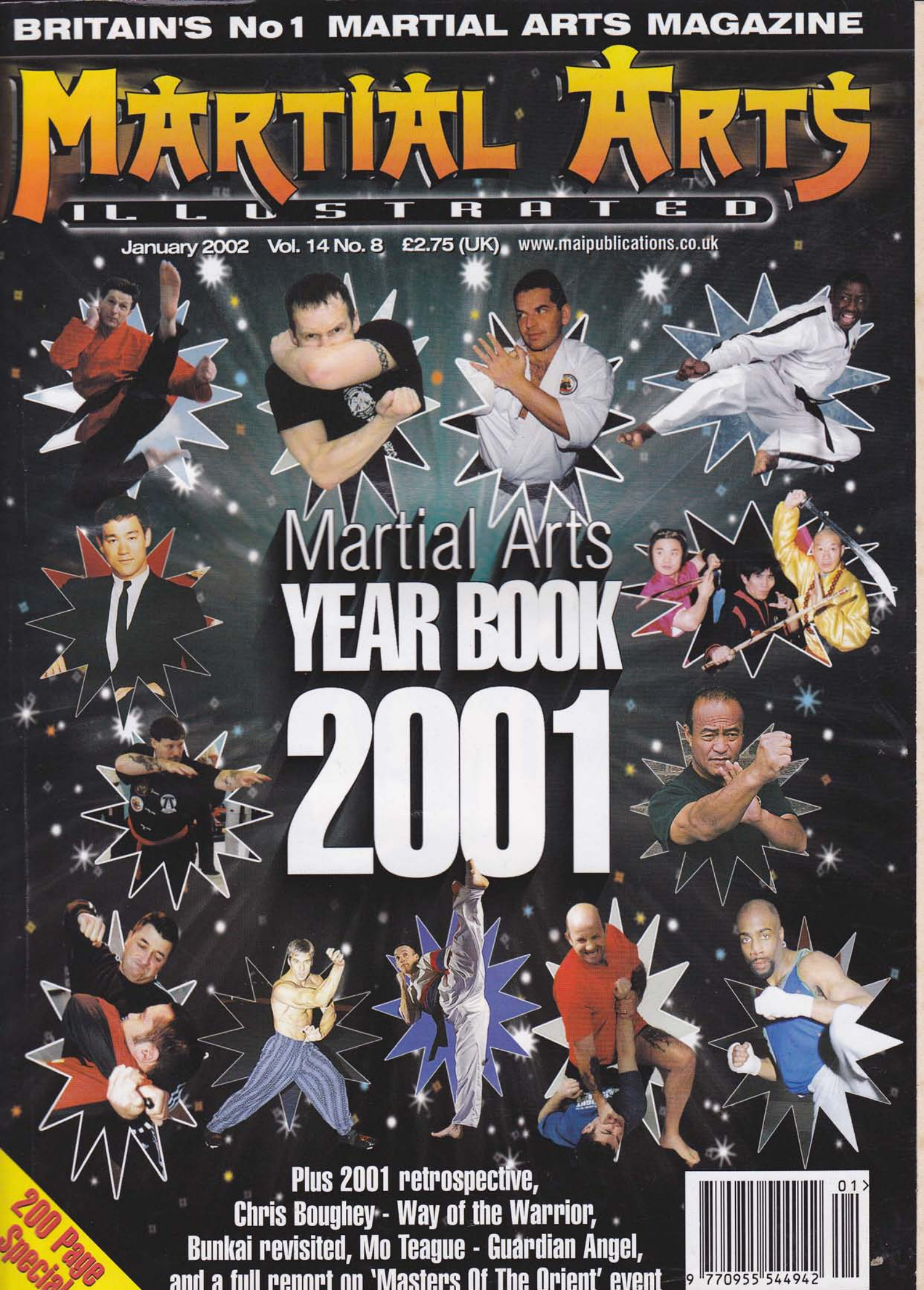


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Is Your Martial Arts Training Making You Fit?

