



health benefits are maximised in a manner that is welcoming to all groups.

These interval-based, conditioning sessions involve fundamental movements that are 'drag based' so you have the benefit of combining movement-based, resistance training with high-intensity fitness work which is all self-paced.

"One of the most unique things I find with drag-based training is that you can train to your absolute maximal without having the negative side effects in the joints and muscles that you can get with high-impact training, as there is basically no eccentric or gravitational loading on the body," explained Craig.

While a number of people will question resistance training for children, Craig is quick to point out that there is a difference between resistance caused by lifting weights and fundamental body movements where a resistance is applied.

"Pushing, dragging and sliding are fundamental movements that you start doing from as early as you can remember, but your ability to do traditional gym exercises like a weight-loaded squat or deadlift is actually based on having a proper technique that must be learnt."

From a more technical viewpoint, exercises such as those utilised by Heavy Haulers are mostly concentrically loaded (positively loaded), so the force is being generated by the participants, rather than receiving the force back through the body.

"That is why I say this style is applicable to people of all ages and all experiences, simply because they are basic, fundamental movements and the risk of injury is minimal," said Craig.

The resistance applied in a Heavy Haulers program is by means of tyres, sleds, ropes and trolleys – things that many children enjoy interacting with.

"We have actually had times when kids have turned up with a note saying they are injured and can't take part. Then they see the other kids having fun and suddenly that injury seems to have mended itself," said Craig. "It's important that they enjoy what they are doing as it keeps them coming back and trying for longer. This is essential to see genuine benefits from exercise."

The program consists of a series of exercises that combine different muscle groups and strengths for short intervals of time. Each exercise is based on a pushing, pulling, dragging or throwing motion and requires the participant to test their work distance, or how many repetitions they can complete in a set time frame. At the end of the exercise, the child writes down the results of their effort on their own clipboard and moves on to the next exercise. A countdown clock over a loud speaker ensures the program keeps moving with high organisation.

The aim then is to simply to go out and beat your own previous effort – whatever that number may be.

"I suppose you would say there is a competitive feel, but not in the traditional way," said Craig. "The focus is to go out and do a better effort than last time. If a child managed 100 metres one time, then we'll work with them to go for 110 metres at their next attempt. We try to keep it pretty simple. But there is a group dynamic and that encourages everyone to do better."

The recording of distance not only promotes improvement, but also makes the program measurable. All equipment used is clearly numbered and marked with its individual weight, so the participant will return to the same station and have a fair comparison of his or her efforts.

"Whatever program you're looking to do, I think it's very important that it's measurable," said Craig. "You need to set some consistency about how you do something and then record the results. When you then go out with that same approach and set a better effort, you know you are achieving. It's beneficial for your health, and helps motivate and inspire you when you see improvements."

Importantly, because the exercises are not traditional, straight-running or coordinated ball skills, many students are surprised to find they have strengths in specific areas they weren't even aware of. Not only is this fundamental to personal confidence, it is also a positive lesson for children in general. If anything, the recent Olympic Games should demonstrate to us all that a wide range of shapes and sizes can excel at sport.

"I like to say that it builds people up, rather than breaks them down," said Craig. "If you're putting in a good effort, at whatever level, then you will see improvement, and that is fundamental for confidence. There are always kids who say they hate sports, but that is because they are on show and placed in a directly-competitive environment. But, in a system where they are only competing against themselves, they should see improvement and gain positivity towards exercise and fitness."

This mentality is fundamentally important to children. Not only does it help their health and wellbeing in the immediate sense, it is also something you hope they can carry with them into the future. Even as adults, we find it very easy to stop exercising when we feel something is no longer enjoyable or the positive aspect has been removed. After all, even if you're not elite, it doesn't mean you should stop doing it.

"We often forget the pressures that we experienced as a kid," said Craig. "In a traditional sport environment, it is easy to become disheartened very quickly. A child could drop the ball or miss-hit the shot and, the next thing, all the other kids are laughing and the child wants to give up. Our aim is to make it enjoyable and to ensure that the child can see improvement for themselves."

A self-competitive environment that promotes improvement – it sounds like a pretty simple idea, but one that can be hard to implement. When achieved, however, the benefits are multi-dimensional. When our kids are active and exercising, there is an immediate health and wellbeing advantage, but basing that advantage purely on running speed or hand-eye co-ordination, can limit those you reach and disenfranchise the rest. A positive culture, where active exercise is welcomed by those of all shapes and sizes, should also see long-term benefits to their self-esteem and the acquiring of a positive mindset for the future. ■■■

For more information about Heavy Haulers, contact Craig Abbott or Jessica Manakis on (03) 9840 0073 or 0408 148 782. You can also visit their website at: www.heavyhaulers.com.au