ROLE MODEL

STEFHANE VIGROUX

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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 Manday) 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.

I was inspired by his passion for his art. His second biggest inspiration was the way 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 planet, called Earth. We’re all connected and influence each other all the time.
- 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 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.

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

The freedom you have in being able to practice 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 undertaking my own inner revolution.

The Yamakasi 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, “Aler 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, calmly, peaceful and said, “Aler 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 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!

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How would you like to see parkour progress 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 develop. 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 offer 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 their parkour community, and for friends and family. We, as the leader of our culture 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.