

Frederick gets its kicks out of self-defense

Tri-Town Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy teaches leverage over strength



Photo by Jen Reeder

Erwin Lopez demonstrates a jiu jitsu technique for students at the Tri-Town Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy in Frederick on Aug. 19.

By Jen Reeder
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FREDERICK – When Erwin Lopez feels himself grabbed by the back of his shirt, he doesn't panic. Instead, he kicks the back of his attacker's knee and throws him to the ground, where he wraps his legs around him and holds him down.

"Remember: the goal isn't to hurt people, it's to stop them," he says to the students gathered in a circle.

Lopez, 34, is the co-owner and

head instructor at the Tri-Town Brazilian Jiu Jitsu Academy in Frederick. Jiu jitsu, a martial art and combat sport that emphasizes leverage over strength, is a component in the increasingly popular mixed martial arts competitions held around the world.

"The goal of jiu jitsu is not to hurt somebody, and not to get hurt, but to stop them from hurting you," Lopez says.

Lopez and his brother, Joer, started the school five years ago

in Dacono at the Lions Club, where they taught 24 kids twice a week. But demand for classes grew, so they moved the school to Firestone briefly before landing at the current location in Frederick at 8105 West I-25 Frontage Road.

"It's been doing well," he says.

Born and raised in the Philippines, the brothers moved with their family to Commerce City in 1987. The teens weren't interested in some of the social options in the area.

"We didn't want to hang out with gang members, so we got into any martial arts we could," Lopez says.

He competed as a wrestler at Adams City High School, and graduated in 1992. He pursued training and competition in a number of martial arts, including kung fu and karate, until he began to solely focus on jiu jitsu in 2000. In 2002, he took a bronze medal in the Pan American Championship and today is a brown belt in the sport.

This summer, he took seven of his students to compete in the Boulder Jiu Jitsu In-House Tournament, and every one of them placed with a medal.

"I'm very proud," he says.

Still, jiu jitsu is valuable not just for competitions, but for its practical implications in everyday life. Because jiu jitsu focuses on holds and leverage techniques that can be executed by people of any size or strength, it is an excellent form of self defense, according to Lopez.

The key is the sport's emphasis

on using leverage to take control of a situation.

"Leverage over strength always wins," Lopez explains. "In a life or death situation, you can't defend yourself for just five minutes. You have to be ready to defend yourself for hours."

Lopez says the martial art is used by Navy Seals and police officers. In fact, Joer, a member of the Dacono Police Department, has joined Erwin in hosting special training sessions in jiu jitsu for his co-workers on the force.

Frederick resident Deb Paino, a student at the academy, says jiu jitsu is also great for women's self-defense.

"It's all about using leverage instead of muscle," she says. "I'm really excited to be a part of it because unfortunately I was in a situation when I could have used it."

She adds that jiu jitsu offers a "killer" workout, and that Erwin and Joer give a lot of individual instruction even in the group classes.

"They're so caring and kind, and they work with you individually," she says. "To have it right there in the Tri-Town area is great."

In an effort to attract more women and other members of the community, the Lopez brothers are offering free introductory classes.

"They get five free classes to try," Erwin Lopez says. "Come down and check out martial arts."

For more information, visit www.ttbjja.com.

Judo medal winner Garcia unmatched on the mat

Snap Fitness trainer good as gold at State Games

By Glen Strandberg
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The story of how Brandon Garcia won a gold medal in judo at the State Games of the West doesn't follow the standard plot line of a young boy who trains his whole life in hopes of reaching his ultimate dream.

Those always have a fairy tale feel that would make Walt Disney proud, but Garcia's victory follows a different path – a path that is just as impressive in how much Garcia didn't work for it. The 26-year-old manager of Firestone's Snap Fitness took an unconventional route to winning the Male Novice (below brown belt) Senior division.

Garcia was involved in judo while he was in middle school, but he stopped after just four years of practice. More than a decade later, he saw an ad about the July 27 competition in Colorado Springs and figured, why not?

"I hadn't actually stepped on a judo mat for 12 years before I went to this tournament," he said. "I

went on a whim."

After so much time away from the sport, the Disney version would show Garcia sweating through all-day training sessions with a wise sensei, preparing for the State Games that included Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

In reality, there was no sensei and no training.

No sweat.

"When I showed up to the tournament, I went out on the mat, just kind of by myself, and did some drills," Garcia said. "And then the tournament started and I went for it."

By the end of the day, Garcia – with a green belt he attained as a teenager – stood atop the medal stand.

Afterward, sensei's from various schools, as well as Garcia's opponents, congratulated him and asked him where he studied.

A reply along the lines of "nowhere," or, "a Northglenn Dojo

back in 1996," didn't go over too well.

"The guy that I beat in the championship match wasn't overly thrilled to hear that answer," Garcia said.

But certainly Garcia surprised himself by picking up the gold.

"To some extent, yeah," he said. "I didn't expect to do as well as I did. It was sloppy, but the moves were all still there."

The win means Garcia has qualified for the 2009 senior nationals, but in typical un-Disney like fashion, Garcia doesn't think he'll go.

He's smart enough to realize he can't "Forrest Gump" his way through another major tourney, so the big drawback is finding the time and a nearby place where he can actually train for "tournament judo," as he called it.

"But I really do want to get back into judo," he said. "One of the biggest reasons is I'd really like to achieve the rank of black belt, so I can become an instructor and maybe I can open a Dojo."

That makes a little more sense. A young man returns to the martial arts, wins championships and then gives back to his sport.

Why not?



Submitted photo

Garcia shows off the gold medal he won in late July.