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Advertising

Tae-Bo wakes up Metro Detroit

Fitness fanatics tired of the same, old thing kick into a new habit



Photos by Jack Gruber / The Detroit News

Katie Page of Royal Oak follows instructor Ryan Robison during the Oakland Athletic Club's Tae-Bo-style class, one of several popping up around Metro Detroit as the latest fitness craze.

By Lauralee Ortiz

Special to The Detroit News

It starts with a few simple jabs. Then come the full-on blows. Next, there are uppercuts and a lot of kicking.



It's martial arts, boxing and self-defense all rolled into one hour-long routine that'll have even hard-core fitness fanatics huffing, puffing and rubbing their sore buns.

At least, that's what Tae-Bo — the latest fitness craze to hit Metro Detroit health clubs — is promising. And, according to fitness experts, it's delivering.

Since being introduced as the workout of Hollywood celebrities — first in a four-video series, then on infomercials starring Tae-Bo creator Billy Blanks, a 36-time international karate champion — the high-calorie burning, low-impact routine has become the hot new way to get fit.

Students say it's fun, it's easy and it's a great way to release aggressions. But, they add, the best part about the routine, it that it isn't choreographed aerobics.

Surprising to many area health-club officials who have created their own versions of Tae-Bo in an attempt to draw in couch potatoes and reinspire burnt-out aerobic groups, Tae-Bo is just the kick (and punch) they've been looking for.

"It has a lot of appeal, especially for the baby

Ryan Robison leads a class at Oakland Athletic Club. The gym has been adding classes to keep up with demand.

Ready, set, punch

If you sign up for a Tae-Bo class, here are some tips for getting the most out of it:

- * Start by observing the instructor. Do the warmup stretches, but practice unfamiliar moves slowly until you are comfortable enough to pick up speed. While this is a low-impact class, there's still chance you could pull a muscle by incorrect movements.
- * Concentrate on the muscles that you are working. Form and flexibility will follow soon.
- * Keep elbows high to keep the heart rate up.
- * Tighten your abdomen.
- * Stay on your toes.
- * Don't worry if you feel goofy (especially during donkey kicks). Everybody else does, too. Some of the moves are awkward at first, but before you know it, you'll be swinging — and feeling — like a champ.

boomers who love group exercise but are tired of the same, old thing," says Rena Lewis, director of aerobics and spinning at Oakland Athletic Club in Birmingham.

"It's a good routine for anyone looking to build flexibility and strength."

Her club is among many throughout Metro Detroit that have had to add classes to keep up with the demands of the members.

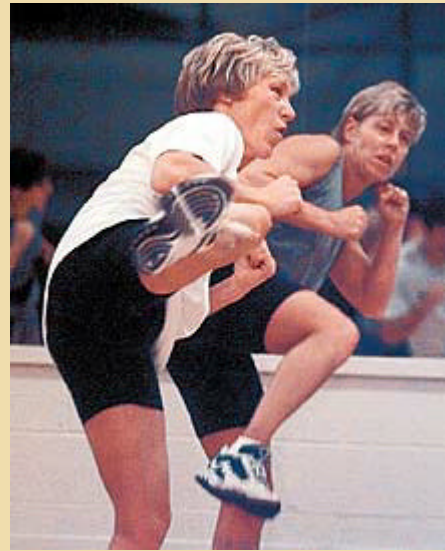
"Our first class had 30 students in it," says Cynthia Best, manager of Oakland Athletic Club of Birmingham. "By the second class, we had 50."

Diana Baird, fitness specialist at Fitness Unlimited in Royal Oak, says the demand caught her club off-guard, forcing them to have to turn people away due to lack of space. Four weeks later, the club has Tae-Bo style classes six times a week.

The appeal, say instructors and their students, is that it's new, different and fun.

Like stepping and sliding and spinning that have come before it, Tae-Bo offers something besides aerobics, which has been around for about 20 years.

Even if it is just the workout fad of the day, they



Kathy Baltz, left, and Julie Boraks, both of Beverly Hills, could burn 600-800 calories during their workout at the Oakland Athletic Club.

Where to go

The following is a partial list of Tae-Bo style classes. Also, check health clubs and martial-arts studios in your area.

