

LEISURE



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Nikki Prussy gets physical — merging self defence, high impact aerobics and martial arts — at a Body Works tae bo class.

Getting their kicks

Kicking and punching, fitness enthusiasts are flocking to tae bo

BY SHARON ASCHAIK
Correspondent

There are as many different descriptions of it as there are ways to spell it — a form of self defence, high-energy aerobics, a variation of martial arts.

But everyone who tries it agrees: Tae-bo is the hottest new fitness phenomenon to hit North America.

Taking its name from the martial arts form tai chi (tae) and kick boxing (bo), tae bo is the innovative new fitness program that combines elements of martial arts, kickboxing and aerobics into one complete workout. Its high speed, upbeat pace and emphasis on developing both inner and outer strength help to explain the program's recent surge in popularity, as more and more people are flocking to fitness centres to try it out.

"It's more challenging than regular fitness programs," said Liora Lange, 20. "The movements are better. It's definitely a full workout."

An active participant of the program at the Women's Fitness Centre in Thornhill, Lange said she enjoys the workout because of the

variety of moves and its intense rhythm.

"It's completely different from regular aerobics, which is what I like, because you're not just doing the same thing all the time. It's actually a lot of fun."

Tae bo is the invention of American martial arts expert and fitness trainer to the stars Billy Blanks, whose workout program is available in Canada. His four instructional videos stress a variety of martial arts maneuvers, punches and kicks, all carried out to a fast-paced dance beat.

The workout routine has established its presence in Canadian fitness circles, spawning a number of similar exercise programs offered at local gyms and health fitness centres.

"They love it. They like the feeling of power within them, plus there's a little bit of self-defence in it, so it gives them a feeling of self-empowerment," said aerobics instructor Sharna Florence, who teaches the class at Women's Fitness Centre.

She said the public response has been so overwhelming at the centre that classes have

been boosted from three to five a week, with further increases being considered to accommodate growing demand.

Florence said the appeal of the program has to do with its spiritual flavour, which highlights both strength of body and mind. It also integrates different fitness forms into a generalized, simplified format, which she believes will enable tae bo to endure beyond fad status.

"I think it does have staying power because over the last couple of years boxing and kick boxing have become more popular, so tying it all into one class and not using equipment makes it a little more appealing to the general public, to the average person," Florence said.

But while the tae bo workout has taken its grip on the Canadian fitness scene, the American version has raised safety concerns.

The fitness industry in Canada, which is self-regulated, follows general safety standards and guidelines of certification programs. The concern lies with the martial arts component of the program, which some believe is unsuit-

Billy Blanks puts up a fight

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

A Thornhill fitness studio has no intention of canceling its tae bo classes, despite being approached by a lawyer representing Billy Blanks to stop using the trademarked phrase.

Body Works Rehab & Fitness International has become one of many facilities across Canada to receive a warning from Toronto law firm Deeth Williams Wall, asking them to refrain from using the term tae bo to advertise and promote their classes.

Created 25 years ago by Blanks, the California fitness guru trademarked the name tae bo and began marketing his tough workout last year through infomercials.

Today, the craze has swept across North America through a series of four videotapes Blanks sells for about \$80.

And with only a handful of tae bo master instructors certified at the Billy Blanks World Training Centre in Sherman Oaks, Calif., Blanks is attempting to weed out any clubs that market an aerobics class by using the name tae bo or any similar phrase.

However, Body Works manager Isaac Levy said since his business opened in September 1997, tae bo classes have helped get people off the couch and enjoying the benefits of a class taught by Gary Dee, a third degree karate black belt aerobic instructor and former three-time karate champion.

Classes have swelled over the past several months with participants paying between \$4 and \$10 to take part in the one-hour sessions.

"We have taught martial arts aerobics since we opened the place and we are teaching the same thing now except people just know it by tae bo. I could call it jump bo, because no matter what I call it, it would still be here," explained a frustrated Levy.

"Billy Blanks claims he invented the name tae bo, but we claim he didn't invent the moves. Does he advertise the crap out of it? Absolutely. If he wants royalties off of it, we don't have a problem with that. The name is patent pending in Canada and I am going to challenge that because we are not going to back down."

See MARTIAL, page 21.

See BODY, page 21.

BIG XTRA! MEAL \$3.99



**Mother's Day
Sunday, May 9th**



McDonald's Restaurants in Markham are planning a special 1st Mother's Day For Angelina Mullings

Angelina was involved in a car accident the day after her son Kennedy was born at Markham Stouffville Hospital. Angelina sustained major injuries in the accident which also claimed the life of her husband Steve. Both Kennedy and Angelina are home in Stouffville and trying to build their lives. On Mother's Day, Sunday, May 9th, 4 McDonald's locations will donate 50¢ from every Medium, Large or Super Size French Fry sold that day. In addition cash or cheque donations will be welcomed and forwarded to the Mullings and Baby Trust Fund. This will be Angelina's first Mother's Day and is also her birthday, please join us and help make her special day a little brighter.

Participating McDonald's locations:

Hwy. #7 & McCowan 7600 Kennedy Road Hwy. #7 & Warden Hwy. #48 & 16th Avenue