

Double Trouble: Partner Training

How would you like to increase the popularity of your classes? Do you also want to teach in an environment in which you and your students feel challenged and enthusiastic and share a great sense of accomplishment and belonging? The “Double Trouble” paired-training concept can help you achieve these goals. In this innovative workout, participants pair off and train together, often sharing the same piece of exercise equipment and raising each other’s motivation to new heights!

Making Lemonade Out of Lemons

When I started teaching more than 20 years ago, a fitness class meant only one thing: high-impact aerobics. Over the years, our industry has evolved to include many new formats that incorporate a variety of diverse equipment. In a desire to offer innovative programming, fitness managers have purchased steps, slides, tubing, bars, minitrampolines, stability balls, balance/strength equipment and all types of weights. Many fitness facilities are hard-pressed to find enough storage space for an ever-changing inventory that requires continual maintenance and replacement. Often, this situation leads to equipment shortages.

For me, pairing up participants began as a survival tactic. I was scheduled to teach a new sculpting class at a club that didn’t have sufficient equipment for each participant. Here’s what I had to work with: a number of fitness bars (of varying weights), stability balls for half the class, some tubing (different

brands and varying resistances) and a decent assortment of free weights. My challenge was to overcome serious equipment shortages and still keep my class motivating, safe and effective.

I began by dividing the class in two and assigning a different piece of equipment to each group. The idea was to have everyone work the same muscle groups, even though each group would be doing exercises tailored to its respective equipment. For example, one half of the class would use tubing, while the other used free weights. Both would perform a row, a biceps curl and a lateral raise, but the setup and technique would be different. I would double- or triple-set each segment and then have each group leave everything behind and switch sides in the room. Transitions included a variety of drills, such as lunges, push-ups, squats, cardio intervals, stretches and balance work. These transitions afforded the students a welcome recovery from some of the harder sets.

I also found that sometimes I wanted to move quickly to the next exercise. I started teaming up individuals and having each pair share a variety of props. This way, participants could easily switch from one piece of equipment to another with very little downtime. Each participant would do separate exercises with his or her own apparatus, and then partners would switch when a set was over. This was a great way to work opposing muscles. For example, one partner would do a biceps curl using a fitness bar, while the other would do a triceps kickback using tubing. Although they were working separately, members

of each pair began to work as teammates, encouraging each other and watching for breaks in form.

The Evolution of Double Trouble

This experience spawned the concept now called “Double Trouble.” The first exercise I created in which each pair actually shared a single piece of equipment was a variation on the stability ball push-up. In this variation, which I called “Push Me/Pull You,” I had the pairs face each other and hold a ball between them. They would alternate between pushing and resisting the other’s push, creating a kind of standing push-up.

To my surprise and delight, I found that people worked harder and enjoyed themselves more than I expected. The class “fun factor” went up, and some students who had been working out side by side for years shared names and motivation for the first time. My students immediately embraced this type of direct interaction, and I found myself looking for additional exercises that would offer the same benefits.

Although my classes still consisted primarily of individuals working together on different pieces of apparatus, I began mixing in these new shared-equipment sets. Some early exercises included physical contact between partners, but it became obvious that most people did not feel comfortable touching each other. In the later exercises I created, I made sure that the equipment doubled as a buffer zone between people.

I then began team-teaching a circuit

class with Patrick Goudeau at the Sports Club/Irvine in California. One day, Patrick suggested we use the stability ball as a punching bag, with two people alternating as the puncher and the ball holder. Our class loved it, and I told Patrick about the shared-equipment exercises I had already incorporated into my other classes. We worked together creatively, experimenting with core stability, balance, coordination, strength, agility and cardio intervals. We tried to think outside the box, without compromising the safety or effectiveness of the exercises. To make things even more exciting, we added layers of intensity and interesting transitions. We thought this partner concept would have a broad appeal, and that's how "Double Trouble" was born.

The Benefits for Participants

Working out in a partner format yields several benefits for participants:

- Instead of working alone using a piece of equipment, "Double Trouble" students get the added resistance of a partner working against them.
- Working with a partner is fun and builds camaraderie.
- Pairing up makes participants feel they're part of a group, boosting adherence.
- Sharing equipment with a partner can increase coordination.
- Partnering fosters healthy competition, which usually causes people to work a little harder.
- Newcomers learn more quickly when partnered with seasoned veterans.
- Experienced students get the satisfaction of mentoring the rookies and assisting the instructor.

The Benefits for Instructors

While a single instructor can teach the "Double Trouble" concept, the format is especially successful when two instructors teach it. If both instructors, regardless of sex, style or experience,

work well together, their partnership truly enhances the class. Here's why:

- Things are livelier when two teachers feed off each other's energy.
- Form corrections are easier and more accurate when you have the benefit of two sets of eyes.
- Exercise demonstrations are quicker when one instructor isn't forced to show both parts of an exercise.
- Your teaching improves when you see how another instructor works, thinks and creates a class; this exposure broadens your repertoire of material and cuing.
- Each instructor can give the other constructive criticism and kudos for combinations well done.
- The mixture of styles and different music that two teachers bring to a class enhances the experience for everyone.

