

IM aerobics class — free, entertaining

By ANDY MILLER
Tar Heel Staff Writer

The students bring not notebooks but exercise bags. The teacher wanders in about a minute before class. Outside it is 95 degrees. Fetzer Gym is not much cooler, but the students milling about the walls of the gym shake their arms and stretch their legs, getting ready. The teacher ties up her hair with a barrette and claps her hands.

Betty Early, a junior from Winston-Salem, said, "The waiting before class is like waiting for a shot."

This is aerobics class. An intramural program, it is held three evenings a week during the summer, free to any student, faculty or staff member.

Cydne Watterson, the instructor, flips on the tape player and the students form rows in front of her. There are more than 30 of them — a wide range of ages, backgrounds and body shapes. They strain to touch their hands to the floor. T-shirts, gym shorts and running shoes are the norm; no one wears leg warmers, and only two people sport leotards or tights.

A slow song ends and a fast one replaces it. Watterson, clapping and smiling, leads her class in a series of chorus-line kicks.

While the exercise is continuous, Watterson constantly changes the commands — the class marches, bends, kicks and jumps. Watterson is less of a military drill sergeant than a

cheerleader, and most of the students keep pace with her, jerking their limbs to the beat. A rhythmic clapping rekindles the enthusiasm. The class then forms a large circle and skips along like kindergartners behind the teacher. The lines form again. They keep this up for 30 strenuous minutes before a break.

"Aerobics' is really the wrong term to use," Watterson said. "Anything that has to do with producing oxygen is aerobic — swimming, tennis. What this class should be called is 'aerobic fitness.'

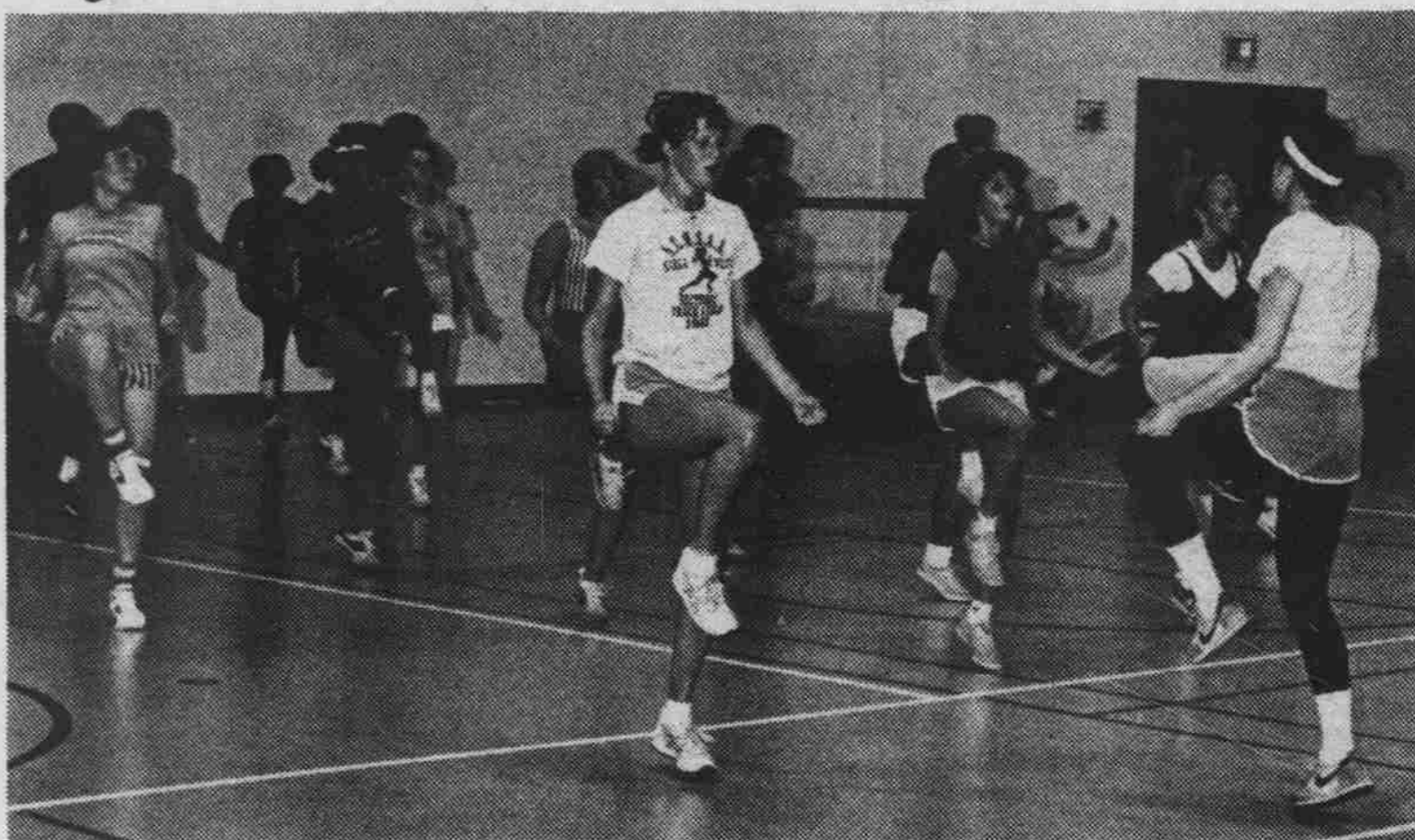
"What our exercise does is four things: it improves flexibility, tones and firms muscles, improves the cardio-vascular system and promotes overall fitness," she said.

The IM class is a product of the 1980s aerobic boom, which, according to Watterson, could replace jogging as America's favorite fitness activity.

"You get to do it with other people, for one thing. Aerobics class makes people feel good. The entertainment and enthusiasm is provided for them. It's very different from dance, where the goal is to perform," Watterson said.

An increasing number of men have been coming to class. "Guys have good strength and cardio-vascular systems, but they are usually not flexible," Watterson said.

"What is rewarding for me is when I can get people hooked on exercise," she said. "A lot of women don't feel good about



Cydne Watterson, right, leads the IM aerobics class from 5:45 to 7 p.m. in Fetzer Gym.

themselves — they're told in magazines that they must look like Cheryl Tiegs. This class is designed to release them, to allow them to feel good about themselves through exercise."

Since the spring, when Watterson became head of IM aerobics, enrollment in three classes jumped to 265. The 5 p.m. class in Woollen Gym had 120 members, all straining along with the beat.

Dr. Pam Robinson, an expert in exercise physiology, said aerobics "taxes the heart and causes a training effect. It should be very

beneficial to the general public."

After the break the class resumes on the gymnastics mat. The students take off their shoes and circle around Watterson for 30 more minutes of exercise, working mostly their abdominal and leg muscles. The faces redden; sweat drips from shoulders. Michael Jackson's "Thriller" is the last song. The workout is over and they gather their shoes. There is an atmosphere of friendship and accomplishment.

Julie DeClerque, a master's student in public health, rests a moment on the gymnast's bar.

"This is the best aerobics class anywhere in town," she said. "Cydne not only demonstrates, but she instructs us individually. She doesn't put herself up on a pedestal like a goddess. She makes it fun."

Watterson, 23, a graduate of Utah State University, is designing a fall workshop for N.C. public schools. She would like to see all aerobics instructors go through a certification process, warning that some current instructors may not be qualified to teach aerobics.

Shutterbugs

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