

Mixed martial arts highly publicized in Japan

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It was like hitting a brick wall. "Good," he said. "Again." After a few repetitions, Mr. Newton showed me how to kick. Weight on my back leg, spring forward, pivot. Bang. My foot made contact with his leg. "Look at this, Terry," Mr. Newton called to his trainer. "She's getting the hang of it." "Now, grab my head between your arms and squeeze with your elbows. Like this." I found myself locked in his vise-like grip, staring at my feet. My hair, carefully tied back in a ponytail, was flying everywhere. OK, this is war. I grabbed the ultimate fighting champion by the head and squeezed with all my might.

What was that sound? Cries of pain, begging for release from my death grip? Nope. He was laughing. "Excellent," Mr. Newton said. "Good grip. Now bring your knees up across your body and into my head." I was really starting to get into this. The grappling, the kicking, the punching. Warrior is one of the few places to offer courses in mixed martial arts, a unique blend of kickboxing, hapkido and jiu-jitsu grappling. The course is designed to give students total self-defence competence, whether a confrontation is stand-up, clinch or on the ground. The course is taught by a team of expert instructors work-

ing together to build total fighters. Although the sport receives little coverage in Canada, it is highly publicized in Japan. Mr. Newton is a household name there and has even been immortalized in an ultimate fighting championship video game for Sony PlayStation. And I was kicking him as hard as I could. Mr. Newton called Jennifer and Terry Riggs over to watch as I combined all the moves I had learned into a full-out assault on my instructor. Jab, soft jab, pow, pivot, kick, grab the head, knee, knee, knee, knee, jab to the head, undercuts to the chest and then the finishing blow. Breathing heavily but grinning from ear to ear, I bowed to

the applause and let myself pretend I really had just defeated the ultimate fighting champion for his title. And now, fighting out of the blue corner, weighing in at 140 lbs, the ultimate fighting champion of the galaxy ... Amy "the Enforcer" West ...

For information on mixed martial arts, visit www.warrior-mac.com. *Been There, Done That* is a regular column highlighting the exploits of staff who try to keep up with experts in a wide variety of recreational activities.

Lack of court time limits memberships

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at the Armadale Community Centre Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays 8 to 10 p.m. for adults and Mondays to Fridays noon to 1:30 p.m. for all ages. A good segment of the response, she said, has come from the Asian community. "We've had a good response to our direct programs that we offer." While it's encouraging to see the sport find a strong following in Markham, one of the difficulties in the region is court time. This gave Jennifer Lee the impetus to find a place to cater to her needs. In 1996, she found warehouse space in Markham where she could operate classes on her own time throughout the year. Housed in an 8,500-square-foot converted warehouse area, Lee's Badminton Training Centre has five courts, two of which were just added in December, a weight room, pro shop and lounge.

"It wasn't convenient for me to run my classes in high school gyms because I only had one or two nights a week available and when there were holidays we couldn't use the gym. This (her current facility) is easier for my budget," she said. Operating seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Sundays until 8 p.m., Ms Lee says she has 200 to 300 members from all over Toronto and surrounding areas ranging in age from six to 74. With such a spectrum of badminton enthusiasts, Ms Lee stages a number of leagues and clinics for members. "We teach people how to play badminton. We have recreational play, competitive team training and classes for beginners and even classes for ladies in the mornings," said Ms Lee, a junior and senior national team badminton player in Hong Kong before emigrating to Canada in 1985 and a former provincial senior team player in British Columbia. Ms Lee is proud of her

school's ability to develop players who wish to play the game at a highly competitive level. She currently has three international-calibre players at her centre, along with another 10 youths at a national standard and 36 youths and adults competing at the provincial level. "Our kids' standards are getting higher and higher," she said. While Ms Lee has found a happy solution to her problem, other clubs have difficulty accommodating players and acquiring adequate playing time. In its third year of operation, the Unionville Badminton Club has access to the Father Michael McGivney Academy gymnasium twice a week in the evenings. Club president Vivian Wong said the club, with 100 members of varying ages, is at capacity. "If I had more court time, I could make the club bigger," she said. "I have lots of people calling me, constantly asking if they can join, but I have to say, I'm sorry because I have a full membership," she said.

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