

feature

BY CHRISTINE LEONG

men have long been associated with it, and women to a certain extent, training with in the shadows, so to speak, with rudimentary equipment to try and master the art of self-defence. Now it's gone upmarket and in air-conditioned confines, it has become a way to keep fit in the city



The action-packed Thai Kickboxing Grand Prix 2002 held recently at Atmosphere

martial arts

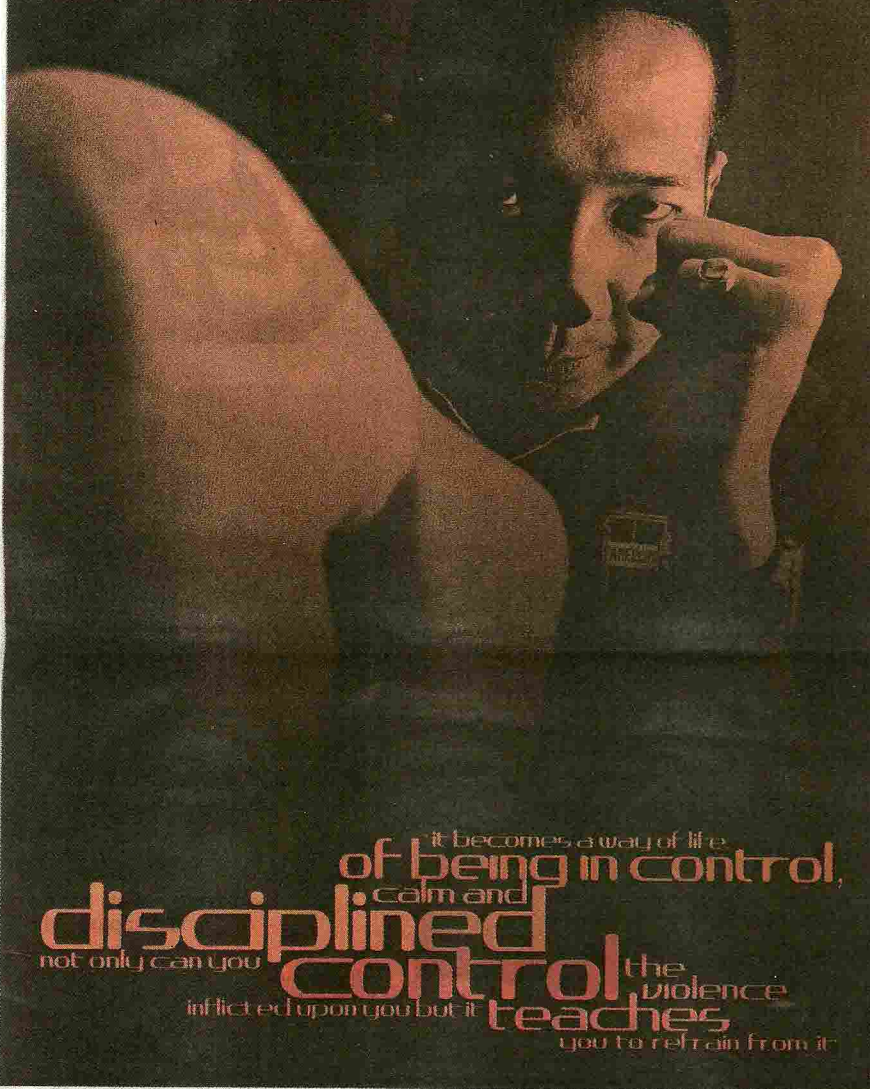
goes active



GOING TO THE GYM can take on new meaning if that friend of yours, male or female, is into exercise through martial arts, complete with screams, high kicks and boxing. And it is catching on, given the gyms willing to include it into their programmes and urbanites willing to pay the price, both in terms of money and the discipline required. Allied Martial Arts Gym is one of those gyms, and proudly so. "It is the first full-time, fully-equipped martial arts gym in Southeast Asia", claims Raja Akhbar Raja Dato' Nong Chik, the co-owner. It was founded three years ago by a group of friends who were looking for the proper equipment to train in martial arts in KL but to no avail. Since then, the gym has attracted members from all walks of life, including a few celebrities, with its comprehensive facilities for the training of Wing Chun, aikido, karate, kickboxing, wushu and tai chi. *continued on pg 19 >>>*



I teach sometimes but I'm not a master says Raja Akhbar, the co-owner of Allied Martial Arts Gym who is currently training under Master Kancho Wong, a seven-degree black belt holder of Goju-Ryu karate



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from pg 18 >>> Although Raja Akhbar (who prefers to be called Kubat) dislikes the idea of name-dropping, the visibly displayed newspaper clippings on Sarimah Ibrahim, Sheila Majid and Wan Zaleha in the act pretty much conveys the rising popularity of this 'alternative' form of workout.

