



DanceSport BC

PROMOTING PUBLIC HEALTH THROUGH DANCE



DanceSport as an integrated component of sport and healthy living in BC

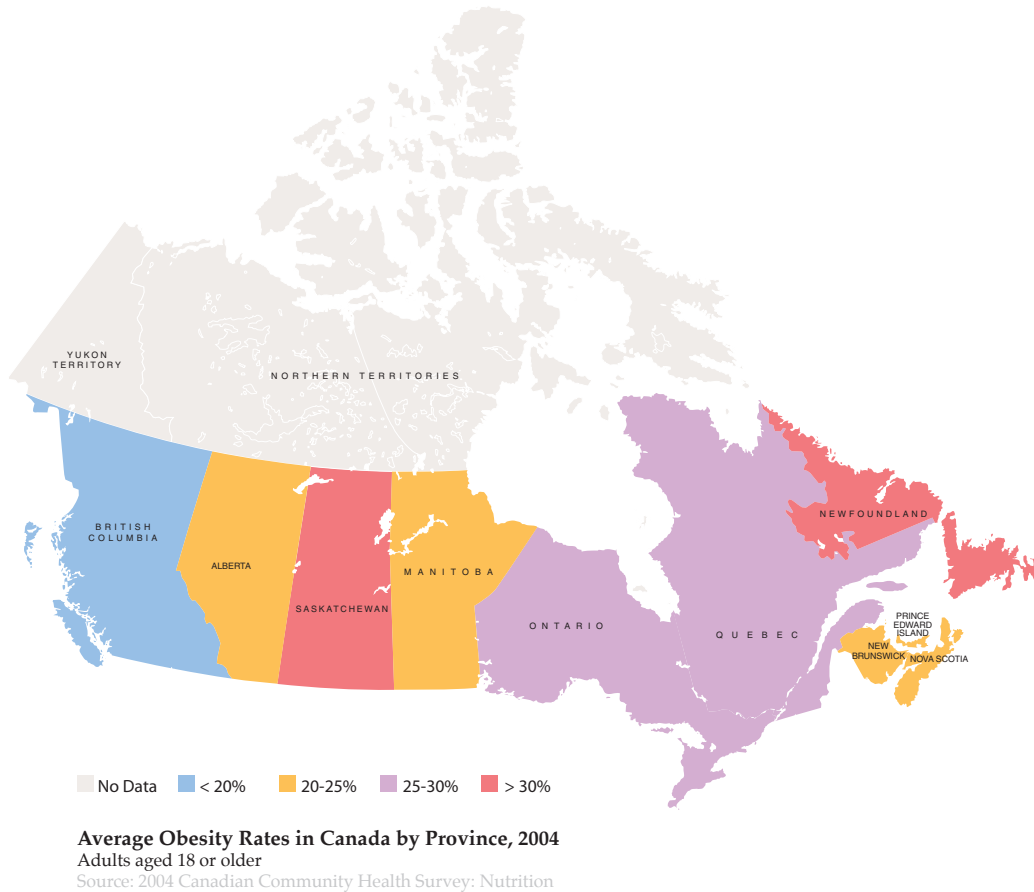
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A response for our time

Inactive lifestyles contributing to obesity epidemic

Around the world, and especially in North America, obesity is on the rise. The Center for Disease Control has found a continuing increase over the past 20 years.⁽¹⁾ Only one province (BC) had a prevalence of obesity less than 20% in 2004. Canada's two most populated provinces, as well as thirty US states, had a prevalence equal to or greater than 25%; others had obesity rates equal to or greater than 30%.



