

## EXTREME



## Rampur's Jumpers

In the small Uttar Pradesh town Rampur, children don't play gully cricket, but run, swing and jump through its streets. By Aaron Rodrigues

**In July this year**, Red Bull decided to send one of their parkour athletes, Mohammad Al Attar, also known as Double Trouble, to India to conduct a parkour workshop. His destination was not Mumbai, or Delhi, or Bangalore, but Rampur, in Uttar Pradesh. It was the Kuwait-based Al Attar's second trip to India. In November last year, he had visited Mumbai to judge Red Bull's first parkour competition in India. Participation was limited, but 9 of the 16 contestants, and 2

of the top 3, had come from Rampur, which is becoming the unlikely hotbed for Indian parkour enthusiasts. "I found the boys from Rampur very enthusiastic," says Al Attar. "They are talented and unique and have a bright future."

So, how did Rampur, which is mostly known for its sugar-refining and cotton-milling industries, start practising an urban sport invented in France? Most of the credit must go to Mujahid Habib, 22, who, in 2007, began imitating stunts he saw Jackie Chan



Team Leonine practises parkour in Rampur and (below) poses with Red Bull athlete Mohammad Al Attar (in Red Bull t-shirt)

perform in movies. Habib was jumping and vaulting over walls and staircases, but he didn't know what he was doing was a sport till a friend showed him YouTube videos of parkour. Habib began gaining admirers of all ages — from 14-year-old Aman Kumar to 29-year-old Firsat Ali — and founded a parkour team named Team Leonine. In November last year, Habib won Red Bull's Indian

competition and he will be going to Greece this October to watch Art of Motion, the world's premier parkour and free-running competition.

Not everyone was supportive of Habib when he began practising parkour. Many told his team there was no future in parkour and that they could get severely injured trying it. Habib says no one has been seriously hurt so far. Moods would

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eventually change when people saw Team Leonine's skills on display in the movie *Ladies vs Ricky Bahl* and advertisements for *Mountain Dew* and *Thumbs Up*.

Unlike other sports, parkour does not require a training ground. All an aspiring free-runner needs is a soft surface to land on — either a landing mat or sand. In fact, the more complex the layout, the better. "It is not a complicated sport. All you have to do is use your imagination and utilise your surroundings," says Habib. "Parkour is both physical and mental. However, it's not the physics you study in school; it's the physics that your mind can imagine," says Al Attar.

Habib is always in search of new places to practise his moves, and, luckily for him, Rampur provides plenty. "Parkour can be done anywhere. You have to do it step by step. All you need is to find places where there aren't many people," says Habib. Here is where Rampur is advantageous for athletes looking to practise the sport. While most metropolises in the country are crowded and occupied with harder surfaces, developing cities are not affected by an over-packed citizenry and have plenty of soft surfaces. Team Leonine frequents construction sites, where the sand breaks their falls, parks, and the banks of River Kosi, where they learn new moves.

Habib is currently in Delhi, studying to be an architect. While in the capital, he has been searching for fellow athletes to practise with.

He has found people from cities all across India, such as Chandigarh, Hyderabad and Chennai. "Parkour is developing very fast in a short amount of time," says Al Attar. "The number of athletes is growing and parkour is spreading in more areas all over India." Habib is currently conducting classes in Delhi and a workshop for girls at LSR College.

Parkour still needs encouragement in India and a pinch of media exposure. "What India needs is media exposure for Indian parkour athletes and for the benefits of parkour. And, probably, more training facilities where people can go and join parkour classes," says Al Attar. If those things materialise, they may help Habib fulfil his ambition: to compete in next year's Art of Motion.



Mohammad Al Attar (here and bottom), who is based in Kuwait, has been to India twice to help develop parkour



Mujahid Habib (above left and here) has popularised parkour in Rampur



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