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 Monday, April 5, 2004
Brazilian martial art finds
new fitness audience

By Richard Brand
 KRT CAMPUS
 The percussion rhythm slows to a crawling beat, and two men playfully twirl their bodies, reacting to one another's moves as if dancing. The beat quickens, the percussion becomes more aggressive. And in a flash, a kick cracks the air and knocks one of the men to the ground, gasping.
 This is Brazilian capoeira, in which beauty explodes into violence. But this scene isn't being played out on the wharfs of Bahia or the favelas of Rio de Janeiro. Rather, it's happening at South Florida gymnasiums, where to the beat of the berimbau drum, a growing number of men and women are discovering the centuries-old martial art.
 Fueled by a growing Brazilian population and by members of the fitness set who are finding that sparring to music is a fun way to get buff, capoeira is becoming popular in South Florida and across the country.
 "There's a special energy in capoeira that you can't get in other places," said Joe Martine, 32, who practices at a gym in Pompano Beach, Fla. "You have the infectious beat of the instruments. It is a release. This is the only sexy martial art."
 "I have a lot of energy, and I wanted to get it out of my system," said John Mancuso, 25, a mechanic.

Although capoeira has recently become popular with non-Brazilians, the martial art has grown in Florida along with the Brazilian population. For many Brazilian immigrants, capoeira is a way to maintain a connection to home. Patty Silva, 40, of Coconut Creek, started capoeira classes two years ago, after returning from a visit to her family in Bahia, capoeira's cultural home.
 "I had always been exposed to it in Brazil, and I never tried it," she said. "When I went to visit Brazil the last time, there was this whole reawakening culture thing. I wanted something that would keep me close to my roots and my culture, speaking my language."
 Still, Silva, who works in a medical office, said it's the tough workout that keeps her coming back four nights a week to train.
 "It's like nothing I've ever done before. I've done yoga, aerobics and jujitsu. But this is something I really stuck with," Silva said. "At my age, with two children, nothing can stimulate me more than this."

Capoeira's roots in Afro-Brazilian culture are deep and rich.
 Long practiced in Bahia, one of Brazil's poorest yet culturally important states, capoeira's specific origins are elusive. Some historians say it was transplanted from Angola by slaves, dating back to pre-colonial times. Others say capoeira is a more modern creation, the product of a confluence of cultures in 18th-century Bahia.

GIGS
 For all those expecting Ludacris to rock Reed Arena and enliven the College Station hip-hop scene last Thursday, the performance was a surprising letdown.
 Rumors ran rampant all week about the possible "special guests" hinted at in the advertisements for the show, but the guest performers concertgoers were treated to were far less than special. That's right: no Chingy, no Li'l John and no other high-profile performers. Fans were lucky Ludacris even showed up.
 But it gets worse. Apparently unable to book any sort of solid opening act, Ludacris was preceded by two Bryan rap groups: Essential Shame and Players By Choice. Of the two opening acts, only Players By Choice was bearable; Essential Shame's performance was, well, shameful.
 And as if that wasn't enough, Candy 95.1 DJ "Tic-Tac" was the master of ceremonies for the event, constantly making jokes no one laughed at and at one point humping the stage floor in an apparent attempt at dancing. Needless to say, this did little to get the crowd excited, and audience members were openly mocking him.
 More than two hours into the three-hour show, Ludacris finally showed up. His 50-minute performance wasn't bad, but he had his backup music, complete with his own lyrics, playing in the background during most of his songs. So at times it was hard to hear or understand Ludacris because his own back-

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