

# MEAN MOVES

While a blitz on the treadmill is great for your heart, there are other more exciting alternatives to your regular workout. Adlena Wong gets the most out of some **martial arts classes.**

Besides running, I can't think of anything else I could do better at sports. While I love going at it for miles at a stretch most of the times, the occasional boredom does creep up and stagnation isn't foreign to me. So when I was tasked to find out if martial arts classes are any good, I thought, "Why not?" After all, it wouldn't kill for a girl to know how to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee, right?

"With any contact sport, injuries abound, in particular if you're doing so at the elite level," says Dr Ben Tan, medical director of Singapore Sports Medical Centre and senior consultant sports physician at Changi Sports Medicine Centre. He, along with his team of experts, is the ring-side doctor at Martial Combat, the biggest MMA championship series in Asia held jointly by ESPN at Resorts World Sentosa from May to October this year.

And according to Dr Tan, women have to take extra precautions when engaging in MMA. "Because women tend to have a weaker upper body compared to men, you'll need to compensate by training more on your upper body strength to close the gap. In addition, your ligaments tend to be looser, so there is a higher chance in tearing them — the ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) in the knees are particularly vulnerable — even without rough contact. Hence, work on strengthening the muscles supporting these ligaments."



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## WING CHUN

Who would have thought gentle hand and feet sweeping moves could give me lean muscles and better posture? Leading the lunchtime class at True Fitness was *sifu* Chua Kah Joo, who has close to 30 years of experience in *Wing Chun*.

"You won't feel exhausted after the workout because *Wing Chun* is not about using muscle power. It is using your body structure to work for you and turn it into a weapon. The moves are practical and can also help you get fit," he explains. A few mandatory stretches — focusing on the joints, limbs and neck muscles, and Chua starts us off on basic drills, such as Straight Punch, Palm Up Hand, Wing Arm, Defending Hand and Circular Hand. They were simple enough and after 15 minutes, I was almost convinced by what he had said earlier: "Anyone can do *Wing Chun*."

At the 55th minute, we wind down with breathing exercises involving expelling air vigorously and breathing in and out of one nostril at a time — all based on traditional Chinese medicine philosophies to enhance the effects of *Wing Chun* such as boosted energy levels and improved blood circulation. And though it doesn't like sound like much, I do feel a little light-headed after.

Simply put, *Wing Chun* is an up-a-notch version of *tai chi*. Its moves are simple, and executed close to the body to create economy of movement and energy. After an hour, I did not sweat one bead and I was light years away from being sore.



### WHAT IS WING CHUN

Each 60-minute session teaches the basic punches and kicks, which are then combined progressively in a myriad of ways to vary the speed and difficulty. Exclusively at the True Fitness outlets at Chevron House and Parkway Parade.

## JIU-JITSU

Brazilian *Jiu-Jitsu* (BJJ) at Evolve MMA is every bit as painful as a strip down under — if not worse. It was also a fortuitous experience: I happened to join a special class taught by guest coach Carolyn Kay Stephenson, a lithe and lean triple-time BJJ champion who has fought in close to 30 matches worldwide.

There are 12 other ladies in the class, most of them petite and half my size. And I secretly wonder if I will eventually look like them if I keep at this. I'm paired with Naj and Tracey, and we take

turns to practise the drills, which include the escape, chokeholds, joint-locks and the guard position on one another. All of the above involves, in one way or another, getting in between your buddy's legs.

And it gets worse.

Alas, my steely resolve to master the moves isn't quite enough to get over the biggest distraction I had that night — this constant obsession with how bad I smelled.

All the crashing, flipping and flopping soon takes a toll on my weak body, which now feels like a sack of potatoes.



### WHAT IS BOXING

Boxing is a martial art and combat sport rolled into one, where two people — generally of similar weight — fist-fight each other. Available daily at Fightworks Asia, located at 1018 East Coast Parkway. Tel: 6449-9821.

## BOXING

While boxing is not new here, I discover that the learning process at Fightworks Asia is. "Our boxing module aims to improve every type of physical capacity: Strength, power, coordination, aerobic and anaerobic fitness, and endurance. Exercises we emphasise include heavy bag, speed-ball, spring-ball and medicine-ball work, skipping, running, weight-training and calisthenics, mainly," Arvind Lalwani, my personal coach and the Fightworks Asia Boxing program director, explains. "Training is hard but our instructors keep you motivated and make it fun, and our programme is designed for all fitness levels."

After learning how to circumnavigate the cotton wrap around each hand and putting on the boxing gloves the right way, I was

made to skip. According to Lalwani, skipping is one of the core warm-up moves of the beginner's routine.

Next, I'm made to assume a fighting stance — legs shoulder-width apart, arms bent and held close to the body and fists at cheek level, creating a physical shield of the chest area. In this position, I add jabs (at eye level straight ahead) and crosses (dominant arm thrusting slightly across the body), definitely putting my psychomotor skills to the test.

But the most challenging was the one-leg stance. Ditto for the bag work, where I had to jab, cross, and pivot all at once. My poor *gluteus minimus* and my upper arms were burning! I don't know how I completed the session, but I was so spent by the end of it that I wobbled all the way to the shower room.

And by the end of the hour, I am starting to feel my quads ache, my *gi* (or uniform) is completely soaked through and my head spinning. Stephenson ends the routine with a minute of half-squats; strong legs are the building blocks to practising good BJJ. Long-term goals of

sculpting a tapered torso and building core muscle strength aside, the short-term accomplishments of being able to turn my opponent on her back after just one session of BJJ, are not shabby at all. However, I do emerge with bruised thighs, so it's not for the faint-hearted.



### WHAT IS JIU-JITSU

Brazilian *Jiu Jitsu* is a reality-based fighting system designed for the person who wants to learn self-defense on the ground with a focus on technique and fitness. Available daily at Evolve MMA, located at #01-01 Far East Square, 6336-4325.