



Learning karate. . .

Bob Boggs, black belt karate instructor at center, gives some tips to class members in self-defense techniques covered in a Parks and Recreation department class held recently on karate. All class participants were women.

'Hyah!' Olathe women learn karate!

By LINDA PENNER
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As I watched the 12 girls in the white pajama outfits of karate students pair off to do what looked like a tortuously painful exercise, a grimace of sympathy must have crossed my face.

"You should have heard the groans the first time they tried that," laughed Lyndi Ramsey, Parks and Recreation department secretary who has been observing the department sponsored karate course for women since it began six weeks ago.

The exercising partners were performing an extraordinary leg muscle stretching routine with faces that registered no pain. Some of the young women facing each other in pairs were even smiling as one of the partners kneeled down while the other placed an outstretched leg on the kneeling partner's shoulder.

My vicarious pain began as I

saw the kneeling women slowly begin to ascend to a standing position—apparently standing just as straight as the pain thresholds of their partners would allow. Once they reached that stopping point, the torturing partner began to bounce slowly up and down, stretching the torturee's leg muscles just a little bit further.

The exercise was then repeated with the other leg, followed by the partners changing positions and beginning the entire procedure again.

This was just one of a number of exercises which the female karate students have gone through twice each week at Millbrooke junior high school for the six-weeks of the Parks and Recreation department course.

Their reasons for enrolling in the course are as varied as their occupations. Of the 12 students enrolled, three were police department employes, while others included a social worker, a

secretary, and several housewives.

Why enroll in a karate class? "I just thought it sounded interesting," said one young woman.

"The physical and mental discipline," responded another.

"It's definitely good exercise," commented still another. "It's amazing how much better shape we're in than when we first began."

Interestingly enough, self-defense was mentioned only in passing by the women as an initial reason for enrolling in the course, but all were enthusiastic about the self-defense techniques they had learned.

Bob Boggs of Olathe, 24-year-old black belt instructor of the course, had nothing but praise for the women.

"Women learn a lot faster than men," he said. "I think they'd be surprised if they realized how much they really have picked up!

"The women have learned

enough so that their karate could help them in a situation of self-defense if the occasion would arise," he said. One advantage a woman has in using her karate, he added, is that when a man attacks a woman he doesn't expect her to try to combat the attack.

Boggs and his assistant Greg Barstow, Gardner, teach an Okinawan style of karate known as "kenpo".

The irony of karate, Boggs said, lies in the fact that although it is a marshall art, it is not belligerent or destructive. Manners and courtesy are definitely involved with the rituals of karate.

From the "kata", a formal "make-believe fighting" exercise, students learn balance, sharpen reflexes, and polish karate technique. The sharp karate movements executed rhythmically in the "kata" are self-defense techniques which

could be dangerous if an assailant were involved.

The fighting turned from a make-believe exercise to the real thing when the girls learned actual self-defense techniques. How to combat an attacker grabbing the unsuspecting victim around the neck from behind, holding a gun to the back of the neck, or pulling a gun on the victim face to face were among the actual fighting techniques taught.

Whether or not the women will ever have opportunity to use their karate is not known—they hope, of course, that they won't ever have to.

But if the leg-stretching exercises I saw are any indication of how fast and hard the students can now kick, assailants beware!