

POINTS OF VIEW

# No weigh: Test works out fitness



BILL COUTANT

One thing that tells me I'm thoroughly middle-aged is when I scratch my midsection and realize what it would be like if the Pillsbury Doughboy were to do a self-exam.

It's not that I don't work out or try to watch what I eat, but the good old days of being able to lose weight easily and turn up the workouts with ease are over.

So when Chris Ward, a veteran of five marathons who works at Botaford Hospital, suggested I take a Microfit Fitness Evaluation at the hospital's Total Rehabilitation and Athletic Conditioning Center, I jumped at the chance, even though my vertical leap is more like a good stumble.

Although the test measures heart rate, endurance, strength and other factors, it's not really a stress test. It's an indication of how you compare in fitness with others in your sex and age group nationally.

And it shows you in what areas you need to improve to be more fit and avoid injury or health problems.

The tests were not demanding for the most part and they did provide me with some pleasant surprises as well as the expected bad news.

TRACC exercise physiologist Ed Pienkos explained the test as he was taking my blood pressure, weighing me and checking my body fat, all with the aid of a computer and a special program.

The idea, he explained, is that flexibility, endurance, strength, the percent of body fat and cardiovascular health are related to overall fitness and affect physical performance, and that in order to maintain or improve your fitness, you have to have some standard measure.

My blood pressure was not what it should be. Sure, I had had a stressful morning with a few too many cups of coffee, Ed reassured. But come to think of it, most weekday mornings are that way.

So with those hard numbers of my high diastolic blood pressure (resting rate) on the computer screen, I resolved to do what I think Temple basketball coach John Chaney ought to do — switch to decaf.

Ed measured my flexibility by having me try to stretch toward my toes while on the floor and touch a bar that registered on the computer. Although I'm willing to compromise, the results were clear — I'm inflexible.

My strength result was more encouraging, although I don't know how sitting in front of a computer screen could help. It was better than average.

Although I know I could stand to lose 20 pounds, my body fat was in the low

end of the fit range, another pleasant surprise. Of course, that's all I need, a reason not to watch my weight.

Then came the bike. This was the part of the test that measures your endurance and cardiovascular system. It doesn't measure sweat, fortunately. Otherwise I would have lost points.

On this count at least, I was in good shape. My endurance score put me well into the fit range. The running and cross-country skiing had paid off.

I could rationalize that my blood pressure reading was a fluke, because it is usually in the normal range other times when I've had it measured. But it's something I'll have to watch carefully, and as I said, caffeine will have to go.

And although I knew my flexibility had been on the wane since I quit doing yoga exercises and put away my judo gi, I hadn't thought it was quite as bad. Ed gave me some stretching exercises and then gave me the evaluation.

The low scores on flexibility and blood pressure balanced the higher scores for percentage of body fat and aerobic fitness. Although he probably thought it sounded like reassurance, Ed's analysis of my fitness profile landed like a big thud.

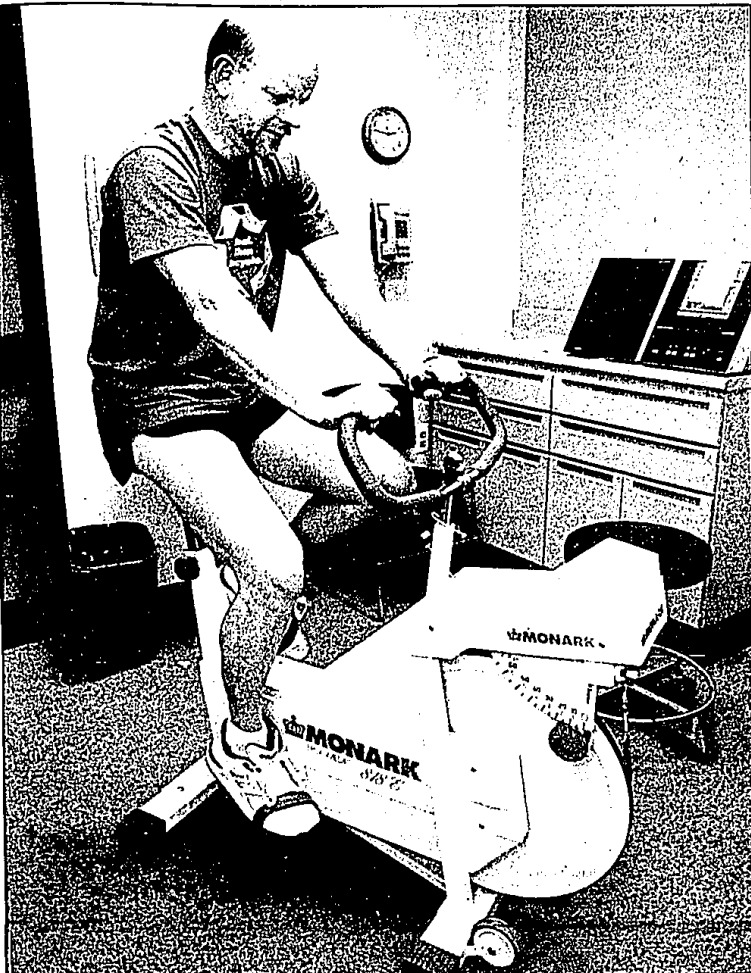
"You are in the average range," he said. "In fact, you are the average of average."

