

How To Choose A Martial Arts School

CoconutCreek Life November 2005 Page 27

An Ancient Asian curse states “May your children live in interesting times.” With wars, terrorism, natural disasters, fuel shortages and the stresses and blessings of modern life, our times are at least interesting.

Historically in South Korea (roughly 200 A.D.), codified martial arts initially developed as an educational movement for personal development and self-defense. It was a way to groom leaders, warriors and states-men who then were better prepared to deal with the adversities of leadership and daily life.

In modern times, however, especially during the last 25 years or so, the martial arts have changed dramatically, unfortunately sometimes for the worse. Schools of all types have been popping up all over. In some areas, you can't pass a strip mall without seeing one. There are commercial chain schools, large martial arts and sports training facilities, small family-run schools, schools that appear to be primarily day care centers, classes held at local health clubs or Y.M.C.A.s, recreation complexes, and more. When you're looking to enroll your child or yourself for that matter, you can't help but be confused, wondering if they all offer the same level of expertise. So what's the difference?

Well, the most important thing you need to determine is why would you or your child want to practice martial arts. Is it for the discipline? Is the black belt you've always been interested in? Is it for fitness or the cultural or traditional aspects of the art? Are you interested in competing or is it for the self-defense aspect? And how you answer those questions should determine how you approach the martial arts.

Once you understand what you are really looking for, start looking into the options. Make some phone calls, visit several different schools, find out who actually is and meet them. You have to feel comfortable with your teacher. (Note: Just because a “Grandmaster's” name is on a school, it does not necessarily mean that they teach at that school). Most importantly, look at the students. Do not assume that you or your child will be that one genius who rises above a mediocre curriculum. I recently spoke with Carols Diaz of American Top Team in Coconut Creek and he stated that “In general, you are only as good as the people around you and the tools you have to do the job.” Mr. Diaz is absolutely right. Who you train with and who teaches you are critical in learning proper martial arts. It is important to know that each school or association sets their own standards. Technical competency can vary greatly from school to school, from teacher to teacher.

Regardless of what martial art you select, by mere definition there should be a tactical element. Punching and kicking in the air, breaking boards and yelling does not necessarily equal self-defense. Nor does Tae Bo or cardio-aerobics, which is sometimes labeled as kickboxing, although most cardio-kickboxing programs are excellent for general fitness, real kickboxing or Muay Thai involves a lot of contact training, actual fighting and intense conditioning.

So open the phone book, check the web, go to the library, visit your local martial arts supply store and ask them about area schools. Maybe you know someone who has had a positive training experience-or a negative one.

But whatever you do, don't drive to the school closet to your home and sign a contract without doing some research. In fact, there are still schools out there that don't require you to sign a contract-as well as many city recreation and Y.M.C.A. type programs. And as to which martial art is the best for you, it is the one you will actually practice.