

APK Gets Real with Kerbie

Written by Paul Mederos

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John "Kerbie" Kerr from the United Kingdom is as original as it gets in the Parkour world. He's been around since the beginning days of Urban Freeflow and was one of the innovators in the group. His hardcore dedication to training, combined with the wild and outgoing personality of a strong lead singer has made him one of the more popular traceurs over the years. APK's Gabe Arnold recently caught up with him for an interview - Keep a eye out as APK is working with Kerbie to do Training Seminars in the US this spring and summer.

Interview By Gabe Arnold

Photos By Claudiu Voicu / www.claudiu.co.uk

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APK: If you don't mind, what's your full (real) name and where are you from? Also, where are you currently?

Kerbie: My name is Johnny Kerr but most people know me as Kerbie. Iâ´m from Surrey in England but I now live in Iceland.



APK: How long have you been practicing? How did you find out about Parkour/Freerunning?

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Kerbie: Ever since I could walk i've been running jumping and climbing, but I first heard of Parkour in 2002. My friends and I would play ninja games and replicate the Jackie Chan stunts but we had no direction. We saw a five minute segment on the Yamakasi in the t.v show 'Ripleys Believe It or Not' and managed to record it onto vhs. We then spent hours every day just copying the moves from that 5 minute segment. Though in the show, they called the sport Yamakasi and not parkour. This made it difficult for us to find information online because we kept spelling it as yamakaze on google.

One morning my next door neighbour at the time (Claudiu for those who know him in the scene) knocked on my door telling me that his friend at school had found out the name of the sport as parkour. He gave us a link to the le-parkour forums where I first met EZ, Asid and the saiyan clan.

After some appalling treatment by the french members on the boards, I began to look elsewhere, which was convenient because EZ had just registered a forum for his new business - Urban Freeflow.

APK: You were one of the original UF members; what was it like in the early days? How was it different from now? What's better or worse when you compare "early days" like 2002-2005 compared to today in 2010?

Kerbie: The early days will always hold a special feeling in my heart. After the treatment on the le-parkour forums we decided that we'd train together and learn all of the movements. We also gave the movements english names to make it more accessible to people that we'd train with in the UK. I wouldnt call it better or worse because there will always be ups and downs on any path you take in life, but it was nice to know that when someone became your friend back then, it wasnt so that they could be sponsored by your team or get a foot in the door into the stunt world. It was because we had a common passion and wanted to make genuine friends, I still speak to most of those people today.

Back then there were no politics, no one judging you by the way you moved, no arguments about what is/isn't parkour

Back then there were no politics, no one judging you by the way you moved, no arguements about what is/ isnt parkour. Back then, parkour had a different definition than the one that came about when Belle formed Pawa. Because no one was fighting over the sport it didnt matter what you called it, you were too busy doing it.

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Things have definitely changed now. I can't really put a finger on what the catalyst was but I have a few theories. I'm sure that they'll upset a few people and I'm not here to do that.

Right now the scene is in shambles in my opinion. I get people adding me on facebook every day just to try to get sponsored by UF and most of them are 5-18 year olds that have been training for less than a year. They just don't seem to understand the passion we had for moving, or the hard work we put into our journey. A lot of them just see cool videos on youtube and think that having a sponsor will give them a dream life. I think that today's generation are used to quick fixes but there are none in life. Dedication and hard work will always come up trumps to guess work and risk taking.

I don't think that we're blame free at all. It was very difficult being a 17 year old free runner one day and then being a spiritual/philosophical/athletic spokesman the next. It was never my intention to get fame nor fortune from Parkour, nor to be a leader. I just wanted to share what I love and to do a better job than the french guys on le-parkour that callously rejected us from the sport. In retrospect, there's a few things I have said that I shouldn't have said and a few blagged answers in interviews here and there when I was young and naive. But I have no regrets, without the past, I wouldn't be where I am today.

Actions speak louder than words but there will always be those empty pails that make a lot of noise.

But after we started working on t.v and being interviewed for newspapers a lot of negative people came into the scene. These were (and still are) people with incredibly low skill levels that feel that discussing semantics and splitting hairs will bring them closer to parkour. Just because you've read about the philosophy and can quote it on a message board doesn't mean that someone hasn't said it before or that we haven't heard it before.

The haters were relentless and looking for us to slip up at every opportunity. The people that screamed loudest about us selling out were always the people that were also quietly trying to turn parkour into full time jobs for themselves, they just didn't have the skill nor attitude to do it without trying to negatively contrast someone against themselves. Actions speak louder than words but there will always be those empty pails that make a lot of noise.