Not to be mistaken as a game only for the boys, women, according to Kubat, sometimes outnumber their male counterparts. "Women have their seasons," he remarks in a joking manner. "Generally, they like to exercise more before and after the festive seasons."

Apart from the benefit of self-defence, martial arts as a form of exercise helps one achieve physical fitness. "And some self-confidence... It becomes a way of life, of being in control, disciplined and calm. Not only can you control the violence inflicted upon you, but it teaches you to refrain from it," explains Kubat,

who has been trained in silat, karate, kung fu and taekwondo.

Perhaps another milestone since the inception of Allied was the **Thai Kickboxing Grand Prix** held in Atmosphere recently. Twenty kickboxers, most of them from North Malaysia, were brought down for the two-day tournament, which saw the club's dance floor turned into a fighting ring.

"When they fight in Thailand, they have to use their Thai names," says Kubat of the competitors. "So they like the idea of fighting in their own country because they can use their own name."

"Why at Atmosphere? "We didn't want to do it in a stadium or dewan. At Atmosphere, it is more accessible to the public and it looks professional," he says. We can expect more of such knockout events as Kubat reveals that they are planning to set up a series of tournaments, which will lead to a grand final in Malaysia next year.

defence disciplines

THE MENTION OF MARTIAL ARTS raises images of testosterone-filled aggressiveness, tough male bodies and that macho thing. In reality, however, it is hardly that and not everyone is suited to a particular art. Says Kubat, "The objective is to teach people to defend themselves but because every one is physically different, you have to choose the style that's suitable for you." Below are some of the disciplines available:

WING CHUN Originated from a woman named Yim Wing Chun in Southern China, it centres on using internal strength to produce punches and kicks directed at vital points. Good for close-quarter combat - in the elevator, for example - it is no wonder that this form of self-defence is popular among the ladies here. Though considered to be a women's martial art, the late Bruce Lee is said to have initially started with this.

AIKIDO Instead of attacking, this Japanese fighting method focuses on using the opponents strength to gain control of them. Philosophy-driven, it emphasises on physical mastery and the dynamics of movement. The Aikido being taught here is of the Aikikai style, a variation headed by Morihiro Ueshiba, the grandson of the originator, Morihei Ueshiba. Besides free hand, training also involves the use of a wooden stick to represent the sword or knife.

KARATE The word is a combination of two Japanese characters, kara and te, which means 'empty hand'. According to Kubat, weapons were not allowed in Japan in the past so the Japanese trained themselves to fight without any or through the use of farm tools.

THAI KICKBOXING Highly popular here, perhaps due to the close proximity of its country of origin. It allows knee and elbow strokes, throws and trips but not wrestling.

SAN SHOU KICKBOXING Kickboxing without elbow and knee strokes but allows wrestling.

WUSHU Literally translated to mean 'military art' in Chinese, this form of self-defence today has a place in the Olympic Games besides being a Chinese performance art. It involves a range of acrobatic patterns with emphasis on the aesthetics of movement, agility and flexibility, thus making it more difficult to master.

TAI CHI Derived from Taoism and based on the concept of Yin and Yang, this martial art from ancient China is gentle and focuses on slow, fluid, circular movements. It helps improve the flow of *qi* (life force) to achieve total harmony of the body, mind and spirit.

THE MONTHLY FEE FOR EACH LESSON is RM150 with a registration fee of RM300. Classes are conducted twice a week at an hour-and-a-half per session. Allied Martial Arts Gym is at 38-3, Jln 27/70A, Desa Sri Hartamas, KL. Enquiries can be made at 03-430 1429