Part 1

By Catarina Murphy

Skipping: the ideal exercise for improving co-ordination and aerobic fitness

Obtaining and then maintaining fitness should be a very important part of your martial arts programme. Regardless of what martial art you practice, you should be doing some form of cardiovascular training other than your average two martial arts classes a week. This could take the form of cardiokickboxing, which gives an excellent balance of aerobic and anaerobic training. But if your school does not offer such a schedule, you should consider cross training in another activity such as swimming, running, aerobic classes or weight training as part of your fitness programme.

What exactly is fitness?

Fitness incorporates many facets: speed, reaction time, balance, agility, co-ordination, muscular endurance, aerobic and anaerobic capacities, power, strength, flexibility, body fat composition. It's amazing how martial arts can offer all of these, but only if your instructor knows what he/she is doing. (See diagram 1 on page 51.)

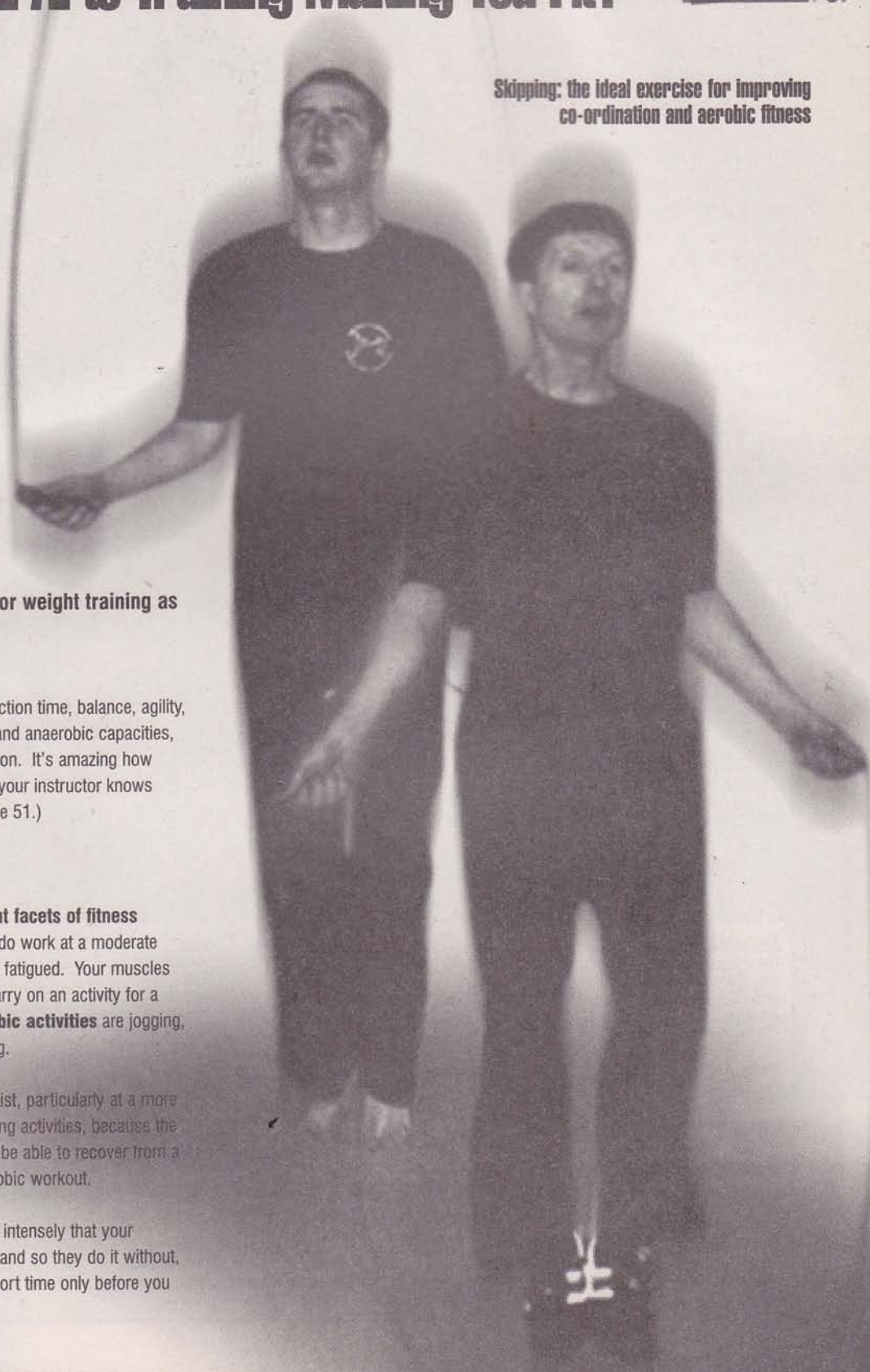
Let's look at some of these.

