

The ultimate fight club

Are ultimate fighting classes really as terrifying as they sound? *Becky Lucas* investigates

'Ground and pound after I call your name!' yells Corey Oliver, the muscle-bound managing director of Original Fitness Company (OFC), before he calls the register. It's 7.30pm on a Monday night and I've rushed to Safa Park straight from the office to brave one of OFC's new mixed martial arts fitness classes. They're apparently based on the same training principles as the now internationally popular Ultimate Fighting Championship, a hardcore US-based martial arts tournament. I'm petrified. And my name has been called first.

'What does that mean?' I ask timidly. Do I have to hit the floor and do 20 already? Fortunately Corey ignores my ignorance and continues down the register. 'Ground and pound!' squeals the next lady, evidently not a newbie. The other men and women around me titter before shouting out the same. So far, so manageable – but I'm not letting my guard down yet, for two reasons. First, Corey founded Dubai's original boot camp a couple of years back, and I vividly remember his terrifying squadron-leader approach. Second, I've seen a little of the Ultimate Fighting Championship on cable TV. It seems to mostly involve men with bulging biceps either pinning each other to the ground or throwing each other across a ring.

'New girls – I can see you're looking nervous,' Corey says to my two brave friends and I. 'But you needn't be. If you feel weak or need to take a break, just stop and catch your breath for a minute at any point.' Eh? This is not the same Corey who piled on 20 extra sit-ups if you dared to smile during boot camp. Looking around, the rest of the group – all of various shapes and sizes – don't look like the kind of people to chuck each other across the grass by their ankles either. My nerves begin to ebb.

That is, until an incredibly fit-looking South African by the name of Zaid Gerber (a member of the Emirates mixed martial arts and jiu-jitsu teams) leads us into our warm-up. After ordering us to jog then complete 50 star jumps, he gives us 10 seconds to grab a swig of water. I wait for the



As we complete a minute of sparring, we all imagine someone's face we'd like to maul



punishments to be doled out when we all take about 30. None come. My stomach settles a little more.

Then the fun begins. We partner up, pull on boxing gloves or pads and complete a minute of sparring at increasing speed. Obviously we all imagine someone's face we'd like to maul. The minute flies by, powering us straight into the circuits part of the session. Broken into four sections, we spend five minutes on each area of the body: upper, lower, combo and core, all to the beat of whatever motivational pop-rock is blaring out of Corey's stereo (Kelly Clarkson is a surprise inclusion). The exercises are a mix of your average circuit training – burpees, sit-ups and suicide runs – alongside more specialised martial art skills, including punching and kicking the life out of padded bags, special turning techniques and, erm, jumping as high as we can. Strangely, Corey continues to walk around, shouting encouraging comments. Is this really the same man I once knew?

By the warm-down we're relieved it's over, but not (and I probably shouldn't reveal this to Corey) utterly pooped. 'What did you think?' he asks. 'Better than boot camp!' I respond, categorically in the affirmative. 'We're more supportive now,' he says, explaining his new outlook. My friends are so taken that they sign up for more classes on the spot.

I, however, tell him I'll think about it for a couple of days – during which every muscle in my body seems to turn against me. Moving from standing to sitting causes me to unleash unbridled groans; walking can only be accomplished stiffly. So much for taking the first class in my stride. While out and about that weekend, I bump into an old (and considerably buff) friend who happens to have completed UFC training with TSG Dubai MMA, another Dubai company (www.mmadubai.ae). 'That class is so easy!' he scoffs. 'You don't even fight each other!' I put my drink down (with considerable effort) and decide I'm not going to start a fight right now, either. 'I just want to train like a fighter, not become one,' I reply, realising that, mercifully, OFC's fight club is one without any losers.

MMA fitness training classes are held on Mondays and Wednesdays at 7.30pm at Safa Park, gate 2. Dhs90 per session or Dhs600 per month for eight sessions. For info, call 04 313 2081 or see www.originalfitnessco.com

👉 NEXT ISSUE We brush up on our golf skills ahead of the Dubai Desert Classic

