



SPORTING TRENDS

PHOTO: MARK CHEONG, DIGS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES, LAND PADDLE SINGAPORE



Gurveen Kaur

You have heard of badminton, how about speedminton?

In the world of fitness crazes, where people come up with creative new ways of staying fit faster than you can say "aerial yoga" or "hot ballet", there are a few trends that are gaining traction.

Life!Weekend rounds up four of these new activities – underwater rugby, land paddling, speedminton and AcroYoga.

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Underwater rugby

Several sports have taken the plunge and gone underwater. Case in point: underwater spinning and underwater hockey. Now, one of the most challenging contact sports, rugby, also has a watery version.

Like its land counterpart, underwater rugby involves two teams of six trying to score a try on their opponent's side. The difference is: they are holding their breath and playing at a depth of between 3.5m and 5m of water, and the goal is a bucket cage fixed to the pool's floor.

Meanwhile, six other players on each team are swimming at the surface ready to take the plunge whenever their teammates need to come up for air.

Underwater, players can be tackled from any

direction, which can be disorientating for beginners. Because there is no verbal communication, teammates have to come up with alternative ways to work together, such as through sign language or following pre-established plans of attack.

Invented more than 50 years ago in Germany at a diving club, underwater rugby has spread worldwide. Engineer Khoo Chia How, 30, discovered the sport during his university studies in Australia seven years ago.

Last year, he founded the First Asian Team Underwater Rugby. It has grown to 45 men and women, aged between 20 and 55, who train every Saturday at the Queenstown Swimming Complex. Beginners can try playing the game, paying \$7 or \$9 for gear.

The team, coached by Mr Khoo, has competed internationally. Returning from the Pan Pacific Cup earlier this month in Brisbane, the male and female

teams emerged third and second respectively in the Nationals League.

Mr Khoo said: "This was our first tournament so the other teams thought we are this bunch of Asian jokers. But we surprised them."

Tertiary student Joyce Kwok, 22, who joined the team in late December, says: "It is totally unlike sports on land as you have to be aware of what is happening not just in front of you but above and below you too."

Unlike rugby, injuries are less common as the water acts as a cushion against attacks, notes entrepreneur Lim Wee Lit, 43, who is a team member.

"The all-direction element and holding one's breath underwater makes the sport all the more thrilling," he adds.

For more information, go to www.latuwr.com.