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Much lighter on his feet

Grayslake man down 22.5% to claim prize for weight loss

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LINDENHURST -- Tony Provo said he was in pretty good shape until about Father's Day of 2008 when he broke his leg playing ice hockey.

"I became a couch potato. I ate everything," said the 38-year-old Grayslake resident, who watched his weight shoot from around 170 pounds to over 200.

Then, in mid-January, when the scales tipped to 207, Provo joined not only the Lindenhurst Health & Fitness Center but also the club's second annual "Lose to Win" program, a team-based weight-loss challenge.

No less than 235 people -- tactfully called "losers" -- were divided into nine teams and spent the last nine weeks working out, participating in team competitions and watching their diet. On the line was a \$1,000 cash award for whoever safely lost the highest percentage of their starting body weight.

Among the means used to reach those ends were three-day-a-week "vigorous" training sessions starting at such times as 5:15 a.m. There were also two different Saturday-morning team competitions with challenges that included dragging a tractor tire -- with someone sitting inside of it -- across a gym floor.

The results were in on Wednesday, as program co-director Beck McNabb gathered with team leaders and top contestants to reveal the winner. All that was known after weigh-ins on Feb. 9 and Feb. 20 was that Provo was in the running.

"I've been hiding this all day," McNabb said, calling Provo and James Gallina of Round Lake Beach to the front. "It was a close race between the two of them."

The final tally: Provo, who dropped down to 160 pounds, had lost 22.5 percent of his starting weight, and Gallina, who started at 200 pounds and dropped to 160, had lost 19.9 percent.

Their secrets? Provo said his wife, Casper, roused him out of bed for pre-dawn BootCamp workouts at the club, and toward the end of the competition, he worked out twice a day. But he also changed some stealthy eating habits.

"The biggest thing was getting my portions down," he said, "though my biggest downfall was eating my kids' leftovers -- I have 7-year-old twins."

Wearing the same 36-inch-waist jeans that he sported before dropping 40 pounds, Gallina said he ate "a lot of bananas," increased his fiber and "basically cut out all pop." Those jeans now needed not only a belt, but a tight one.

While adjusting his diet, Gallina worked out anywhere from 90 minutes to two hours six days a week. He credits the approach with both dropping weight and lowering his cholesterol count from 220 to 160 -- without statins.

Gallina's second-place showing earned him a \$600 cash award, while third-place finisher Kevin Hughes (18.9 percent in weight loss) was given a \$400 credit toward fitness center expenses.

While there was no cash award for the team with the highest overall weight loss, the competition's largest trophy was handed out to the Light Green team headed by Peggy Kresch of Lindenhurst and Jenny Maiden of Round Lake Beach. All told, Light Green lost 9.21 percent of their starting weight.

Praising the "great friendships that came about" during the competition, Maiden held up the trophy and said "don't make this just about the last nine weeks -- make this the start of your

life-change, forever."