



ROLE MODEL

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Sport has always been a great platform for role models, due to the widespread appeal of sporting disciplines. The sad thing is that the role models we are often presented with aren't necessarily that fit for the job! It seems that role models are nominated based on media coverage and potential for financial sponsorship. With such things as these as the key defining factors, the results we are presented with seem way off the mark.

How did you first get involved in parkour?

It was an afternoon in the summer of 1998. I was practising Viet Vo Dao and break dance back then, but was still looking for something that would bring more through a physical activity.

A friend of mine (Ken Mardaye) thought I'd love it and brought me a home-made video tape of raw footage of David Belle and the Yamakasi. It instantaneously grabbed all my attention and touched my soul. I knew I wanted to practise this.

Ken managed to get a meeting the same day with David who was training in Lisses that day. We met at the famous gym staircase. I told him I wanted to train in this discipline and I wanted to be serious about it. He said he didn't teach people and had too much to do with his own training already, but, if I was able to follow

him and catch up with the intensity of training he would allow me to join him.

So I began and just followed the training I was given with no complaints or discussion. I was practising between 12-18 hours a day at this time - everyday non-stop for about 3 years without break.

You have been an inspiration to many thousands of practitioners around the world, following the documentary made about you called 'Le Singe Est De Retour'. Who has inspired and continues to inspire you today?

Obviously my first inspiration in parkour was David. He was my reference, my mentor. I was amazed by his level of strength and skills. He was able to do extraordinary things with his body in his environment. He had this incredible confidence when he was moving. He made everything look easy, effortless and he was very confident in his abilities when it came to doing jumps and movements. I was inspired by his passion for his art.

My second biggest inspiration was the day I first had the chance to meet and train with Williams Belle. It was in the Sarcelles forest. I was recovering from my injury, it was a difficult period for me, and I was barely able to walk properly.

So, that day I was in poor shape, training in this forest where my girlfriend Katty Belle brought me. We found Williams,

training and teaching with a group of kids and family. He looked very strong and healthy.

We started doing sets of muscle-ups until we all got tired, except Williams who was incredibly strong and was wearing a 10 kg weight jacket while repeating the same amount of reps as I was - AND he was less tired!

At the end, for my last few sets I had difficulty finishing my reps, but I did, because I wanted to finish them all and show Williams I've got some spirit too. I was in a dual mode in a way and was thinking I couldn't look weak. I had a lot of ego. But Williams ended this very quickly with a simple act. While I was trying very hard to do my last muscle-up, shouting loudly with all my heart in the forest, he came, looked at me and said, "Aller Stephane!" He was encouraging me! He helped, lifted me up slightly, just a little bit in order for me to finish my muscle-up.

He then looked at me again, calm, peaceful and said, "Aller Stephane, encore une!" And he encouraged me with words again, so I finished each set properly. He helped me at the end of each set, with calmness, serenity and heart. He knew I was injured, that mentally, I was going through a hard time, so he just helped me. This action of helping me with an open heart and smile touched me a lot and I will



always remember this moment.

We were training hard that day, but he made it smooth and tranquil because of the love he shared and this peaceful attitude. So I realised that one can be very strong, training very hard and can still be very calm, peaceful and kind at the same time - in harmony.

People describe parkour as having a profound underlying ethos and set of principles. What are they and what do they mean to you?

It's more than a physical activity. Parkour has some underlying ethos and values such as:

- ➔ Being strong to be useful: helping others. Making all the people around you benefit from the fact that you get stronger and more confident.
- ➔ Respect for the people and our environment. We live together on the same home, called 'Earth'. We're all connected and influence each other all the time. We must be aware of this and measure the consequences of our actions when we train outside in front of people.
- ➔ Self improvement. To me, this is the most important and will enable you to be useful and beneficial for others. Your own growth and development is essential if you

want to then share what you have learnt.

It is important to be able to see your own identity and way clearly. Having inspiration is good to help you and guide you to achieve your own journey but you need to make sure you're walking on your own path and not copying someone else.

Why did parkour appeal to you over other arts/sports?

The freedom you have in being able to practise where you want, when you want, just using your imagination, your body and mind. You basically need nothing but the will to move and to train parkour. No equipment, no rigid concepts or specific time to go out etc - just yourself and your environment. I like this simplicity, this honest and direct connection with the environment/obstacles. It is a very natural and healthy activity. Another reason why parkour appealed to me more than other sports was that it wasn't established or set as a recognised activity when I started. It was raw. I was feeling like I was doing something unique that only a few people in Lisses were doing. At this time I needed to explore new paths and find myself through something completely new and fresh. Unconventional, like I was undergoing my own inner revolution.

How would you like to see parkour progress from here and how do you see your own involvement in that?

I hope parkour will keep growing all over the world and people who want will get a chance to experience it, because I believe parkour can help people in their lives.

My role in that is to offer an available method of training for people to learn safely. I want to give them some guidance and share some of my experience if they want it; make sure people see and understand that there's more to parkour than a jump.

They should learn that beyond the physicality of it, there's a whole process before a jump. Ask yourself questions and try to understand the reasons why you undertake the action of jumping, taking risks, etc. This is where you will understand more about yourself and where parkour becomes a philosophy/lifestyle.

Is it important for there to be strong role models in the world of parkour?

I think it is important for each practitioner to become a role model within his parkour community, and for friends and family. We're all responsible for the present and future of our art/discipline, so the more of us who act responsibly and show strong values and ethos, the better. Again, in the end what we want is to have all of us being independent and strong individuals who are unique - not relying only on someone else's strength or confidence.

What advice would you give to someone wanting to take up parkour today?

I would encourage someone who wants to take up parkour to reflect on his motivations to start training. What are the reasons, why does he/she want to train in parkour? What is he/she looking for? And why?

And from a practical point of view, I'd tell him/her to start training gradually, one step at the time, one jump at the time. Take the time to build up the foundations and a strong body. They should listen to their heart and try to follow their own way. Make sure you're doing what is good for you, not copying someone's way of moving. Parkour is about discovering and exploring both yourself and your environment. **S**