How martial arts can provide the different facets of fitness

When you are aerobically fit, you are able to do work at a moderate pace for a long period of time without getting fatigued. Your muscles are using oxygen to burn fuel and you can carry on an activity for a long period without tiring. Examples of **aerobic activities** are jogging, walking briskly, walking upstairs or swimming.

Aerobic fitness is important to the martial artist, particularly at a more advanced level if you are competing in sparring activities, because the fitter you are aerobically, the quicker you will be able to recover from a bout of sparring, which is an intensely anaerobic workout.

Anaerobic activities are when you work so intensely that your muscles are unable to burn fuel with oxygen and so they do it without, allowing you to work at this intensity for a short time only before you



masterclass



Catarina Murphy leading a cardiokickboxing class, an excellent complementary exercise to your martial arts training

need to take a rest to recover. If you become anaerobically fit, you will increase the time you are able to do intense activity e.g. sparring.

You can get fit anaerobically in a martial arts class by doing spurts of intense activity (which is very common in martial arts), particularly when you are sparring. This sort of training can be incorporated into a cardiokickboxing class if you do circuits, for example the student has to work out on a bag intensely for a minute. You may work out intensely on different pieces of equipment such as focus pads, this too could be anaerobic depending on how hard you work it.

Class drills, particularly using focus pads and kick shields, sparring activities, will all increase your **speed**, **reaction time** and **agility** dramatically. Calisthenic activities (exercises that use the body weight as a work-out tool) such as press-ups, sit-ups and squats are very common in martial arts classes and these develop **power** and **strength**.

In the beginners' traditional technical martial arts class, you may find yourself sweating very little on occasions as you slowly learn the moves. The classes can be stop-start as you spend time listening to the instructor's explanations and trying to get to grips with basic techniques, developing your **co-ordination**. In an intermediate/advanced class, this would be less so, as an instructor would be able to