A 2005 report released by the Canadian government's Economics Division reported that "In 2004, approximately 6.8 million Canadian adults ages 20 to 64 were overweight, and an additional 4.5 million were obese. Roughly speaking, an adult male is considered overweight when his body weight exceeds the maximum desirable weight for his height, and obese when his body weight is 20% or more over this desirable weight. A similar guideline holds true for women, but at a threshold of 25% rather than 20%. Dramatic increases in overweight and obesity among Canadians over the past 30 years have been deemed to constitute an "epidemic."⁽²⁾

Alarming future unless changes take place

Statistics Canada in early 2005 presented an alarming outlook for overweight and obesity in Canada should current trends continue. A study found that approximately one-third of people who were classified as normal weight in

1994-1995 had become overweight by 2002-2003, and nearly one-quarter of those who were initially overweight were classified as obese after the eight-year period. Conversely only 10% of those who were overweight in 1994-1995 had progressed to a normal weight range by 2002-2003.(3)

Similar trends are taking place worldwide. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that there are more than a billion overweight adults globally, of whom at least 300 million are obese. Recognizing that overweight and obesity can have tremendous negative health implications, a group of health and nutrition experts assembled by the WHO in 1997 concluded that:

Without societal changes, a substantial and steadily rising proportion of adults will succumb to the medical complications of obesity; indeed, the medical burden of obesity already threatens to overwhelm health services. The spectrum of problems seen in both developing and developed countries is having so negative an impact that obesity should be regarded as today's principal neglected public health problem.(4)

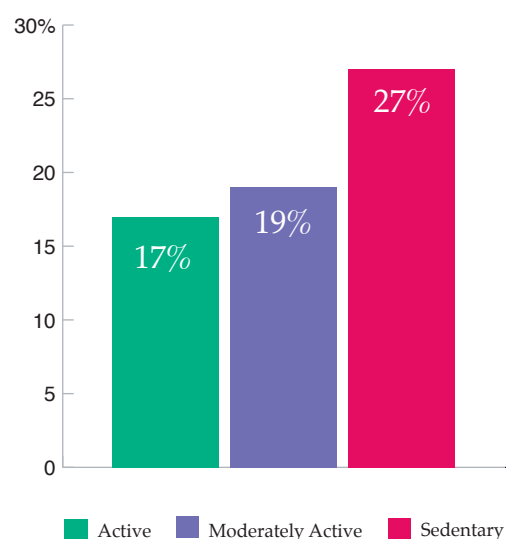
Inactivity a primary cause of obesity

The factors that lead to overweight and obesity are numerous, complex and intertwined, but experts agree that one of the primary causes is decreasing involvement in physical activity. True Sport Canada reports that adult sport participation has declined from a rate of 45% in 1992 to just 28% in 2005.(5) The US Centers for Disease Control found that recommended minimum activity levels of 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five days a week are no longer being met by a growing segment of society. A 2004 Canadian Community Health survey found that average obesity rates for active individuals were 17%, compared to 27% for sedentary individuals.(6)

The solution involves public health awareness and involvement. In a July 2005 news release, the Canadian Minister of State (Public Health) said: "Encouraging and supporting healthy weights will require cooperative action across all sectors and levels of government... Social, economic, physical and environmental factors must be addressed to create environments that will support Canadians in making healthy choices."(7)

Not just adults

Rising obesity in Canada is not restricted to the adult population. The data for children mirrors the trends reported in adults. The trends are consistent in showing rapidly increasing rates of overweight and obesity among Canadian children.(8) One evaluation study showed that rates of overweight (including obesity) among children ages 7 to 13 increased by 200%-300% between 1981 and 2001, though they appear to have stabilized somewhat in recent years.



Obesity rates in relation to lifestyle, 2004

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey: Nutrition

Inactivity is more prevalent among those with lower income and education, and, beginning in adolescence, affects females more than males (NIH, 1995; Physical Activity, 1996). A pattern of inactivity, also known as sedentism, begins early in life, making the promotion of physical activity among children imperative.

Proactive educational system essential

One of the best ways to prepare our society for physical activity is to do so through the educational system. Children spend hours every day in school, for many years. These years represent key stages in mental and physical development, during which time they learn patterns of behavior and habits that stay with them the rest of their lives.