APK: What kind of training do you do today? Mainly technique work or physical conditioning?

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What does your typical workout or session look like?



Kerbie: I teach 7 days a week at the moment and take part in the warm up, conditioning and stretching with each class I do (which is almost 30 classes per week at the moment). Each class is an hour and a half long. We do stretching and then lots of games and playing with the younger classes. They don't do much conditioning as its not healthy for developing bodies. We just want to encourage them to explore movement and train them before that fear instinct kicks in. They also train fundamental techniques for Parkour and Free run.

The older classes do half hour of stretching and conditioning. It's a full body workout but kept fun and relevant to Parkour techniques. I cringe when I watch videos of classes online and I see potential traceurs in the streets just doing pushups and sit-ups. Those are exercises you can do at home with your own time, not something that a traceur/free runner should be teaching you.

We then do half an hour of challenges and technique work. I'm getting to know my students very well now so I try to cater to their strengths and weaknesses. Its normally training the fundamental movements but with challenges for each individual in order to keep them progressing and to keep boredom at bay.

Then we do half an hour of freestyle where my assistant coaches and myself supervise small groups and help people to learn the movements that they desire. It's a winning formula and everyone comes out richer from the experiences.

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Due to the weather in Iceland this time of year, I cannot train outdoors and probably won't be able to until Easter. When I get home I do my own reps of pushups, sit-ups, crunches and handstands. This is more for fun than anything as repetitive conditioning bores the living daylights out of me.

A good practitioner has an open mind and desires something more in life. They look for their own answers and rely on their own strengths. They don't make excuses when they fail, they learn from it.

APK: You've trained with and taught hundreds of practitioners over the years. Is there anyone who stuck out to you or made an impression? Is there a common trait you see in beginners? What makes a practitioner "good"?

Kerbie: There's so many people that I think have stuck out and made impressions but I've been to so many places that the list would be huge. The way that the guys in Iceland approach training is one of the key reasons for me to move here. I find a lot of students in Europe and the States are very defeatist and psyche themselves out of progression with the "I can't do that!" line of thinking. I think that in the U.K and the U.S we're very indoctrinated into being dependent on the state and not free thinking at all. Individuality is frowned upon by our peers and we stop believing in ourselves. After a few tries at a new move, people really start to realise how amazing they really are and that you can achieve anything you want with practise.

A good practitioner has an open mind and desires something more in life. They look for their own answers and rely on their own strengths. They don't make excuses when they fail, they learn from it. They don't beat themselves up if they haven't completed their goals, they just try another day. Once again, this is something that I feel the quick fix generation are finding difficult to understand.

APK: What's it like in Iceland right now? How's the community? What is a typical teaching session or class like? Do you do anything special or unique?

Kerbie: I kind of rambled on a bit in question 4 and answered this. Sorry! I have 10 classes and almost 200 students. We have 3 classes of 8-12 year olds, 3 classes of 12-17 year old beginners, 3 classes of 12-17 year olds that are more advanced and one over 18 class. In February we'll be opening up a second gym and increasing the number of classes we run per week to 16. Then in March we'll start in 3 more gyms.

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APK: What were the Barclaycard Championships like? Do you think they were as good as they could be? What went right, what went wrong, what could be improved? What are your ideas on competition?

Kerbie: Firstly, I think that there is nothing wrong with competition. Some people really get in a fluster about it, but I really cannot understand why. We've managed to convince one of the worlds leading banks to spend nearly a million pounds flying 30 free runners from all over the globe to spend an awesome weekend of training, learning, pranks and more training. As long as we spend one day of it doing what we love, with each other in front of thousands of people that want to see more of what we do. Plus the winners use the prize money to travel and spread the word about what we do.

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There are no real feelings of competition between the athletes because we all know how lucky we are to be part of all this. I think my feelings on competition would be different if feuds started to arise and it stopped being fun. However, I know for a fact that if someone comes along with that attitude, they wont be invited back. It's not about that. When you're standing in the crowd you can really see the feeling of brotherhood between us all and it's something the audience always compliment us about afterwards. The atmosphere is incredible.

I would never have the audacity to contemplate whether or not they were as good as they could have been because I still count myself blessed to have been a part of all of this and to have someone like barclaycard putting money into a sport, especially in this current economic climate.

APK: There's long been controversy over the way UF handles Parkour and Freerunning, that EZ or the company doesn't portray an accurate image of them or that it's too much about profit. Several bigger names like Livewire have left recently. Care to comment on any of that?

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