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WELL AND GOOD

The shape of fitness in 2006

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By Tina Juan Inquirer Last updated 02:21am (Mla time) 08/15/2006

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FITNESS professionals from all over the world expect to learn new exercise programs at the annual Idea World Fitness Convention. This year's event delivered exactly that— creative new formats and motivating variations on old favorites.

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Not all of these new fitness ideas will be successful, meaning they will go past the tipping point to become staples at gyms and clubs around the globe.

The slide—a five-foot-long slippery board —didn't last long after its initial presentation in the early '90s. Today, it survives only as a training tool for professional speed skaters.

In 2000, our very own tinkling was transformed into an exercise program, Tinix Sticks, by an innovative American instructor who saw Fil-Am kids jumping between wooden poles for their Physical Education class. Despite trendy marketing, lightweight foam poles and interesting choreography, it was barely a blip on the fitness radar screen.

A good idea stands the test of time. Consider step aerobics and high-low impact aerobics. Step was introduced in 1990 and high-low has been around since the '80s. Both programs are still being taught in gyms. Idea continues to offer workshops because surveys show its members still want them.

Yoga and pilates have continued to climb in popularity for almost 10 years now. Idea says the two formats are leveling off this year but show no signs of declining anytime soon.

Spinning or indoor cycling is also holding on. Mini balls that fit in the palm of your hand, basketball-size balls and large stability balls that you lie down and sit on are still everywhere.

Programs that are not new but have developed a growing following over the years are Nia (a mix of tai chi, martial arts, jazz) and Gyrokinesis and Gyrotonics (spiraling flowing movements done on the mat and on a medieval-looking machine).

And speaking of having a following, Beto Perez, creator of Zumba, might soon be heading a fitness cult. I heard that some teen participants across the United States were so taken with this popular Latin aerobics class that they had Zumba tattooed on their inner wrists. They called it being

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"zumbafied."

How is that for dedication to an exercise program?

New programs

So what's new? Here's a short list of what caught my eye. Your guess is as good as mine as to whether these programs will be coming soon to a gym near you.

Drums alive!

Stability balls are used as the "drums." Participants do various drumming techniques while standing up and moving around in all sorts of positions. It is a fun and energetic workout that uses the whole body.

Reactive impact training

A shifting or oscillating resistance forces the body to react by tightening core muscles to control the movement. Gadgets sold at the expo to accomplish this goal were the Body Blade, which has actually been around for several years and the totally new Xco Trainer, an aluminum canister filled with a material that shifts from one end of the tube to another, as you exercise with it.

Suspension training

This "hanging" system uses your body weight against gravity. The sturdy straps, which are suspended six feet above the floor, can be hooked up almost anywhere—on a gym machine, a door, a wall, a fence, even a coconut tree, if you want.

Ginastica natural

It was mesmerizing to watch Brazilian Alvaro Romano and his all-male students (some of them middle-aged men) present a sensual display of strength, flexibility and raw energy with poses inspired by yoga, jiu-jitsu, gymnastics and primitive animal-like moves.

Stiletto strength

Trust Crunch Fitness to come up with a class to strengthen legs and calves to allow the wearing of high heels like a pro. Crunch is the New York-based gym that invented Cardio Striptease, Cycle Karaoke and the Fireman's Workout.

Visit www.tinajuanfitness.info

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