The Canadian Lifestyle and Fitness Research Institute published a white paper on the value of daily physical fitness in the educational system. The report included the following recommendation:

Recent cutbacks to school physical education programs, which include physical activity instruction and intramural programs, should be of concern to parents. Physical education enhances academic performance and should receive equal priority in the timetable.

Rather than decreasing the time spent on physical education, schools should strive to increase it.

Quality Daily Physical Education has the potential of developing a desire to be active and physically fit, a positive attitude that will keep the child active long into adulthood. Participating in a balanced program taught by well-prepared professionals in a safe and caring environment develops other important attitudes such as:

- * an interest in health and responsibility for personal care;
- * a respect for rules;
- * self-confidence; and
- * respect for oneself and for others.

A 2006 study by the Canadian Lifestyle and Fitness Research Institute found that between 70-80% of schools encourage participation in physical activity events, promote community physical activity programs to students and their families, provide certificates or rewards to students participating in physical activity, or integrate physical activity into lesson plans.

Sadly, the same study found that only 10-15% of schools provide credit for physical activity training or certification, frequently use physical activity as a reward, or provide late bussing for students participating in physical activity after school. (9)

While some schools do provide physical education credits for involvement in extracurricular sports such as DanceSport, this happens inconsistently. DanceSport BC athletes have complained to the association that their requests for such credits have been denied. Why should a student who is actively involved in a highly athletic, competitive sport be denied physical education credits, especially in schools where other sports are supported? One reason appears to be a misunderstanding of the physical qualities of DanceSport. A proper understanding of the sports aspects of ballroom dancing can be encouraged through provincial and educational initiatives.

DanceSport BC encourages all schools in BC to adopt a policy of providing education credits for competitive students who can prove their involvement in DanceSport.

While some schools do provide physical education credits for involvement as a competitive DanceSport athlete, this happens inconsistently.

Dance as sport

The Olympic Commission defines a sport as “any activity that combines a physical effort with a certain amount of skill.”

Clearly dancing requires physical effort. Different forms of dance have varying degrees of effort involved, depending on how fast or active the body movement calls for in that dance style. Competitive ballroom dancing has been found to be one of the most physically demanding dance forms of all.

Physical activity has been defined as “bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure” (Pate, Pratt et al., 1995).

Competitive ballroom dancing (or ‘Dancesport’ as it is now officially called) is an extremely physical activity. At an advanced level, dancers are very fit. They may not have the bulky look of a football player or the bulging biceps of a weight lifter, but there is more to fitness than large muscles. Dancers are known for their aerobic fitness. As their level of competition increases so does their speed, balance and strength. In addition, ballroom dancing utilizes a variety of different muscles including rear deltoids, rhombus, upper and lower abdominals, glutes and calves. Great strength is needed in the upper body to maintain proper tension between partners. A strong core is essential. Many dancers also cross train with a variety of other sports to keep themselves in peak physical condition.

Studies compare DanceSport to Olympic athletes

A study referred to in the November 3, 1997 issues of Forbes Magazine showed that “a vigorous rumba burns up the same number of calories and requires the same exertion as a bicycle competition or a foot race over a similar period of time.”⁽¹⁰⁾

The 1986 study conducted by the University of Freiburg in Germany demonstrated that the muscle exertion, measured by production of lactic acid, and breathing rates of DanceSport competitors performing one competition dance of approximately two minutes were equal to the muscle exertion and breathing rates of cyclists, swimmers and Olympic 800-metre runners exerting themselves over the same period of time. Consider, however, that a DanceSport competitor repeats this performance five times in each round and that a finalist in a World Ten Dance championship will have repeated this performance 30 times.

The German study's methodology was repeated in a recent Australian study, the results of which were published in the authoritative British Journal of Sports Medicine.