* Birmingham Karate Studio
555 S. Old Woodward,
Birmingham
(248) 646-6608

* CMI Health & Tennis Club
30333 Southfield,
Southfield
(248) 646-8990

* Fitness Unlimited
408 S. Lafayette, Royal Oak
(248) 541-2880

* Fitness USA Supercenters
10 locations throughout
Metro Detroit

workout fad of the day, they say they plan to enjoy it until the next craze hits.

"I'm not sure how long it will last," says Nicole Meathe, an avid aerobics fan. "But I like it because it offers me something different."

The 27-year-old Royal Oak resident says she tries most classes at least once. So far, she has been turned off by only one — spinning. The routine that involves group exercises atop a bicycle was not kind to her back side, despite a brand-new gel seat.

Meathe says she and her husband had been working out to Blanks' tapes at home for several weeks before she decided to attend a group session at Oakland Athletic Club. After her first class, she says she was pleased and planned to return in the hopes of getting ab muscles like the ones on the women in Blanks' tapes.

The fact that Tae-Bo style routines are nothing like aerobics is definitely part of the attraction, especially to men, says Barbara Leppert, aerobics director at CMI Health & Tennis Club in Southfield.

It doesn't require fancy footwork, stepping to the left, reaching to the right or any other moves that might closely resemble dancing or take more coordination than some people have.

"This is something where the movements are very basic and simple, but somewhat awkward at first," Leppert says. "It takes a few classes before you get it down, but once you do, you get a great calorie-burning, toning and cardio workout in one 60-minute session."

Dennis May, 43, of Ferndale admits that after being sluggish all winter, he felt a bit winded after his first Tae-Bo style class.

"I got through the aerobic part OK, but I couldn't feel the

Metro Detroit
(248) 356-6700

* Fitnessworks
6525 Second, Detroit
(313) 972-4040

* Oakland Athletic Club of
Birmingham
355 S. Old Woodward
(248) 540-9596

* Pointe Fitness & Training
Center
17243 Mack, Detroit
(313) 885-3600

flexibility that I do now.”

After a faithful three sessions a week for the last month and a half, May says his kicks and his energy level are higher.

The former college athlete says he tried dance-style aerobics but never really got motivated enough to continue. He says he signed up for the Tae-Bo style class out of curiosity. It took little convincing to make him want to return again and again.

“During the first night of Tae-Bo, I knew this was something that I was going to really get into,” he says. “It’s addictive.”

Tae-Bo style classes typically start with a quick warmup of stretching, rolling the neck and shoulders and marching and shuffling. Next come some basic punches and jabs to the front and alternating sides. Now, double time. Just as you think your arms are going to fall off, you squat and jab low, now high, now low. (Come on, you can do it!) Next, you add some front snap kicks (lift the bent leg high before snapping it at the knee), now side kicks, back kicks and more front kicks.

Among the greatest hidden benefits is the abdominal workout from all the twisting and flexing.

Louder and faster music is the cue to pick up the pace. Punch harder, faster, kick higher, higher, higher. Before you know it, you’ll think you are Bruce Lee or Jean-Claude Van Damme.

But, Lewis warns, be careful that you don’t kick or punch the people around you.

The Tae-Bo concept is the same no matter where you take the class, but expect variations with each instructor. Those with aerobics training will likely try to keep their classes in beat with the music. Others with backgrounds in martial arts might concentrate more on the style of the punching and kicking.

Either way, expect to burn anywhere from 600 to 800 calories by the end of an hour-long workout.

Don't be fooled by substitutes

Don't confuse the latest Billy Blanks Tae-Bo collection with *Tae Boxing With Billy Blanks*, a workout video that was filmed years before the martial-arts champion designed the specific Tae-Bo techniques. The official Billy Blanks Tae-Bo Video Library includes only four tapes. They are: *Tae-Bo Instructional Video*, *Basic Tae-Bo Workout Video*, *Advanced Tae-Bo Workout Video* and *8-Minute Tae-Bo Workout Video*. It is available for mail order at www.taebo.com. Dick's Clothing & Sporting Goods and Target also carry them. But, fitness experts say that you're probably better off learning Tae-Bo in a group setting with a qualified instructor.

Talk back

Tae-Bo is the hottest new fitness craze. Are you considering or have you already changed your workout routine to include Tae-Bo either in a class or at home? Tell us about it. Send a letter to Health and Fitness, The Detroit News, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226. Or fax it to (313) 222-2451, or e-mail it to health@detnews.com

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