

Power of sports

Irishman Jason Moriarty tells **Aneeta Sundararaj** that sports can help teenagers cope with stress and realise their full potential

ACATERPILLAR will eat until it becomes plump and long. One day, it'll stop eating, hang upside down from a twig or leaf and moult into a chrysalis.

Within that protective casing, the caterpillar radically transforms and eventually emerges as a butterfly. If you disturb the chrysalis in the guise of 'helping' the caterpillar, you'll damage its transformation and the butterfly may never fly.

This is the analogy that Jason Moriarty uses when describing his observations of what parents today are doing to their children. The co-founder of Yuber Sports, the leading experts in leadership and character development for youths through sports, says: "Parents are so afraid to let their child fail. If children are not getting As in everything, they're sent to tuition classes. So many kids today would rather not try because they may fail. Like helping that caterpillar open up its shell, these parents doom their children to walk and never fly. Children should be allowed to fail; sports is all about failing."

The 43-year-old panics when asked to describe, in one sentence, what he does. He exclaims: "Oh dear, I'm Irish. If we have to say anything in one sentence, we get scared."

Indeed, his words flow as he explains he's a youth exercise specialist who believes that teenagers will be able to cope with stress and realise their full potential through a combination of mental conditioning and sports coaching.

This is why he'll be a lead trainer at Camp Valour (www.yubersports.asia), a five-day sports leadership camp where kids aged 13-18 will take part in activities to stimulate their mind and agility. Central to this is the focus on exercise.

MAD AND PASSIONATE

Before going on to explain just why exercise will be the focus in the programme, the lively Irishman shares a little of his history.

He says: "I'm married with cats. We got one and I said no more. But we compromised and my wife got two more. I'm the fourth cat."

He cocks his head to one side and adds: "Actually, come to think of it, we're all fed at the same time."

The son of a miner, Jason has just returned from Bangkok where he met with herbalists and naturalists to learn about the properties of various



Hurling is a game that requires you to be aggressive but controlled at the same time.

PICTURES BY NURUL SYAZANA ROSE RAZMAN

herbs there. A man with a "life-long need to learn", he's fascinated with the method of crop rotation practised in Thailand. He recognises the similarities with how farming is carried out in his hometown outside Kilkenny, Ireland.

The most unique game that this mad and passionate sportsman has played is hurling. This outdoor team game is considered the world's fastest field sport and shares many features with football and hockey. Players use a wooden stick called a hurley to hit a small ball between the opponent's goalposts and collect as many points as possible.

"Other babies got rattles and dummies; my father gave me a stick and a ball," says Jason. "My uncles played for rival teams — Tipperary and Kilkenny. It may look very violent, but it's a game where you have to be very aggressive, yet controlled."

The aggression in hurling, Jason says, is similar to the kind exhibited by the *mat rempit*. However, there is a huge difference. He says: "It's no mean feat what they do. They (*mat rempit*) are very aggressive but their aggression is misdirected. That's how we end up with social problems."

Declaring that he's "bloody lucky" to end up living in Malaysia, he says he left home once he finished basic schooling, to work and study in England.

"I'd always wanted something better. I'm the first in my family to go to university," he says. The business and finance graduate went on to pursue gymnasium management before becoming a personal trainer.

EXERCISE ENHANCES

All his experiences have led Jason to conclude that the reason we should exercise is to enhance the quality of life; exercise shouldn't be the life. He tells the story of a desperate 30-something man who came to seek his help.

"He was beyond morbidly obese. What I chose to focus on was what he was able to do and build on that, not give him stuff he couldn't do. For example, he could barely walk 10 steps in the beginning. But we set a goal for him to run five km in 18 months. He did it in 12. He came to me later to say I helped changed his life. He's even got a girlfriend now," he says, choking a little as he remembers how he was instrumental in transforming a client's life.

Taking a deep breath, Jason adds that he sees some of the same attitude that children show in many adults. "They'll say, 'I can't'. I ask them, 'How do you know you can't if you haven't tried?'"

His aim is to change negative thoughts. He says goals have to be specific, measurable and realistic. He chooses to focus on the young now, but it hasn't always been so.

"When I started, kids were terrifying. They moved fast and didn't listen," he admits. Still, when

he learnt that he needed to focus on their kinaesthetic abilities rather than auditory or visual ones, he found the task of helping them much easier.

NO PERFECT DIET

"When you get the mindset right, then the physical is easy," says Jason. "For example, I give people food hacks and teach them to eat healthy for their body and their lifestyle. This is one of my favourites as people

immediately stop suffering and start enjoying life. The bonus is that they're eating healthier."

The basis upon which he creates these food hacks is his belief that nutrition is not low fat, low calorie or being hungry and feeling deprived. It's nourishing your body with real, whole foods so that you're consistently satisfied and energised to live life to the fullest.

To emphasise his point, he says: "The last time I looked, there were over 30,000 registered diets in the US alone. So trust me when I say there's no such thing as the perfect diet. Stop driving yourself crazy looking for it."

Instead, he says that people need to learn to focus on something more positive. For instance, substitute unhealthy foods for healthy ones. "Get educated on what you're putting in your body. If you decide you want to be healthy and to live a long productive life, ask yourself the following question with every bite you take: 'Should I put this in my body?'"

What he also hopes to see in the people he coaches is a marked improvement in their strength, resilience and willpower.

That said, Jason has a very different and somewhat personal take on each of these characteristics. He returns to his past and says that resilience is the ability of a person to rise from failure.

"I have dyslexia," he says. "But that didn't stop me. This was before we had tools to train children how to overcome this. But I knew I had a goal and that was to get to college."

Similarly, he worked in places as diverse as construction sites, an abattoir and a bar to pay the fees for his college education.

In the end, Jason's message is simple: "If you want something, work for it."

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Jason Moriarty

