting out words of encouragement.

"One thing for sure, you can't fake it. You can't fake hitting the bag or pretend to skip", says Wayne. And for the women who attend the boxercise class at Centre Ring, Wayne hears pretty much the same thing "I'll never go back to another aerobics class after this. This is a workout."

Although you may not be ready for the ring, you certainly will experience many of the training elements of an amateur boxer. Trying a boxercise program may even give you a better appreciation of the sport of boxing itself, and the fitness level these athletes must attain and sustain to be the best. On the amateur circuit at the Olympic level, men box 4, 2 minute rounds. On the pro level, boxers can face up to 12, 3 minute rounds - and remember, that's not just hitting the bag. That involves actual contact. Whereas boxercise is strictly non-contact. And hitting the bag is only a small part of the hour and a half class. The circuit training is intense. Starting off with a few stretches and then onto a series of push-ups and sit-ups. Then 3 x 3 minute rounds of skipping. And yes, more sit-ups in between. Finally, you'll be ready for the intense heavy bag work of 4 x 3 minute rounds with, yet again, more push-ups thrown in-between the reps - just for

good measure. Ready to throw in the towel? Before you do, let's finish off the class with some hard core abdominal exercises and a cool down stretch. Now, you're done.

To the purist, it may be boxing's poorer cousin - but it does provide both men and women a great all-round conditioning activity, a superb cardio workout that helps rejuvenate an otherwise boring exercise routine. Everyone is looking for a change in his or her routine. Boxercise is one of those activities which takes time to perfect and pacing is key. "It's a question of repetition. Your jab will not connect the first time out, but once they get the technique of the punches, they get a feeling of just how much force they have when they actually make contact. And when they do, it's not arrogance that takes over, it's more self-confidence, self-awareness that they can hit," says Bourque.

After a few months, hitting the bag has paid off. As a cross-training activity it has improved your cardiovascular performance. You feel stronger. Curiously enough, your body seems to be transforming. Your shoulders and back are more defined, your arms have taken on a sculptured look. Sweat glistens with each flurry of punches. There's something about a woman who's not afraid to pull any punches!

Note: Like all new fitness activities, check with your physician first.