In BC, one of the province's top DanceSport athletes wore a heart rate monitor during a 90-minute training session to measure physical exertion. Heart rate during the Jive (the most vigorous dance) averaged 174 for the duration of each two-minute dance, and 158 during the Rumba, the least vigorous dance. Even with breaks between dances and between rounds (during which time heart rate dropped significantly), the average heart rate for the entire 90-minute session was 137. This is within the recommended aerobic target range for elite athletes, and equivalent to the average target heart rate suggested for training of competitive professional cyclists.⁽¹¹⁾

Skills also important

What about skill? As with any activity that requires talent, not just anyone can excel at competitive ballroom dancing. Top couples make it look easy, but the reality is very different. After all, what sport doesn't look easy by those who do

it well? Competitive ballroom dancers train for many hours each week. It typically takes several years of intense training to arrive at the top “championship” level where they begin to fight for recognition as provincial, national, and world champions. Training requires both group and costly private instruction to develop the fine points of foot and leg action, connection between partners, weight transfer, and choreography.

Discipline and team work are also necessary components of DanceSport. Competition dancing is essentially a team sport. The team may be a single couple or comprise up to 16 members in a formation team competition. The discipline of 16 competitors performing up to 13 changes of dance tempi while constantly coordinating their floor positions with other team members far exceeds that of many other team sports.



BC's Michael Duong & Peony Yao



BC's Zillion Wong & Sarah Liang



BC's Valeriy Chirkov & Maryana Dudchenko

Planning for an Olympic future

A survey conducted by DanceSport UK asked the question: "Should competitive dancing be an Olympic event?" 10,012 people took part in the survey with the following results: Yes: 9906 votes (98.95%), No: 93 votes (0.92%) Not sure: 13 votes (0.13%). While the survey results are not scientific, they reveal that nearly 99% of ballroom dancers understand the intense physical qualities of this activity.

On September 4, 1997, The International Olympic Committee (IOC) granted full recognition to the International DanceSport Federation (IDSF). Actions to obtain IOC acceptance of DanceSport as a Program Sport are currently underway. DanceSport has joined 12 other recognized sports which are currently waiting to be admitted to the official roster of the Olympic Games medal sports. There are currently 86 national federations from five continents within the IDSF, of which 63 have been recognized by their respective national Olympic associations.

An estimated 5.4 million registered DanceSport athletes exist worldwide. Canadian athletes are governed by the Canadian Amateur DanceSport Association (CADA), the national body reporting to the IDSF. CADA is managed by five regions within Canada, of which DanceSport BC governs DanceSport activities in British Columbia. These organizational bodies have worked together for many years to develop rules, sports guidelines, structures for governance of athletes, and a sophisticated dress code.

Structured for stamina

DanceSport competitions utilize rounds of events to narrow down the number of competing athletes until only the best remain to be marked by judges. The elimination rounds, which contain four or five dances at the higher skill levels, are danced in heats with up to 13 couples on the floor at once. Each round reduces the number of couples by approximately half, until only 6-7 couples remain. These couples then dance the final round, where they are placed

against each other. A mathematical analysis of these final markings eventually decides the winners. The whole event often takes several rounds from start to finish. This requires stamina.

Given the physical exertion involved in a single two-minute dance, imagine having five of those dances in a row, then multiplied several times in the course of a day, culminating in the final and most important round at the very end. For Ten Dance couples, this same sequence is repeated for another five dances.

DanceSport is a stamina-oriented, physically demanding sport with Olympic potential in the near future. It deserves the same respect in terms of government support and educational credits given to other Olympic-recognized sports. Making it even more deserving are the long-term benefits offered to a wide cross-section of our society.

Long term benefits

The benefits of active involvement in DanceSport extend well beyond the individual. The entire culture benefits when people, and especially youth, are involved in healthy, family-friendly, goal-oriented extracurricular activities. These benefits are compounded when those activities are physical in nature.