A far cry from the best of the best. It just doesn't have that same ring.

The disappointment behind me, I now have a plan of action and some hard numbers about where my physical fitness could be improved.

And although I know how easily the resolve to shape up is likely to melt away before the winter snows do — or my love handles — I can't look back. "High average" sounds so much better.

Bill Coutant, a black belt in judo, is a reporter for the Farmington Observer.



SHARON LEMMON/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Going nowhere fast: I worked up a sweat on this computerized stationary bicycle that measures endurance. It was just one part of my fitness profile.

## Winter runs ragged over Michigan's fish, wildlife

I caught a mess of fish — enough for two meals — through the ice. With my bare hands. Just like Robert Redford tries to do in the opening scene of "Jeremiah Johnson."

Kirsten the Norwegian elkhound is my witness. All dog fanciers know an elkhound never lies.

It happened one balmy, 22-degree day in mid-February when I took Kirsten out on a picnic in the Island Lake State Recreation Area. To an elkhound, 22 degrees is balmy. Besides, elk-hounds are a bit balmy.

Island Lake has lots of oak trees, and dead-fall oak branches make quick, hot-cooking fires. We cooked diet-busting breakfasts of bacon, chopped onions and eggs, mopped up with fire-toasted bagels and the help of a dog tongue. Kirsten used to catch her own warm meals of field mice and sometimes a bunny, but 13 summers, 12 winters and arthritis have slowed her down, so she mainly consumes dog biscuits and polishes the frying pan.

But about the fishing: It actually is a sad story known as "winterkill."

There's a pond about the size of a hockey rink, five feet at its deepest. It drains a large swamp and flows through a narrow channel into the Huron River. I've written about it before. The swamp is where Kirsten found two bodies of beaver that the park rangers didn't even know lived as far south as Livingston County.

The pond was ice-covered except for the upstream end, where a tiny creek oozes out of the swamp and fills the pond. In six feet of open water were dozens of bluegills, some dead, the others gasping at the surface for air.

Winterkill occurs where ice freezes deep in a tiny pond, and snow blocks rays of sunlight that nourish plants. Plants supply oxygen to the pond water. Lack of oxygen suffocates the fish. I had read about it but never had witnessed it.

The fish were going to die, so with a bare hand I scooped up some of the nicer pan-sized bluegills, dropped them in my knapsack and threw in some snow to keep them cool.

It's legal. The DNR fishing rules (page 7) prohibit use of firearms, explosives and poison



TIM RICHARD

to catch fish, and limit netting, but nowhere does it say a guy can't use his bare hands.

Since then, I've heard of an angler who visits the area each year during winterkill. He chops a large hole in the ice with an ax and takes out a bucket of dying ones.

Winterkill is a sad phenomenon, but part of nature. Vast proportions of our wildlife populations die during winter. In Wisconsin DNR literature, I've read that 75 to 90 percent of fish populations die in the course of a year. One fry in a million grows into a trophy-sized lunger. First-born fawns of young, inexperienced does have a poor survival rate. Rabbits have several litters a year because so many predators feed on them.

Bluegill are a pretty fish, almost as pretty as the angel fish you see in tropical fish tanks. On the hook, gills turn their slab sides perpendicular to the angler and put up a stiff battle on light tackle.

Kirsten likes her gills raw — head, fins, scales, bones and all. The rest of us like 'em coated with cracker crumbs and pan fried. Their flavor is sweet and pleasant, unlike the bland packaged fish you get from the supermarket freezer.

Eat your heart out, Robert Redford.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. You can reach him by Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1881.

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