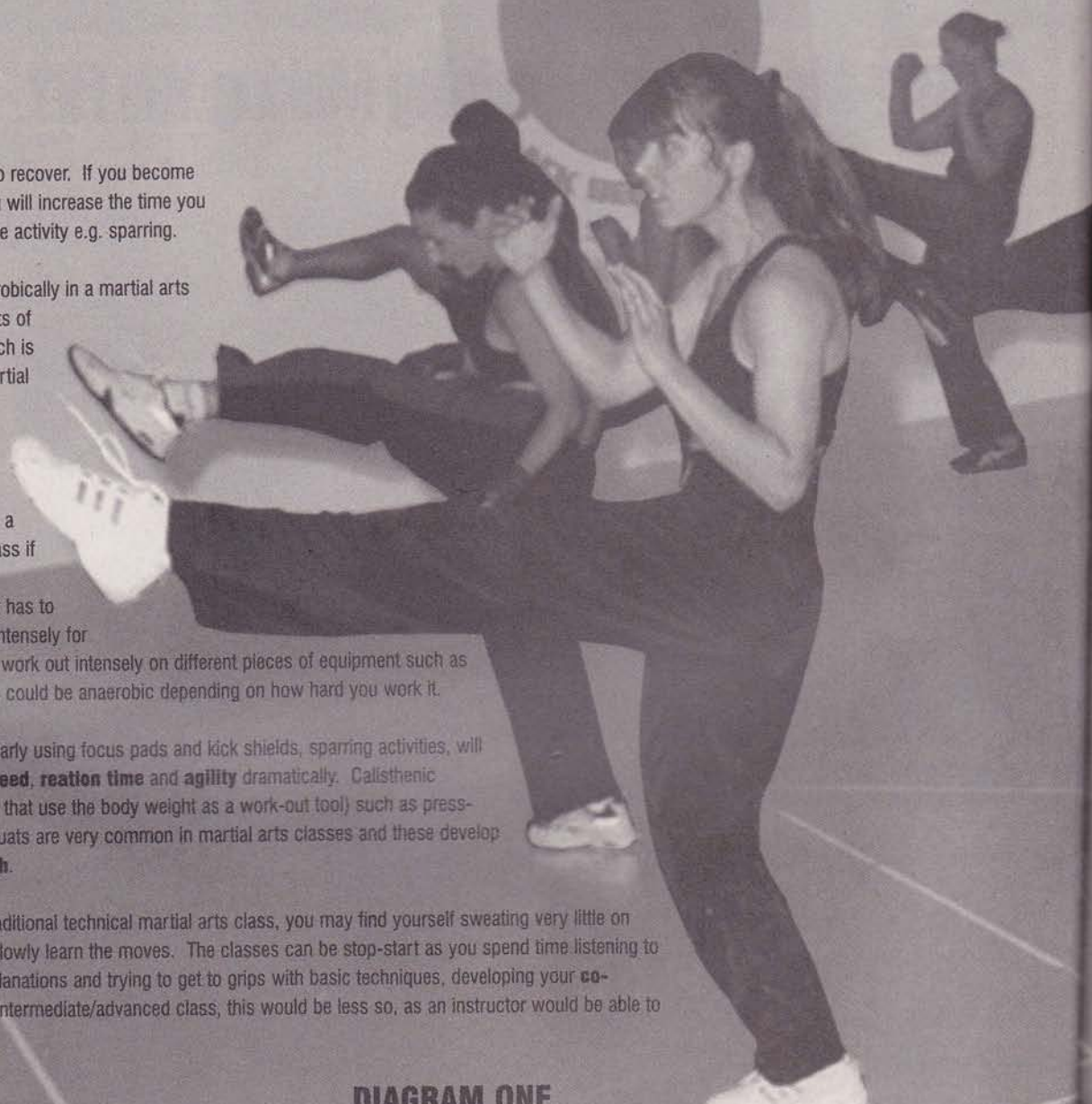


DIAGRAM ONE

Anaerobic Fitness

The ability of muscles to work very hard and intensely over short periods of time.
Activities: circuit training, intense/competitive sparring activities, intense padwork drills, grappling.

Body Fat Composition

The ability for body to carry the correct proportions of fat.
Activities: cardiokickboxing and all aerobic activities.

Balance

The ability to maintain stable while still or moving.
Activities: sparring, step sparring, kata.

Flexibility

The ability for joints to move with a full range of motion.
Activities: specific flexibility training. Kicking drills and sparring for dynamic flexibility.

Aerobic Fitness

The ability of heart and lungs to cope with activity over a period of time.
Activities: cardiokickboxing, light sparring activities and drills, performing katas/linework/step sparring without stopping.

Muscular Strength

The ability of muscles to have power, the ability to contract with speed and force in an explosive act. Endurance, the ability to work very hard over a period of time.
Activities: sparring, padwork drills, calisthenics (press-ups/sit-ups).

Speed

The ability of muscles to move very quickly.
Activities: sparring, padwork drills, kicking drills, footwork drills.

Agility

The ability to change direction very quickly.
Activities: sparring, sparring drills, footwork drills, padwork drills, kicking drills.