Wide variety of ages supported

Unlike most other sports, DanceSport covers all age groups, with training and competition for people from very young children not yet old enough for school to those in their senior years. The IDSF has structured a sophisticated category of age ranges to encourage fair competition for all age groups, with world ranking tournaments held in many countries for children, adults, and older dancers. These age levels include Juvenile (9-11 years old), Junior (12-15 years), Youth (16-18) and Adult (16+). The IDSF has also defined 35+ as “Senior 1” and 45+ as “Senior II” to encourage active lifestyles and competition support for more mature members of the world population. DanceSport enjoys many younger athletes as well as those 35+ whose children have reached the age of independence, with gaps in the initial child-rearing years due to athletes setting aside the competition floor so they can take that time and money to raise children.



A typical children's ballroom training class, at Broadway Ballroom in Vancouver. Children learn mutual gender respect and other values besides skills related to athleticism.

Very few sports enjoy such a vast assortment of ages. This is especially valuable considering the increasing percentage of our population which are entering the senior age bracket. Statistics Canada reports that the percentage of seniors in Canada reached 13.2% in 2005, a total of 4.2 million people. The department projects that percentage to almost double by 2036, with nearly one in four being 65 or older.⁽¹²⁾

As the population ages, health care costs will be critical factors. Supporting an active lifestyle through involvement in DanceSport leads to less financial burden and many other long-term benefits for future generations.

Some of the community benefits provided by DanceSport include:

- ✓ **Gender respect through partnership.** Involvement in partner dancing teaches young people to interact with members of the opposite gender in a respectful, healthy, constructive way to accomplish common goals. This builds mutual respect with long-term value. DanceSport is entirely gender neutral, the only sport with 100% gender parity.

- ✓ **Social interaction.** Competitive ballroom dancing has a social aspect as well that encourages goal-oriented competition in a friendly, non-threatening environment.
- ✓ **Diversity.** DanceSport is culturally and ethnically diverse, helping to foster increased interaction with and understanding of others regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation.
- ✓ **Reduced health care costs.** Dancers are healthier than sedentary individuals, reducing the burden on our health care system. GPI Atlantic commissioned a series of reports between 2000 and 2001 that estimated the direct and indirect costs of obesity in individual provinces. These reports estimated that obesity alone was costing British Columbia as much as \$780 million per year in indirect health care costs, with the direct costs representing 4.5% of the province's annual health care budget.⁽¹³⁾
- ✓ **Reduction in chronic disease risk.** These include hypertension, type 2 diabetes, high blood lipids, cardiovascular disease, and obesity. Even among children and adolescents, physical activity can prevent or delay the development of hypertension and can reduce blood pressure in those young people who already have hypertension (Physical Activity, 1996);
- ✓ **Increase in bone density.** This is especially important for girls, as 40% of adult women in BC develop osteoarthritis by age 70, largely as a result of insufficient physical activity. The Journal of Rheumatology reported that the overall prevalence of osteoarthritis in 2001 was 12.6% in women overall, higher than men in all age groups. By age 70-74 years, about one-third of men and 40% of women had the disease.⁽¹⁴⁾
- ✓ **Improved mental health.** DanceSport brings with it a reduction of anxiety, improvement in body image and mood, as well as increased self confidence and assertiveness.
- ✓ **Promotion of weight control through caloric expenditure.** This benefit is of particular importance to children, who are experiencing the same epidemic of overweight and obesity as adults.

Ballroom dancing found to reduce dementia

The Einstein Aging Study, summarized in the June 19, 2003 New England Journal of Medicine indicates that ballroom dancing helps prevent dementia.⁽¹⁵⁾

In the study, a group of 469 men and women were studied between the years 1980 and 2001. The researchers found that people who took part in intellectually stimulating hobbies such as reading, playing board games or instruments demonstrated a reduced risk of dementia. The researchers found no significant association between physical activities and the risk of dementia, except for ballroom dancing. A significant 76% risk reduction from frequent participation in ballroom dancing was the highest score of all hobbies and physical activities measured in the study.

