

It is a Monday night and this particular room is nearly filled to the brim with people, all of them eagerly awaiting another grueling training session.

From the outside, there is nothing that really suggests that this is a place where something special is going on. However, looks can be deceiving.

Inside, surrounded by walls covered with blue foam padding, about thirty people are shuffling in place, their feet rhythmically tapping against the gym mats that line the length of the floor.

Each person is paired up with a partner, one of whom is holding up a Thai pad (a small pad worn around the arm) up into the air for the other to hit while both shuffle around each other at a fast speed.

"Hit!" A voice suddenly bellows out. A loud cracking sound reverberates across the room as fifteen fists simultaneously hit the Thai pads that are being held up by their partners.

Drooping from the ceiling, the heavy boxing bags creak and sway just slightly from all of the combined activity.

"C'mon guys ... Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee!" The voice-tinged with a Japanese accent-says this near to the point of laughter.

The voice belongs to Haru Shimanishi, head instructor and founder of the Mixed Martial Arts training facility, Hawai'i Martial Arts Center Academy.

One would only need a momentary glance at most of the students to see why Haru says this in such a joking manner. Most of the thirty students have come to this beginning boxing class straight from either work or school and are already somewhat fatigued.

The students are doing a drill designed to enhance their footwork, and are looking very much like ... well ... like beginners actually.

"C'mon, dance, dance like Ali ... like Joe Louis!" Haru yells out jokingly again. Almost as a direct response to this one student's stumbles, tripping over his own feet. Haru notices the student struggling and comes over to help correct him while another instructor takes his place. He shows him the correct way to per-

# Just for Kicks

Stories by Jason Ordenstein

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form the drill and then moves on to correct another student.

Haru and the other instructors at HMC have trained fighters who have had success in shows like Hawaii's premier MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) event, Superbrawl.

Today though, considering that most of the people here are beginners they are being trained at a considerably less demanding regimen than what the amateur and professional fighters would have to endure.

Looking around I notice that alongside most of the adult male students there are a couple of female students, some children of about 11, and also some students who are over the age of 50.

After the drill the class is over, and everyone seems relieved. Some students are already hunched over nearly completely out of breath. Most beginners say the same thing about training MMA for the first couple of times.

The conditioning is what surprised them the most. It is one thing to have good running cardio (cardiovascular endurance), but it's

another thing entirely to have good boxing/kick-boxing cardio or even good grappling cardio.

Most of the students train purely for the excellent workout that they get.

This is just the beginning though. Three more classes remain for the night: Beginning Kick-Boxing, Wrestling and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (A submissions based Martial Art).

Surprisingly, everyone stays for the rest of the classes. It's clear that everyone is having a lot of fun doing this. A lot of people here are already fans of the sport of MMA and are eager to learn the same techniques that their favorite fighters utilize in events such as, the UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship), Pride (extremely popular Japanese based organization), and of course, Superbrawl.

In a later class, after talking with some of the beginning and advanced students I find out (to my surprise) that although everyone here, now has the ability to defend themselves adequately (compared to the average person), most would simply back

down from any physical confrontation they encountered.

In fact, I am surprised at the overall humility of everyone here. As the beginners are eager to learn, the professional and amateur fighters are conversely eager to teach the beginning students as well.

As a result of this interaction, the beginners learn at a fast rate. Some students look like polished fighters in both striking and grappling, even though they've only been training for a few weeks.

It appears that having this physical knowledge has made a lot of these students inwardly confident. They have no need to prove themselves on "the street," nor do they have the desire to. If they do want to test their skills out, they only prefer to do so against other highly trained opponents in a sporting environment.

At the end of the night the remaining students mop the gym mats with disinfectant. I notice that a couple of the heavy boxing bags are still gently swaying from all of the hammering they took tonight.

As I'm watching this, I began to contemplate about the more aggressive aspects of the Hawaiian culture. Hawai'i has long had a culture where warfare and violence was fostered. This arose almost as a necessity and was very common in any island culture where resources were limited.

Even today Hawai'i can be described as having a very "tough," or "macho" culture. The disproportionate number of quality MMA gyms in Hawaii's small population, reflects this further. Some people in Hawai'i prefer to settle their differences physically.

If there is one thing that I've learned from observing these training sessions, it is that there are a lot of people on this island who you truly do not want to get into a physical confrontation with.

They are also nearly impossible to visually single out, particularly since their humble demeanor belies their true abilities.

So, I give a warning to those who walk around with a big ego and a lot of pride: You never know. You never know, who among us, young or old, male or female, is actually one of these humble, highly trained, modern-day warriors.