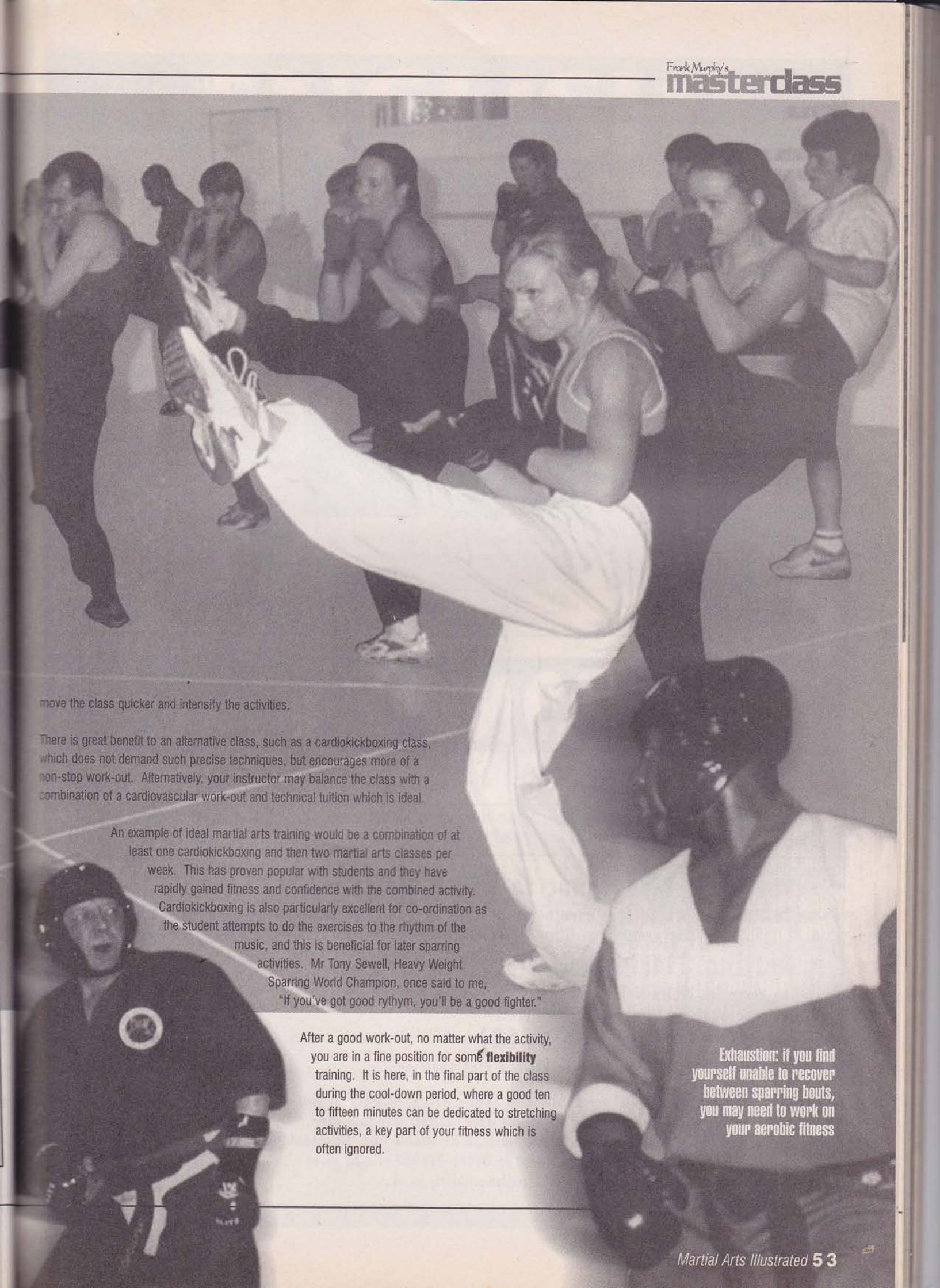
Co-ordination

The ability to perform complicated movements or sequences.
Activities: sparring, kata, linework, step sparring, all padwork drills, all martial arts drills in general.

FITNESS FROM MARTIAL ARTS

Reaction Time

The ability to react to a stimulus quickly.
Activities: sparring, step sparring, all padwork drills, self-defense drills.



move the class quicker and intensify the activities.

