



Argentina
PARKOUR

Traceurs - the urban superheroes

Albano Ariel Vallese is one of the young men. Coming from a background of martial arts, the transition to Parkour has been fairly easy for him. "The advantages of Parkour are many, compared to other sports," he explains. "First of all it gives you a great deal of independence. You can practice whenever and wherever you want and you are not reliant upon any kind of equipment. You only use your body. I like that freedom. At the same time Parkour gives you just as much of adrenalin rush as other extreme sports and requires the same kind of mental discipline as in martial arts. It's perfect." Albano is studying information technology and spends most of his day in front of a computer. "After school I just need to get out and start running. I've been confined to a chair all day. I need to feel my body working, sweating, breathing. After a couple of hours of practice I feel alive again. Happy. And often we just go on till late in the night – we don't stop till we're completely wasted," he laughs.

Looking at the group of boys training in the trashed backyard of Canal 7, it is not hard to picture them being exhausted after a session. Nobody stands still at any time; the pace is fast and fearless. People are scattered all around the yard, each pursuing his own goal of climbing a transmitter, jumping a high fence or mounting a wall. Pretty much like children in a playground – and apparently that comparison is not so far off the mark. "Parkour is basically what all children do quite naturally," Albano says. "It's about testing the borders of your world to see how high you can go, how fast, how far. Whatever's in your way, you jump it, climb it and keep going. After a while you can't see a fence without jumping it. You start seeing your city with new eyes. The cars, the buildings, the streets – they're all challenges."

As well as on Saturdays, the group often meets during the week in smaller groups.

Every Saturday a group of young men meet on the streets and plazas of Buenos Aires, each Saturday in a new place. These men vary greatly in age, background and religion, they come from different districts of the city and they never meet for any other purpose than this: overcoming obstacles. Quite literally, that is. They run up walls, skip over benches and jump from rooftops. They have committed themselves to the principles of Parkour and are now "traceurs", using the urban environment as one big assault course.

Parkour facts Parkour (French for obstacle), also known as urban running, is a fast-paced, acrobatic city sport, which is practiced in the streets of major towns all over the world. The rules are simple: to move from A to B as fast as possible, tackling and overcoming every obstacle on the way smoothly and swiftly. Named and systemised recently by young Frenchman David Belle, who was inspired by martial arts, military exercises and superheroes, Parkour is growing rapidly in popularity and spreading effortlessly via its simple internet-based instructions. Practitioners call themselves "traceurs" (French for runners). The training involves running, climbing, jumping, skipping and sliding on the urban obstacles at hand, such as walls, benches, fences, rooftops etc. The practice is mainly practiced in groups for both safety and social reasons and can be held wherever and whenever it suits the traceurs. Traceurs commit themselves to helping other traceurs in their training and development. There are no Parkour competitions, only jams.

For further information
www.parkour.net · www.davidbelle.com · www.pka.com.ar

Sometimes by the Universidad de Derecho, sometimes by the Biblioteca Nacional, whoever has time joins in. All communication goes via email. Javier Guerrero, who is also a student, has noticed how many of those who take up Parkour, work with computers in their everyday life. "I think there is a growing need for sports that are social, outdoors and very physical to compensate for all the time we spend alone in front of the screen. But at the same time, it has to be flexible. I can't meet at a fixed time twice a week. My study wouldn't allow it. Plus it would drive me nuts."

But there is another side to it as well. "When you work with computers and sit by a desk all day, you lose your physical confidence. You lose touch with your body. But when you climb that wall and jump that rooftop, when you overcome your fear and discover how capable your body really is, you regain that confidence. As if your body has always been on autopilot, and now you are able to take control."

Parkour was founded by French traceur David Belle. He does not, however, take any credit for its invention since it is a basic, natural way of moving and not an organised sport as such. He has merely given it a name and started communicating it on the internet, which is how Parkour is spreading so rapidly all over the world. Still, to these youngsters, he is a mentor. "David Belle trains very, very hard," Albano explains. "He can climb down a four-storey building in 15 seconds and jump off a 10m-high bridge without hurting himself. He is the master!"

But it's not just Belle's physical achievements that have brought about his idealisation. "He teaches us how overcoming physical obstacles gives you strength to overcome psychological obstacles as well," Albano continues. "In Parkour you can never go around a

challenge, you have to go straight through it. You have to focus on your goal instead of the irrational fear you feel when faced with a challenge. If I can walk in a straight line on the ground, I can do it on a ledge high up in the air as well. I just have to concentrate on the task and not on the distance to the ground."

To the unknowing beholder, Parkour seems every bit as hardcore as other street sports. And onlookers often do mistake the traceurs for burglars or a violent gang. But even though the sport looks rough and the practitioners are pierced and tattooed, Parkour is a clean discipline in every sense of the word. No drugs, no violence, no attitude. Safety is a major issue. You have to be humble towards the danger you face and respect as well as challenge your limitations. Traceurs do not even compete against each other, as this is considered against the spirit of the sport. One competes against oneself, not against the achievements of others. So when traceurs meet, it is to "jam" - to share their passion, learn more and help each other, never to compete.

In a country as unstable as Argentina at the moment, this kind of environment is a godsend. Albano explains: "These are difficult times for our country. Since the financial debacle in 2002, none of us have much money. Doctors and professors have to drive taxis to make a buck and still more people are living on the street, sorting through the garbage to survive. I've seen many kids move from martial arts into gangs and crime. There's so much anger and frustration these days. It is easy to get into trouble. Parkour gives me a purpose and self-confidence, without being violent. It's free and it's liberating, it's a way to make things better for myself and for my city." Albano thinks for a minute and smiles: "You know, where others see an obstacle, a traceur sees a way forward."



Name **Javier Guerrero** Alias **Oudine**
Age **19** Occupation **Economics student** Status **Single** Hobby **Parkour and Muay Thai** Football team **Boca**
Best travel experience **Argentina**
Dream destination **France (to meet David Belle)** Favourite music **Trance**
Favourite meal **Pasta** Favourite clothes **Whatever's comfortable for Parkour**
Favourite drink **Chocolate liquor**
Favourite restaurant in Buenos Aires **Bice in Puerto Madero** Favourite club in Buenos Aires **Pacha** Favourite barrio in Buenos Aires **Palermo** Ambition **To excel in Parkour**



Name **Albano Ariel Vallese** Alias **Alariva** Age **21** Occupation **Technology student** Status **In love and still hoping** Hobby **Parkour, digital image design** Football team **N/A** Best travel experience **Patagonia, Argentina** Dream destination **Not on this planet I think. I'm still looking...** Favourite music **311** Favourite meal **Asado** Favourite clothes **Ben Simon** Favourite drink **Chokolatada** Favourite restaurant in Buenos Aires **Rojo y Negro** Favourite club in Buenos Aires **El Divino in Mar del Plata** Favourite barrio in Buenos Aires **Villa Martelli** Ambition **To be really happy**