Fitness over the last 150 years, have we chosen the right path?

Rudyard Kipling once wrote "nations have passed away and left no traces, and history gives the naked cause of it, one single simple reason in all cases they fell because their people were not fit"

This profound quote beckons us to consider that fitness not only means our personal survival but also the survival of our culture and nation.

While there is a part of our population that is striving ever forward towards incredible feats of human performance there has been for some time a growing sector that are becoming less healthy and fit.

Studies have shown that in 1940 one third of the population of 17 to 24 year olds were unable to pass the physical requirements for military service. By 1960 the number had grown to 50 percent and now only 30 percent are thought to possess the physical standards required for the military.

During Kipling's time some interesting changes took place in what could be considered as the fitness industry of the day. Fitness emporiums of the mid to late 1800's where people practiced a style of training that could be described as fitness for the sake of health and wellness gave way to the system of training for and playing in competitive sports such as baseball, football, and basketball.

An understanding of why these changes took place is beyond the scope of this article but given the declining fitness of the majority of our population over the last century should we begin to question if the transition that took place in Kipling's time was the best path that could have been embarked upon?

Until the modernization of many of the worlds cultures physical fitness was truly a matter of survival. Only the fit could cultivate crops or hunt and forage for food and avoid or escape from danger. On a nationalistic level the more fit the population of a country was the more resistant to invasion by neighboring countries they could be.

It is certainly difficult for any of us who love to participate in or follow competitive sports to imagine a world without them but do sports contribute to the overall fitness of the majority of a population or just a few? Do the thousands upon thousands of sport related injuries create a burden worth carrying for an individual and the society in which that individual resides?

Technological advances and social change have removed most of the primal reasons for achieving and maintaining mastery of our physical being. In their place are competitive sports or the pursuit of the aesthetic but not necessarily functional physique. Can we do better? The evidence may be suggesting that we must!

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