Dr. Joe Verghese, assistant professor of neurology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University, New York, offered the theory that the requirements of ballroom dancing: remembering the steps, moving in precise time to the music and adapting to the movements of one's partner – are mentally demanding exercises. Therefore ballroom dancing offers both physical and mental stimulation.

Dr. Susanne Sorensen, head of research at the Alzheimer's Society, said "this research strengthens the use-it-or-lose-it school of thought which states that complex brain activity can build up a brain reserve that may protect people from Alzheimer's disease in later life." She warned that "people also need to remain physically active and that this research should not be taken as a recommendation to concentrate on cerebral exercise only."

DanceSport in the educational system

In Europe and Russia, many countries include ballroom dance training in their educational system. The sport is not only part of the physical education program, but also used for its benefits in developing posture, character, respect for the opposite gender, and healthy social interaction. As a result of this history of dance in schools, European and Russian youth are well ahead of North Americans in DanceSport competition.

An examination of current participation statistics demonstrates the results: Germany, with a population 2.5 times that of Canada, hosts 88 times as many DanceSport competitions — about 3,000 each year compared to 34 in Canada. In Russia, there are over 10,000 registered DanceSport athletes in the city of Moscow alone.

University dance clubs in BC

The University of BC Dance Club has introduced thousands of students to ballroom dancing since 1949. Membership has reached as many as 2,000 students. The club has been foundational in creating a positive climate for competitive ballroom dancing in this province. The UBC Dance Club enjoys a positive relationship with DanceSport BC and with the professional dance community. A number of professionals have come through the program. The club also hosts an annual competition, the UBC Gala Ball, each spring, now in its 48th year.



Simon Fraser University recently began a dance club as well, formed by competitive ballroom dancers. Like the UBC Dance Club, the SFU program brings in professional teachers to lead classes as well as hosting fun events throughout the year to encourage participation in the physical activities and other benefits related to partnership dancing.

Starting at an early age essential

However, it is far more effective for dance programs to begin in the elementary school system rather than waiting until high school. In Europe this is commonplace. Many North American schools still teach square dancing when there is any dance program at all, a form of dance which has very few opportunities for actual practice anywhere in Canada. In contrast, ballroom dancing can be enjoyed in large cities and small communities across the country. In Vancouver alone, people can go dancing any night of the week. Cities such as Nelson and Kelowna have organized ballroom groups that arrange dance parties and lessons for all ages in a family-friendly community spirit.

What is needed most of all is an organized program to introduce young children to ballroom dancing at an early age. They learn to develop such skills as mutual gender respect, partnership, poise and balance as well as the benefits of physical activity. In addition, they improve the self-image and self confidence of students involved in these programs.

Pilot programs have already been initialized in several places across North America to introduce ballroom dancing into the public school system. These programs introduce children to ballroom dancing at the beginner level as part of a physical education program. They also provide opportunities for schools to engage in casual, non-threatening competition to include goal setting, team spirit and disciplinary efforts into the mix.

Dancing Classrooms program

The first such North American program was started by dance teacher Pierre Dulaine in New York City. Director of the American Ballroom Theater's (ABrT) dance program, Dulaine took dancing out of the studio and into the public educational system with his community outreach program "Dancing Classrooms." The result of his effort is featured in the hit documentary, "Mad Hot Ballroom." Dulaine's story was the inspiration behind the Antonio Banderas film, "Take the Lead." Now in more than sixty NYC schools, "Dancing Classrooms" helps over 7,500 elementary school children gain social awareness, confidence, and self esteem — crucial life skills as they move into young adulthood.

The Dulaine Method is roughly based on two of the most thorough and successful educational methods that help children acquire skills they need to become successful adults: The Montessori Method and the Suzuki Method. Dancing Classrooms possesses the same ingredients that make these methods successful: a clear and compelling philosophy with a rigorous and systematic training model that dramatically coincides with the developmental need within 10-11 year old children to reinforce their social skills just prior to the onset of puberty. Dancing Classrooms is now being replicated throughout the US and Canada. The program has expanded to many regions throughout the USA and Canada, including California, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Toronto and Texas.