The "Double Trouble" Class

Creating an entire class based on the "Double Trouble" concept will take some preparation. For a one-hour class, be prepared to present three to four segments, plus a warm-up and a cool-down with stretching. The three or four segments should contain a variety of exercises. Here's a sample class outline:

- introduction
- warm-up
- training segments (3-4)
- cool-down/stretching

INTRODUCTION (2-5 MINUTES)

This is when you arrange your pairings. Either ask participants to find their own partners or pair people yourself according to their strength, experience, height, gender, etc. Tell participants what equipment they will use that day and discuss the exercises. Preview any new or particularly difficult moves.

WARM-UP (10-12 MINUTES)

Try to get partners working together with their equipment right off the bat.

We have found that using a stability ball or medicine ball works best during this segment of the workout. Begin with leg movements, making sure everyone is in sync before adding a ball exchange. Rolling, tossing, bouncing and passing are all great ways to incorporate a ball into the warm-up. You can use almost any combination of directional changes. Partners can move together in exactly the same way, they can move in opposite directions, or they can face each other. Include the ball exchange after participants have mastered the initial steps. As in any warm-up, you will need to include rhythmic and dynamic movements, as well as joint-limbering exercises. Never compromise effectiveness for "fluff without function."

Recommended Exercises: Have partners do grapevines right and left. Partners pass/bounce/roll the ball at the end of each grapevine.

TRAINING SEGMENTS

(35-40 MINUTES TOTAL)

Each training segment should consist of consecutive exercises that allow two people to use the chosen equipment efficiently. To make the segments effective, choose one or two pieces of equipment, and have participants do two to four exercises per set before changing position or equipment. Incorporate both upper- and lower-body exercises in each segment. Avoid complex exercises that take more than 15 to 30 seconds to preview or set up. Between segments, insert transitional exercises. Because many of these exercises—such as squats, lunges, push-ups, speed running, leg balances, hopping and plyometrics—can be performed individually, they give partners a break from each other. You can also use the transitions to switch partners.

Recommended Exercises:

SEGMENT 1: cardio drill; push me/pull you; legs.

SEGMENT 2: squat; triceps; pectoralis.

SEGMENT 3: row (various); deltoids; lunge combo; plié.

SEGMENT 4: biceps; abdominals; adductors; balance/stability.

COOL-DOWN/STRETCHING

(5-7 MINUTES)

Bring the intensity down slowly. Most of the exercises done during the cool-down portion of class are similar to those you would do at the end of any class. They include balance/stability moves, pliés, floor exercises, abdominals, etc. The only difference is that “Double Trouble” cool-downs employ partner work on any equipment the teams used in class.

Recommended Exercises: Partners stand on one leg while passing a stability ball back and forth; they stand back to back and pass the ball around both their bodies in a circular fashion, switching direction from time to time; or they do a series of lower- and upper-body stretches while holding a fitness bar vertically between them for support.

Class Challenges

While the “Double Trouble” concept is mostly a win-win situation for instructors and participants, challenges occasionally arise. First and foremost, instructors need to check their respective egos at the door when partnering up with another instructor. If class becomes a war zone of incompatible personalities or if ego and self-promotion take center stage, everyone will feel uncomfortable and success will be short-lived. Budgetary constraints may also preclude having two teachers and two microphones in one class.

Here are other challenges you may need to overcome when working with this concept:

CHALLENGE: A participant isn't comfortable working with a partner.

SOLUTION: Encourage the participant

to partner up with you or the other instructor. The exerciser should eventually become comfortable enough with the format to be paired back up with a fellow participant.

CHALLENGE: The many changes of equipment/positions/partners, along with the need to explain and demonstrate the next exercise, may lead to lapses between sets and kill the class's momentum.

SOLUTION: Explain the next new exercise while the class is finishing the current set.

CHALLENGE: One participant has trouble keeping up with a stronger partner.

SOLUTION: “Cut in” and finish out the set with the stronger participant while the fatigued one takes a break. On the next set, try to find a new, more compatible partner for each student.

CHALLENGE: It is harder to spot mistakes when partners are performing different exercises simultaneously than when everyone is doing the same thing. The pairs often set themselves up at differing angles to the front of the room, or they may be performing a traveling exercise.

SOLUTION: After successfully demonstrating the new exercise, circulate around the room to view the class better and correct breaks in form.

CHALLENGE: Since participants are often focusing on each other, it is harder to get the attention of the whole class or of a specific person/pair.

SOLUTION: To get the attention of an individual or a particular pair, call that person/pair by name or go directly to them. To get the entire class's attention, place additional emphasis on all commands.

CHALLENGE: Only one teacher is available to teach the class.

SOLUTION: No problem! After pairing

up the class, team up with the odd man out or the late arrival. Demonstrate exercises by grabbing a temporary partner; to keep things democratic, use different students for each demo.

Double Success

Once you've practiced and you feel comfortable with the shared-equipment concept, you have a great many options at your disposal. You can inject a few “Double Trouble” sets into your current choreography, spice up your existing schedule by developing an entirely new class or promote “Double Trouble” as a special event at your facility. There will be some extra work involved, but the big smiles on the faces of your students—and on your own face—will make it well worth the effort.

Aileen Sheron is an IDEA presenter and a continuing education provider for ACE and AFAA, with several videos to her credit. She teaches the “Double Trouble” concept at the Sports Club/Irvine in California. In her spare time (!), she is the president of Good Natured Products Inc., producers of KidSport® Nutrition Bars.

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