

Sport

Fighting fit

Edited by
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The **ultimate fighting** pros arrive in the city this month. We sent *Oliver Robinson* to look at the amateur scene

To be honest, I don't get UFC. From what I've seen of the sport, it appears to consist of little more than two half-naked men wriggling around on the floor. Boxing, on the other hand, is a sport I get: two men, 12 rounds, one gets knocked out, the other wins. Easy. However, it appears that the noble art of pugilism is no longer enough to sate the appetite of your modern-day martial arts fan. They want to watch wriggling. That is to say, they want to watch the Ultimate Fighting Championships (UFC); the fastest growing sport on the planet.

In the US alone, UFC viewing figures have skyrocketed by 106 per cent over the past couple of years, a trend which is being reflected, albeit on a smaller scale, across the globe, from the UK to Australia to Japan. That mixed martial arts have found their way to the shores of the UAE was inevitable. Abu Dhabi hosts what looks to be the first of many UFC bouts on April 10 (see p30 for details).

If the television viewing figures were anything to go by, it was only a

matter of time before the whole world embraces UFC. And if I didn't want to be left on the wayside in terms of water-cooler small talk, I'd have to shake the notion that UFC was a (slightly) less camp version of American wrestling and start taking it more seriously.

As luck would have it, the good people at Original Fitness have

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recently set up MMA Boot Camp right here in the capital. Since there's no better way to embrace a sport than having a go at it yourself, I decided to don an Airtex and a pair of pumps, and head over to Zalamat Gardens to see what all the fuss was about.

I arrived to find a carefully contrived course of cones and

began to swell. If girls could do it, then how hard could it be?

I soon found out.

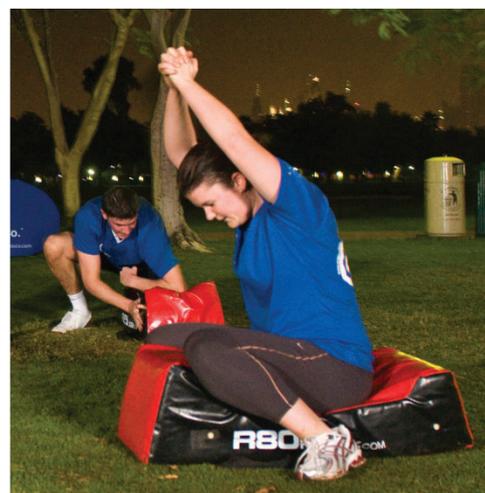
Proceedings started off with a gentle jog around the park followed by a slightly more strenuous weave through cones and over running ladders. And then onto the sparring pads; ten jabs, ten hooks, and ten uppercuts. After the first set, I could barely lift my arms, let alone land a good right hook. I had little time to rest – before I knew it, I was straddling and pummeling the pad, while Corey urged us on with tough love; barking out nonsensical references to the ground and British currency. Then it was back to the grid for push ups, squats, thrusts – every imaginable exercise working previously unimagined muscles.

Back to the pads. By now my eyes were stinging from sweat or tears or

both. I would have tried to make a run for it if my legs weren't crippled with lactic acid. More punching. Alongside me were the girls whose presence had previously filled me with such foolish bravado. They worked over the pads with a frightening ferocity, while I could only muster a succession of limp-wristed sort of swipes.

It was relentless. It was exhausting. It was brilliant.

After 45 minutes of



sheer pain, I collapsed in pure physical elation. Not only had I spent one less evening festering in the cold glow of the television, but I was beginning to understand the attraction of the UFC. It's not simply a vicious scrap, but a technical, versatile sport that requires fighters to utilise a number of different martial arts (to name but a few: boxing, muay thai, judo, ju-jitsu) while maintaining immense fitness levels. The future of competitive fighting, it seems, is more than just a camp wriggle.

Original Fitness Company holds MMA Boot Camp every Monday and Wednesday in Zalamat Garden (behind The Hilton Hotel). Dhs90 per session, Dhs600 per month for eight sessions. For more information, call 02 406 9404 or see www.originalfitnessco.com

Right. So, just to be sure, we're not getting beaten up?

'After this, you'll feel like you've been beaten up,' chirped another student, who to my relief didn't look like much of an ultimate fighter. And there were even girls! My confidence