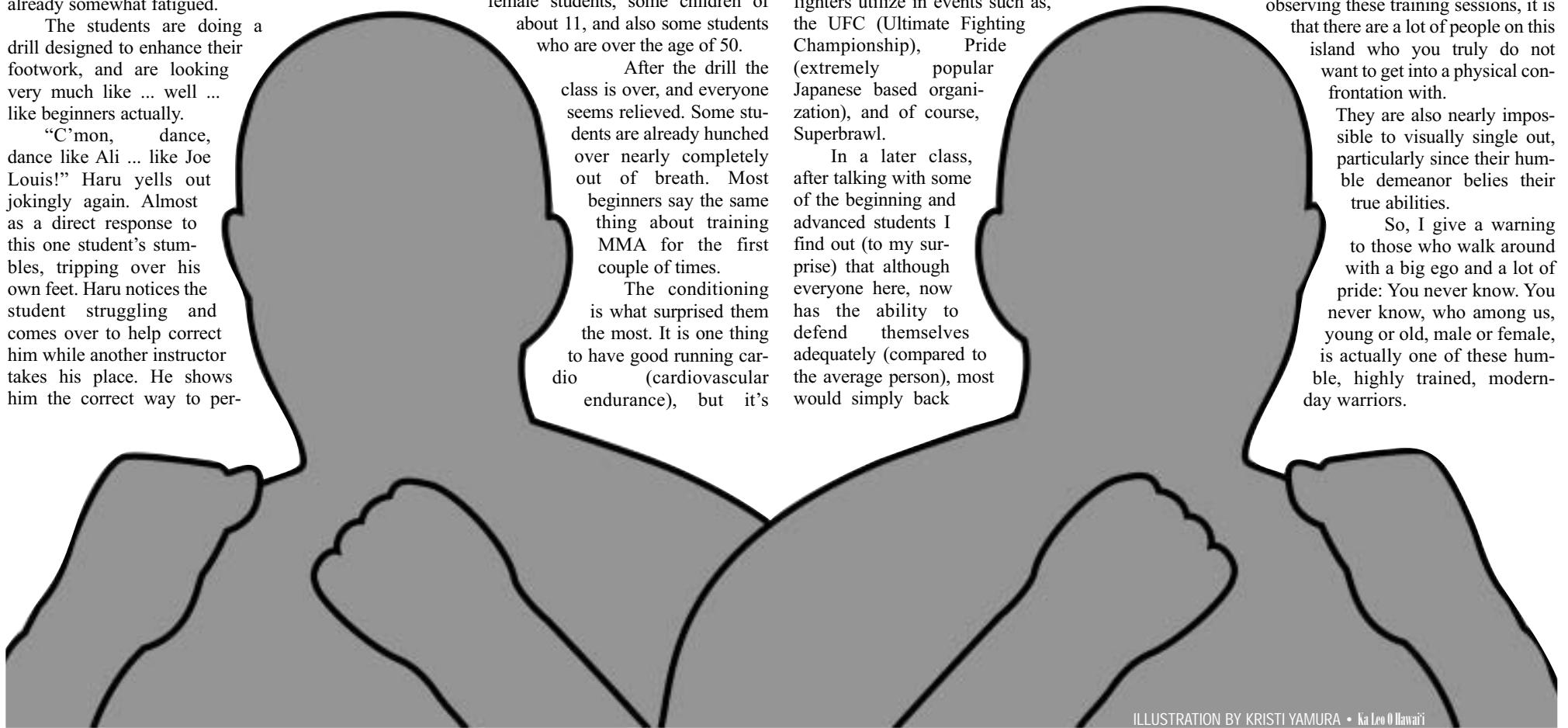


ILLUSTRATION BY KRISTI YAMURA • Ka Leo O Hawai'i

## Mixing it up with a martial arts instructor

Haru Shimanishi is the head instructor of the Mixed Martial Arts Gym (MMA), HMC Academy. Originally from Japan, his background as a trainer is extensive, having taught all over the world.

He has trained many professional fighters, including former kick boxing champions Dennis Alexio and Maurice Smith. Along with former MMA competitor Matt Hume he cofounded one of the most nationally famous MMA gyms, AMC Pankration.

I managed to sit down and talk with Haru and was able to listen to a number of his thoughts on his background, gym, life in Hawai'i and the sport of MMA itself.

Haru is bilingual and still speaks with a slight Japanese accent, but talks with the same type of eagerness and enthusiasm that he has

when he's training his students. Here are some of his thoughts:

**Q:** How did you first get involved with Martial Arts?

**A:** I came from very poor family. I wanted to do lot of things. I wanted to learn guitar lessons, but-couldn't afford it ... I wanted to learn painting, but-couldn't afford it. At the police station, they had a Kenpo program, and it was free. I did a little bit of Judo, but at the same time I did a little bit of Kenpo, and that's how I got started ... seven years old.

**Q:** Why did you become a trainer?

**A:** After I seriously injured my shoulder and neck competing, people told me that I should teach. I soon realized that I really, really

like to teach. I feel that ... It's like I giving to people, and it made me ... so happy! So it made me high to see a person get better.

**Q:** How did you get involved with Mixed Martial Arts?

**A:** After training Maurice Smith for Japanese events like Pancrase. I met with Matt and Todd Hume, and I helped train them for their MMA events in Japan. Later we meet other people who want to fight. ... I met Kimo, from Hawai'i, and he trained with us for a year. Then, me and Matt, we created the first amateur sanctioning. We created the rules and regulations, made the license system ... Later, everybody copy us, our rules, what we set up. This was about 1990, about three years before UFC (Ultimate Fighting

Championships) started in America.

**Q:** Did you know that MMA was going to be popular, especially in Japan, when it was just starting out?

**A:** Yes, because I knew the Japanese always do that. They were doing MMA in the Pro-Wrestling for a long time. Back in the 1930s and 40s even in America, the Pro-wrestlers were all doing MMA, they were all seriously fighting. But they had to take away all the striking, because those fighters cannot fight the next week, so they had to take it away. Then people started to break arm or something by accident, because they only doing submissions all the time, so they started to move more into the entertainment, like what it is today.

**Q:** What attracted you to Hawai'i, what made you want to open up a gym here?

**A:** I always come back and forth to Hawai'i, for training and to help Superbrawl get started. We help them a lot in the in the beginning, we help them use the sanctioning rules that we set up in Washington. Then I met with Dennis Alexio and then trained him. So I was always back and forth here.

Always I knew ... someday I'm going to live here. It's my kind of people, my kind of weather, my kind of food, my kind of women. But, the main reason is surfing. Every time I go back to Washington, where I was living,