

Publication: Virginian Pilot; Date: Jun 29, 2009; Section: The Daily Break; Page: E1



HIP-HOP FITNESS

YOU CAN GET get a workout without realizing it at this popular exercise session, which looks more like a dance club than an aerobics class

By **ELIZABETH SIMPSON** The Virginian-Pilot

NORFOLK Ten-year-old Breon Case doesn't seem like the type to seek out an aerobics class at the Y, but there he was last Monday night doing ab crunches and knee lifts.

What drew him?

"Someone told me they had a hip-hop class here, and I wanted to learn," he said, his face glistening with sweat, his T-shirt damp.

And indeed the floor was shaking – some 30 people were jumping and kicking – and the walls were vibrating with the sound of hip-hop music. Instructor Kristal Randolph, dressed in lime green and sleek black, looked like something out of a dance club rather than an exercise class.

Her moves were electric-fast at times, incorporating jumps and fist pops, swiveling hips and pumping arms.

This is hip-hop aerobics, and Kristal packs a full house on Monday nights at the Blocker Norfolk Family YMCA. So does her sister, Kelli Randolph, who teaches the class when Kristal's out, say, having a baby, as she was in late April.

You wouldn't know 31-year-old Kristal is a mother of three, though, as she's thin as a reed, with taut biceps and abs that are rock-hard.

She's a good advertisement for her class.

She's a fitness and dance instructor at the Y and other community centers, and also teaches physical education for Portsmouth schools.

Five years ago she had just taken a hip-hop dance class and decided to choreograph the moves to an eight-count fitness routine, using her favorite hip-hop and rhythm-and-blues tunes as a backdrop.

It felt like a new idea at the time, but the Internet is now thick with hip-hop aerobic routines and cardio-rock fitness DVDs. "It's everywhere," she said.

"Zumba" exercise uses the same concept with Latin tunes. Exercise programs have also cropped up using everything from punk rock to Irish stepdancing to ballroom serenades.

They all put to use a concept that Kristal knows well:

"When you're dancing, you're working out without realizing it. If you like to dance and have a good time, you can't be bored."

She kicked off the class Monday with a warm-up of stretches and easy steps, then moved into an abdominal workout, then propelled the class into a fast-moving cardio workout.

"All right, come on, let's do it. Inhale deep breath, exhale. 1-2-3-4, shoulders back for eight. Roll to the front ... "

So far, so good. The group was more diverse than the typical aerobics class, with the young, the middle aged, white, black, male, female, first-timers and veterans of hip-hop.

"We're not worried about the choreography; we're just worried about moving," Kristal said. "If you don't know the dance step, do a step touch."

As the pace picked up, some people had the moves down exactly, others marched to keep going during tricky parts they had somehow lost the beat on and still others added their own moves and yells and claps to the routines she taught.

"I'm trying to get it right, get it tight!" yelled 26-year-old Dateria Holmes during the peak of a fast-moving song.

The Norfolk woman has been coming to the class for two years. She tried other exercise programs but got bored with the tedium. "The step aerobic thing ... I could not get with it. This is easy. If you like to dance, it comes natural. It's like I'm auditioning for a dance video."

"Basically, what you put into it is what you get out of it," said Cedric Myers, 27, of Norfolk, who's also been coming for two years. Kristal introduced short combinations of the dance and then built upon them before connecting the segments. "OK, are we ready? You know we can't do this if we're not hyped. OK, come on, wake up, wake up. If there's any move you can't do, don't worry." She jabbed at the air, and kicked her heels in the air. Meanwhile, her sister, Kelli, worked out at her side, helping to ramp up the energy level. Kelli said the class is popular with people who like to dance but don't want to go to clubs. "Here you can dance and get a workout," she said. Kelli is a P.E. teacher in Portsmouth, too, and the sisters have also incorporated the class into their intermediate and middle school curriculums. "With obesity running rampant, this is a good way to get kids off the couch," Kristal said. "It's music they can enjoy and relate to." At Monday's class, Kristal had half the people face the others toward the end of the one-hour session. They each had a turn doing the dance in a competition-type format. "How are we doing guys, we good?" Kristal said. "Make some noise, come on, come on, from the top." About the time the class was drenched in sweat, she gave the signal for a cool-down segment. "Wonderful job, give yourself a hand." "It was fun," Breon said afterward. "And a lot of exercise." His twin, Savion Case, said he's been trying to lose some weight by playing basketball and walking on the treadmill. "This is easier and more fun," he said. "It's fun because we were doing hip-hop."

Elizabeth Simpson, (757) 446-2635, elizabeth.simpson@pilotonline.com





RYAN C. HENRIKSEN PHOTOS | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT Kristal Randolph, top photo, packs a full house for her hip-hop aerobics class on Monday nights at the Blocker Norfolk Family YMCA. Her moves are electric-fast at times, incorporating jumps and fist pops, swiveling hips and pumping arms.





RYAN C. HENRIKSEN PHOTOS | THE VIRGINIAN-PILOT Kristal Randolph, left, and her sister Kelli, right, lead a class that typically includes the young, the middle-aged, white, black, male, female, first-timers and veterans of hip-hop.

Print