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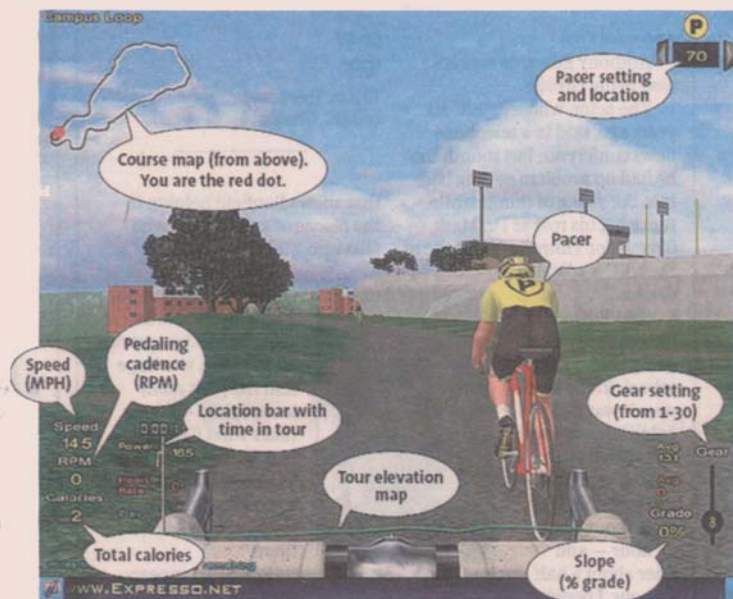
Metro Final



Health & Fitness



Gyms are finding that enjoying TV or a virtual reality experience, right, can boost a workout. The Expresso Bike, above, offers both options.



Expresso Bikes

Channel your exercise

BY VICKY HALLETT
Washington Post

Although once upon a time, a single TV in a gym would have been a luxury, now it's odd not to find several sets and frequently a bunch of machines with their own personal TVs.

Gold's Gym has recently introduced the idea of the Cardio Cinema, where movies play on a large screen in a darkened room set up like a theater, only

Distractions like watching TV can enhance your workout program

Running 26 miles is a killer workout, whether you're watching TV or not, and his body burns the same number of calories it would have if he'd been staring at a blank wall. "For most workouts, you don't need to be there," Pittsley says. "Be on the French Riviera." But commercials can be a problem, he warns, because "the disassociation stops."

McCall advises harnessing the rhythms of TV to your ad-

with bikes, treadmills and ellipticals instead of cushy seats. Increasingly, gyms are also offering equipment such as Espresso Bikes, which have screens that riders can use to watch regular television programming or take a virtual-reality ride through a choice of environments (including outer space!).

If that's what it takes to get the general population moving, Pete McCall, an exercise physiologist with the American Council on Exercise, is all for it. "The perception is exercise is work; it makes me sweat," he says. "So if we have to use TVs as a puppy dog, it's a necessary evil."

Diane Whaley, a sports psychologist at the University of Virginia, says there are two goals for any exercise session: to be enjoyable and effective. And while getting engrossed in television seems to help with the former, it can take away from the latter. "You have to find out what will result in a good workout, not just going through the motions," she says.

Although Costas Karageorghis, a sports psychologist at Brunel University in London, firmly believes that distractions reduce pain during exercise, his groundbreaking investigations of the effect of visual stimulus have him worried that television can be too great a diversion. "Watching TV while you exercise is such a distraction that it diminishes the quality of exercise. When you combine video with audio, it requires more from your brain," he says.

However, Karageorghis—who orchestrated the live soundtrack of this month's "Run to the Beat" half-marathon in London, where musicians performed along the course—has found that upbeat programming that requires little mental energy could have an "additive ef-



Gold's Gym

Gold's Gym, with locations worldwide, offers Cardio Cinema, where movies run on a big screen in a darkened room.

Watch what you watch

Sports highlights are the scientifically proven viewing option for the gym. But what are some other good options?

Mindless reality TV (think Bravo, MTV and VH1) is a popular choice that won't drain too much brain power. But although catching up on the news might seem like a handy way to stay informed during a workout, exercise psychologist Diane Whaley warns against programming that's overly negative: "What if all of the stories are bad news?" If you build an association in your mind between depressing thoughts and running, getting back on that treadmill won't be as appealing.

For similar reasons, exercise psychologist Costas Karageorghis also advises against horror movies. The members at Anytime Fitness in Leesburg, Va., might want to take note. Owner Jeff Strahan has noticed that one channel has recently dominated over Fox, CNN and even "SportsCenter." It's CNBC, the business news channel. Too much time tuned into Jim Cramer, and those people may never be able to exercise again.

— *Washington Post*

fect." He favors comedies, music videos or cartoons over plot-heavy shows that demand extra attention.

"The very best thing would be edited highlights of athletes to inspiring music," he says, offering as an example "I Feel Good" by James Brown coupled with carefully selected Olympic moments. "Highlights are better than a game because you get time-outs or injuries, and those aren't motivational," he says.

TV allows us to disassociate, says Jesse Pittsley, program

coordinator of the exercise science program at Winston-Salem State University. He knew a guy who used to set his treadmill to a seven-minute-mile pace while watching football games. Several times a season, he'd cover marathon-length distances.

vantage. When the commercial comes on, that's when you pick up the speed. "It's the old Chuck Woolery 'two and two,' and then you go easy for five to eight minutes," he says. "That's a good recovery interval."

Folks using a Gold's Gym Cardio Cinema have entire movies to go through, with no commercial breaks. "You can get really lost in it," says manager Cameron Child. So, although people who stay for an entire two-hour film tend not to work out at a high intensity the whole way, he says the ones who come in for shorter periods usually crank it up.

Using a large screen also avoids one of the problems of combining TV and exercise: bad biomechanics. Karageorghis fears people watching television lower or raise their chin for a better view of a screen.

David Harris, national director for training for the high-end health club Equinox, says that beyond the postural concerns, personal TVs disrupt what he calls the right "staging" of an exercise environment. "The energy is different. People aren't looking around and learning from other things going on."

And even though experts believe the trend toward more screens will continue, especially using new interactive technologies to give exercisers more game-like experiences, there's one part of the gym that everyone agrees should stay TV-free: the weight room. Form is crucial when you're lifting, and it takes focus and concentration. Distraction there doesn't mask pain—it creates it.