

The Last Word

By **BILL LANKHOF**

He's Mississauga's Mr. Gadget and he is in mid-sales pitch: "It's strength training equipment but it's simple, it's portable, it's effective, you can store it under your bed ..."

Marc Lebert is 38 years old, has spent the past 10 years as a personal fitness instructor. He runs the Fuel Fitness Centre in Mississauga and you'll just have to forgive him for sounding like an infomercial.

Why? Because in a couple of months he'll be one.

The star of the TV production, or irritant, depending on how you feel about things that make you sweat in the night, will be The Equalizer — which Lebert invented and calls "the hottest new strength and flexibility training tool to come to the market ..." Or a broom closet, or yard sale, near you.

Lebert, being a realist as much as he is creative, chuckles. He acknowledges too many people buy expensive gym equipment only to have it end up sitting in the corner of the basement or gathering dust bunnies under the bed.

Something new

"There's always something on TV that's selling, the Bowflex was big for a while, there is the nordic machine and you know, except for some of the really terrible ab machines they're always selling on the late night shows, there is some merit to them. But, they're only good if you use them. Buying the equipment is just the first step."

Lebert says his Equalizer is different and hey, who am I to argue with a guy who has a black belt in Taekwondo and who once trained boxer Billy (The Kid) Irwin.

To start. It's cheap — "it's \$99 and you've basically got yourself a home gym. Outside of a ball you're not getting much for that kind of money," Lebert says. "There are 75 exercises and you don't have to work out more than 10 minutes a day for it to be effective."

Sweet. He's just a margarita and a beach hammock short of making this sound like my kind of exercise routine.

The Equalizer basically consists of a couple of bars. Instead of pulling weights, you use your own body weight to do pullups, chinups, squats and dips. He got the idea four years ago when he found his female clients having difficulty handling the usual weight training equipment.

"I had a buddy who works with steel and one afternoon we were sitting around having a few beers and he worked up a couple of prototypes." It also helped that wife Mel didn't suggest maybe he'd had one too many of those brewskies when he brought his idea home.

"I've always had ideas but this is the first time I've gotten the gumption and money together to bring something to fruition. We're in pretty deep ... a couple hundred thousand but it's

kind of neat to see it evolve and to see who is starting to use it.

“The good thing is we ended up in the Nike Bauer promotion for Earn Your Ice Time. They had a picture of Scott Niedermayer jumping over our product on a billboard outside the Air Canada Centre. They make great hurdles, although they weren’t actually invented for that.”

He just sold three sets to Tony Mark, the trainer for NHL star Alex Ovechkin and several other NHL players. Professional long drive champion Mike Wiebe has used it and, Lebert says, “We’ve had amazing response in the U.S. At the end of the month we’re heading to a conference of 500 coaches led by the strength and speed coach of the California Panthers.”

Ah, yes, heady moments. It has not always been thus. A year ago his dream nearly slipped away like a thief in the night. “There has never been a time when I didn’t think it was a good idea but we have had some crazy things happen. We just got enough funds together to order a trailer load of the product and we had it all sitting in a trailer. And, didn’t the truck get stolen. Of course, the guys who opened it up took one look and said, ‘What the heck ... are these?’ We got it back, but man, those were a few tense days. It was about \$60,000 and we’d have been pretty much done if we hadn’t got it back.”

This week he still was muscling boxes at his warehouse and when the Toronto District School Board bought some “I delivered them myself,” Lebert says, “but someday this part’ll be over.”

At the Can-Fit-Pro Trade Show he hooked up with contacts in the U.S., where the fastest growing industry is the production of body fat. “As a friend of mine likes to say,” Lebert says on his website, www.lebertequalizer.com, “I have washboard abs, it’s just that I have a load of laundry in right now.”

So he dreams.

“It’s going to be, wow, really big! One of the ladies in the U.S. who wants to represent us does a lot of the big infomercials,” Lebert says. “She said the last product she represented, the owners can retire today. We just know it’ll do well because it fills a need.”

But, what if someone with more good intentions than commitment ends up working on his pot belly more than he does his Equalizer?

“Hey,” Lebert says, pointing to his son Toren, 21/2, “it does have a lot of other uses when you see it. I’ve seen the kids put a blanket over it and it makes a great play tent. And it makes a dandy workhorse for dad.”