There is great benefit to an alternative class, such as a cardiokickboxing class, which does not demand such precise techniques, but encourages more of a non-stop work-out. Alternatively, your instructor may balance the class with a combination of a cardiovascular work-out and technical tuition which is ideal.

An example of ideal martial arts training would be a combination of at least one cardiokickboxing and then two martial arts classes per week. This has proven popular with students and they have rapidly gained fitness and confidence with the combined activity. Cardiokickboxing is also particularly excellent for co-ordination as the student attempts to do the exercises to the rhythm of the music, and this is beneficial for later sparring activities. Mr Tony Sewell, Heavy Weight Sparring World Champion, once said to me, "If you've got good rythm, you'll be a good fighter."

After a good work-out, no matter what the activity, you are in a fine position for some **flexibility** training. It is here, in the final part of the class during the cool-down period, where a good ten to fifteen minutes can be dedicated to stretching activities, a key part of your fitness which is often ignored.

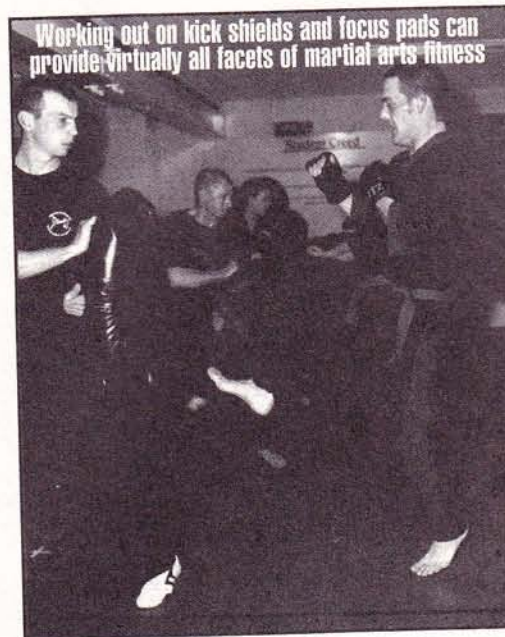
Exhaustion: if you find yourself unable to recover between sparring bouts, you may need to work on your aerobic fitness



As your fitness improves and if you work out regularly, at least three times a week ensuring that you do work out aerobically, you will burn fat, and the fitter you are, the more efficient you will

become at burning fat as a fuel rather than burning sugars. When you are unfit, your body will predominantly burn carbohydrates as fuel. The end result is that you will feel fatigued and drained after training. Beginners in martial arts who have done no other activity for a while commonly report this. When you get fitter, your body will start to use more fat as an alternative fuel. This also explains why weight loss does not always come immediately unless you really start to deprive yourself of food. Unfortunately many people get disillusioned in the early stages of a weight loss programme because they see no immediate change in body weight or fat distribution and give up their training just before their body has had a chance to reduce or change its **body fat composition**.

Finally, although not mentioned at the beginning of this article, I think there is also a level of



Working out on kick shields and focus pads can provide virtually all facets of martial arts fitness

'mental fitness' that is developed through your martial arts training. Each time you come training, you develop a little more of that fitness

which is the ability to persevere when the going gets tough, or to think positively and never give up when you are up against a challenging technique.

All the words related to fitness that are highlighted in this article can be measured to a certain extent. Part 2 of this article will describe exactly how this is done and how it can be incorporated into a martial arts class.

The key to fitness is **regular, committed training**, where you push yourself a little more each time, getting out of that 'comfort zone'. The bad news is that you can lose your fitness as quickly as you gain it. It only takes approximately two to three weeks of inactivity to lose your aerobic fitness. You also lose flexibility very rapidly. Anaerobic fitness, power, strength, reaction time and speed will deteriorate with time but not as dramatically as aerobic fitness and flexibility. By keeping to your training programme, you get a little closer each time to your goal, that coveted black belt or, if you have one already, simply maintaining a good level of fitness.

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By Frank Murphy

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