

Frisbee whiz sings sport's praises

Former world champion introduces children to healthy activity

BY TRACY CARR
for The Daily Gleaner

Children in elementary schools throughout Fredericton are learning to have a ball — with a Frisbee.

Gary Auerbach, the 1995 world freestyle Frisbee champion, has been visiting schools in the city and surrounding areas with his Frisbee sessions. He developed these sessions to introduce kids to Frisbee games in the hopes they'll grow to love the sport and develop lifelong skills in throwing, catching and handling the plastic disc.

"(They're) to give young people an activity they can do for the rest of their lives and to encourage them to be active for the rest of their lives," he said.

The sessions take the form of small assemblies, such as one at Royal Road Elementary School recently, where Auerbach gives a sample of his skills to show how challenging the sport can be.

In front of the small crowd sitting at his feet, Auerbach demonstrates "spinning" activities with a Frisbee. He spins the Frisbee on the tip of one finger, and then suddenly he's a whirl of activity, tossing the disc over his head, under one leg, and spinning before snatching the Frisbee out of the air.

A chorus of gasps and noises of approval rise from his audience and he continues with a series of different manoeuvres, each one more difficult than the next, as the students grow more spellbound.

Then it's the students' turn. Auerbach separates them into six groups and has the members of each group line up behind a string of small pylons. He explains what he wants them to do, gives the signal and suddenly the gym is a frenzy of activity as kids race each other across the gym, grab a Frisbee off the floor, pass it around their body five times and speed back to their team.

Once the relay is over, Auerbach has two questions.

"Which team thinks they won?"

The members of three or four of the teams raise their hands.

"Which team had the most fun?"

All the kids raise their hands.

"The team that had the most fun wins," he said, and the kids cheer in agreement.

Then it's time for more relay races, each one involving slightly tougher skills, such as tossing the disc into the air, then clapping hands.

They put the Frisbee behind their backs, under one leg, under the other leg, then all together. Many kids drop their Frisbees. Others fall down. They all have a blast.

Auerbach said he emphasizes fun and exercise during the sessions.

"I don't want them to focus on who's winning," he said. "They're all watching each other learning a new skill. Not all kids are athletic, but none of them are failing in these activities. So they're seeing each other being successful."

Auerbach began leading spinning bees in Canada, the United States and Europe after he won the world championship in 1995 because he wanted kids to rediscover the sport.



— THE DAILY GLEANER/STEPHEN MACGILLIVRAY PHOTO

FLYING MESSAGE: Former Frisbee champion Gary Auerbach displays his talents to the kids at the Royal Road Elementary School.