

Knock yourself out

More women are discovering the fitness benefits of the sweet science

BY CAROL FORGET

Britney Spears does it. Mia Saunders, Amelia Heinle's character on "All My Children," uses it to work through her man issues, while it seems only natural that Laila Ali would take it up.

But boxing isn't just for image-conscious pop stars, scrappy soap divas or daughters of former heavyweight champions. Women — who outnumber men at the gym and take more fitness classes — are boxing to lose weight and unwind.

Bruno N.R. Alves, an accounts manager for Title Boxing, a boxing-equipment supplier, says 10% to 15% of his gloves are sold to women — a noticeable increase over just the past couple years. He saw boxing cross over to mainstream fitness five years ago, when Michael Olajide Jr., a former middleweight champion, and others, advertised their videos on TV.

"Women started using the workout side of boxing," said Alves. The latest indication of this trend will be found at the YWCA at 610 Lexington Ave. early next year, when a much-requested boxing program will be launched.

Some women come to boxing for self-defense. But Eileen Kuwaye Olszewski, a personal trainer at Crunch who competes in world boxing championships, discourages notions that it's anything but a science, an art and a sport. "It doesn't translate very well to the street," said Olszewski. "Nobody's going to square off with you and go rounds."

But most box for fitness. Fran Wald, 65, used to throw her back out when she carried a bag of groceries. She had led an academic's sedentary life, and she battled with her weight constantly. Six years ago, she started boxing. "I wanted to be in control of my body," said Wald, who found jumping rope an interesting cardio workout that also increased her bone density.

Three years ago, the fit, petite Wald be-

came a trainer. Today, she inspires her clients by showing them photos of her former self.

"You've got to do boxing with somebody who's going to look at your form and make sure it's good," she said.

Ricardo Andre, founder of the core boxing program at World Gym, is passionate about teaching the average person the fundamentals of boxing technique. He insists it's also fun — and an incredible workout. His trainers are certified by the National Academy of Sports Medicine or the National Fitness Trainers Association, so they have a firm understanding of body mechanics.

In Andre's program, trainers design a program that takes into account lifestyle, endurance, flexibility, conditioning and strength. Core boxing goes way beyond cardio exercise, incorporating resistance training, flexibility, balance, rhythm and coordination. "Box for six weeks and you won't believe how much weight you lose," said Andre.

For living proof of Andre's claims, look no further than Isabel Perez, 30. The 5-foot-4 Perez wasn't getting the desired result from her regular regimen, so Andre suggested boxing. "It's a total body workout," said Perez. In 10 months, after boxing three times a week and weight training twice a week, she went from 198 pounds to 130.

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

On a recent Tuesday evening, 14 World Gym members (12 women and two men) took a boxing class with Krudner (J.R.) Fiote Jr., and Ronson Frank. A CD pumped out R&B while trim twenty- and thirty-somethings in shorts, T-shirts and sport

TOUGH GLOVE: Women come out fighting during a core boxing workout at World Gym on Mercer St.



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tops whipped the yellow paint off the floor with their jump ropes. After 10 minutes of stretches, squats, pushups, jumping jacks and lunges, bodies were shiny with sweat. Some boxers took short breaks, while others towed off and drank water as needed. "Let's go!" shouted Fiote, keeping the energy high.

After more calisthenics and some shadow boxing, Frank led the group through a variety of crunches. Halfway through the hour, it was time to box. The trainers circulated, winding cloth wraps and lacing up gloves.

"For three minutes they get their energy out," said Fiote as the class found places at the heavy bags and punched. Then he called out combinations, "Left, right, one left, two rights now, jab, double-

cross." Next, he and Frank sparred with students, and ended with pushups, jumping jacks and a stretch.

"I walk out feeling like a new person," said Julie D'Ambruso, 23, who started boxing in 2002 to combat the stress of law school. She admitted that the day after her first class she was too sore to walk. Now, she's recruiting. "I'm going to bring my mom next week."

For more information:
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