Britain's Essentially Dance program

A school-oriented physical education program with the same objectives has recently been launched in Great Britain. Called "Essentially Dance," the program is currently being piloted in 30 schools across England - in Darwen near Blackburn, Salford, Rotherham, Bromley in south London and Falmer near Brighton. Following evaluation of these pilots by the University of Roehampton, the program will be rolled out across the country in summer 2009, in preparation for the new school year in September.⁽¹⁶⁾

BC pilot program

A program on Vancouver Island introduced ballroom dancing into a number of schools from Victoria to Nanaimo. The students involved in the program then participated in an inter-school competition at the Dance Pacifica DanceSport competition which took place at Saanich Commonwealth Place on June 26, 2008.

DanceSport BC seeks provincial support to build a dance program into the educational system in the province.

Initiatives by DanceSport BC

A number of initiatives have been organized by DanceSport BC to encourage public involvement in ballroom dancing with the goal of promoting a healthy lifestyle through dance.

Robson Square Summertime Dance Series

Robson Square Summertime Dance Series is an outdoor event that provides the opportunity to dance in a free, family-friendly social environment in the heart of the city. Held regularly since 1979, the program allows the public to view and engage in public ballroom dancing, typically held on Friday nights at the Robson Square complex in the centre of downtown Vancouver. The event brings about 11,000 participants annually. It is organized entirely by volunteers, including dance teachers who volunteer their time to teach a dance lesson at each Robson Square session. Dance performances allow DanceSport BC athletes to showcase their skills, and most of the evening is dedicated to allowing the public to enjoy a free night of ballroom dancing in a spectacular setting.

SnowBall Classic

DanceSport BC organizes an international showcase DanceSport competition each winter called the SnowBall Classic. Featuring world-class athletes from countries around the world, this highlight event attracts some 1,500 spectators annually and has gained an international reputation as one of the best competitions in the world. The 2010 SnowBall Classic, which will take place January 22-24, 2010 at the Hyatt Regency Vancouver, will also host the IDSF World Cup Latin competition, which is restricted to the top couple from each IDSF national association. Taking place just two weeks before the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver, the event is expected to feature couples from more than 30 countries.

Prestazione Performance Program

DanceSport BC is planning a community-based program of regular reduced-scale DanceSport competitions held in schools and community centres throughout the lower mainland. By allowing the public to experience first-hand the excitement and athletic qualities of DanceSport at extremely low cost, the goal is to increase awareness, interest and understanding of the sports elements of ballroom dancing competitions. These events provide new audiences for DanceSport BC athletes to develop their public performance skills.



Pierre Dulaine, right, who pioneered the Dancing Classrooms program



SnowBall Classic brings the world's best couples to Vancouver. Above: 2009 IDSF Latin champions Timo Kulczak & Motshegetsi Mabuse, representing Germany.



DanceSport includes all ages, from young children to senior age categories. Above: BC's Adult 35+ Standard champions George Lindholm & Deborah Wong.

School Program

DanceSport BC is planning a school-based program structured around those already developed by American Ballroom Theater and Britain's Essentially Dance. The program is still in the initial planning stages.

Wheelchair DanceSport

The IDSF has been pioneering the evolution of Wheelchair DanceSport. The International DanceSport Federation (IDSF) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) entered into a formal cooperation agreement on 14 October 2008. Under the terms of this agreement, the two bodies pledge to jointly develop and promote Wheelchair DanceSport, and to work towards establishing a single international governing body for DanceSport, including Wheelchair. World Championships in Wheelchair DanceSport are currently held under the direct authority of the IPC and conducted to modified IDSF Rules. SnowBall Classic has included Wheelchair DanceSport demonstration events on several occasions and is planning to include actual competition as soon as economically and logistically viable.

