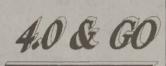
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# Brazilian martial art finds new fitness audience

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 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.

But in Brazil, popular folklore and an son on the street will tell you that capoen developed by African slaves who, barrel having weapons, learned to disguise & kicks within the seemingly innocuous m

"Capoeira is an expression of freedom" Bira Almeida, a Brazilian capoeira master lives in California and is the author "Capoeira: A Brazilian Art Form." touched both runaway slaves and those who the No secuted them, from unsophisticated por ball te intellectuals, from vagrants and those of the mainstream society to workers, students Stillwar politicians. It fulfills many people's questa' With

It's the romantic version of history, if many historians say is partly true, that in so many to embrace the martial art.

South Beach capoeira instructor (prompt Carneiro, 34, a tall, muscular Brazilian wears his hair in a bun above his head, said when he opened his school 10 years ago, ir a dozen students. Today, he has 250 student two our two gyms.

"It's growing like crazy," says Camer ing stin familiar face from fight movies such as Quest," in which he threw capoeira sue opposite Jean-Claude Van Damme's kidh moves. Carneiro mixes the experts with beginners in his classes.

During a typical lesson last week, even Penni started by stretching out before they moved and sa cardio and strength-building activities liken also we ups and sit-ups. Then the group practiceds plate w long sweeps.

'Be the best!" Carneiro shouts, correcting Baylor students as they go through the drills, which 12 star progressively complicated.

The movement in the class never stops, Housto neither does the Brazilian folk music, white Tuesday turned up full blast. An hour into the session: Field b most of the capoeiristas were drenched in see play in

'You come in and have fun and work out with a two hours without even realizing it," said Re the Univ Baquedano, 21, one of Carneiro's students.

As a beginner, Baquedano's moves an Agg cumbersome and deliberate, and when the sweet ring begins, she sits out and watches the ent go at one another.

Indeed, beginners are not supposed to it When they do spar, they are required to dis the dance-like moves they've learned with hitting one another. Back flips are a Sunday macaus, roundhouse kicks are chibatas, era Univers moves are esquivas.

Carneiro said he's happy to welcome the 12) did wave of fitness buffs into his gym, allow two-gam them to train in the same room with the "I wa belts. "Many of my students never fight." our pit don't have to," Carneiro said.

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 highprofile 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-

ground vocals were playing too loud. That, of bined with the constant shrieks that pierced le Arena every time a performer walked too closs speaker with his microphone, was enough to many concertgoers leave early. And they did

But the concert had its high points, too. R rapper Shawna, of Ludacris' Disturbing The clique, stole the show, rapping dirty enough to Li'l Kim blush and fast enough to make Twis down. I-20, another member of DTP, also hads hard-edged rhymes laden with violence and use. He even sported a T-shirt proclaiming " THE DEALER.

And Ludacris, though going through motions for most of his songs, wasn't a to disappointment, as he played mostly his rain win in b gles off all three of his albums, going all the back to "What's Your Fantasy," from his innings "Back for the First Time." So the concert was ing out complete loss

All in all, this event will likely do little tom University age more hip-hop acts at Reed Arena, as the Wednes was hardly a sellout and many left 30 minuts Ludacris' performance. As one disgruntled said on his way out, "I can't believe I paid 26h A&N



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