Cost factors

Easy to begin

Compared to other sports, DanceSport is exceptionally affordable to start.

There is no need for personal equipment of any kind, with the possible exception of dance shoes.

Facility requirements amount to little more than a reasonably sized smooth floor surface.

Training for beginner level involvement is typically done through group classes which are equivalent in cost to fees for swimming lessons or initial training for many other sports. Practice time is remarkably affordable, with some ballrooms in the lower mainland charging as little as \$2 for an entire day of practice. Practice opportunities abound, as compared to the challenge of getting access to ice rinks or other facilities.

Moderate intermediate costs

When DanceSport athletes begin to get serious about their involvement in the sport, they seek out private lessons for more refined training and choreography. These costs are not unlike those encountered in other sports. At the same time, the initial stages of competition are structured to minimize additional expense. Costumes are not even permitted in the first three levels of competitive DanceSport, to reduce the burden of such expenses on young couples getting started in the sport.

As skills increase, DanceSport athletes eventually require costumes for competition at higher skill levels. These investments run into thousands of dollars. Like other sports, children, parents, coaches and other support groups engage in fund-raising activities to generate the necessary funds.

Travel costs

One of the biggest cost factors for athletes of all ages is the need to travel. Unlike most sports, the opportunities for competition in BC are extremely limited for DanceSport. Only 6-8 competitions are held in the province annually, while countries such as Germany will have 3,000 competitions in a typical year. In the month of February 2009, some 16 IDSF competitions were held around the world, 12 of them taking place within a radius of just 1,000 km. In Canada, two IDSF competitions the same month were more than 3,000 km apart. As the world's largest land mass, Canada's geographic scale creates significant challenges for travel. While European competitors can travel to distant events with a very small investment, Canadian athletes traveling to another province typically must spend some \$1200-1500 in travel costs for each competition. This investment is multiplied when they travel overseas. Athletes in Ontario or Quebec can not only enjoy many competitions in their own regions, but these provinces also have access to dozens of other competitions in the US northeast, many of them within driving distance. Atlantic Canada and BC are isolated geographically, making travel much more difficult. This creates huge financial challenges, and significantly limits the exposure of BC athletes. The result of these limited opportunities is a reduced impact on the world stage, because only through competition can any athlete learn to excel in their sport.

DanceSport BC would like to see incentives from the BC government to help offset these financial issues and give greater opportunity to athletes from our province as they seek exposure on the world stage.

Conclusion

Obesity rates are steadily increasing, partly the result of decreases in physical activity levels. Unless something is done to change this trend, health care costs and issues will rise dramatically as a result.

Competitive ballroom dancing is a vigorous physical activity which has been defined as a legitimate sport by the Olympic Commission, recognized by the IOC, and is being considered as a medal sport for the summer Olympics.

Ballroom dancing is a sport with 100% gender parity that costs little to start, involves people of all ages, and brings with it a host of societal benefits including social diversity.

School credits for DanceSport athletes

It is essential that DanceSport athletes in British Columbia receive the encouragement, recognition and support from both the provincial government level and the educational system to continue advancing their progress in the sport. We urge school boards and the BC Ministry of Education to require all schools to recognize involvement in extracurricular DanceSport as a valid physical education credit.

Support for classroom programs

Furthermore, we encourage schools to include beginner ballroom dance training into the educational curriculum as part of the physical education program. DanceSport BC is willing to work with the Ministry of Education to organize training and a healthy support environment for such a program.

Financial initiatives needed to support our athletes

Finally, we urge the provincial government to find ways to encourage athletes with additional initiatives to offset the high cost of travel for BC athletes involved in the sport. These could take the form of tax-based incentives for individuals or businesses that support athletes, or they might take the form of direct funding initiatives. We are willing to engage in discussions to consider what form these incentives might take.

Submitted by the Board of Directors of DanceSport BC

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