

Padbox

Survival of the fittest

Joe Holroyd looks at a boxing-trainer course with a difference at The Peacock Gym.

Fitness and martial arts are now an industry. An industry which, in many sectors - despite overwhelmingly downwards economic trends - is flourishing. Recently I, along with hundreds of other personal trainers, martial arts instructors and other industry professionals from all over the country, enrolled for the weekend Padbox course at the Peacock boxing gym in east London. Almost every one I spoke to alluded towards - not merely business as usual - but actually having taken-on a significant number of new clients over the last few months. So why are so many sectors of the fitness and martial arts industry weathering the current financial storm?

It has a lot to do with the 'streamlining' that Sainsbury's CEO Justin King

recently mentioned when asked about the proposed government bail-out of Woolworths. King argued that such casualties as the closure of Woolworths are a necessary and healthy step on our road out of the recession. His point was fundamentally a simple one: hard-times force us to address what is wrong with our economy - and perhaps society more generally.

Times of economic difficulty also tend to signal a need for personal change. Just as the financial health of our nation benefits from a shift towards new, more effective business models, so the physical health of our nation may also flourish with the tightening of the fiscal belt. The high-street and the high-life are suffering - there's much less partying and clothes-shopping on the credit-card and

the expense-account - and people are, increasingly, turning to healthier activities to occupy themselves. The sprawling, flabby Woolworths are remodelling themselves as the lean, lithe niche-boutiques of tomorrow. And just as the hard times force an economic Darwinism on the market-place - killing-off the weaker business-models - so the survival of the fittest maxim starts to pervade people's personal outlooks too.

But, leaving this journalist's meandering, pretentious over-simplifications aside for just a moment, one thing certainly is clear: meeting a client's specific needs is the key to sustaining growth in the fitness - as any - industry.

And this is exactly why Padbox is flourishing. With their backgrounds in amateur and professional boxing and strength and conditioning training, Padbox's Ian Burbedge and Andy Scott have devised a unique training package.

Having worked extensively as a personal-trainer and kickboxing instructor myself, when Ian invited me along to check-out the course I was, initially, slightly dubious. The fitness-industry does, in fact, suffer from some of the aforementioned Woolworths-style flabbiness. In order to maintain your 'Personal Trainer' status on the R.E.Ps register, you must attend a certain minimum number of training activities each year. Inevitably enough, some of these are much better devised than others: there are no shortage of half-arsed courses which simply run-through the



motions without any real substance - nonetheless allowing attendees to keep their 'Qualified Personal Trainer' status and course operators, of course, to keep their profits.

So here we go, I thought: two days of shuffling-round a fitness studio pretending to look interested and wondering why I bothered to put my track-suit on. No such luck. Padbox is the real deal - and that tracksuit absorbed one hell of a lot of sweat! Right from the get-go, this course means business.

Whilst orientated primarily towards the fitness industry, Padbox makes no concessions on boxing essentials. You will be made to drill your basic punches until you get them right. As Andy Scott patiently reminds me: 'If you haven't got your technique quite right on that hook - if your elbow isn't quite coming-up so that your shoulder turns-into the punch - how can you demonstrate it accurately to your client? How can you spot the flaws in your client's technique if your own isn't quite right?' Through a sheen of sweat I blink my agreement and turn back to the pads.

The entire 2-day course is devised around partner work. Each set of techniques is modelled by Andy, Ian and a number of their other expert team of coaches, who then circulate providing guidance and demonstration where needed.



All of which may sound less than entirely revolutionary: certainly not quite worth invoking Darwin for. What sets this course apart, however, is the subtlety with which your expertise evolves as Padbox builds upon the basics to develop you into the role of trainer. You will take a very active role in this process: activities are designed around you working-out what punches combinations logically flow into one-another; around you-working out what punches should be thrown inside what range; around you working-out what counters should be thrown against what attacks.

The course culminates in a formal assessment with detailed feedback provided to all participants. The skills you have developed/sharpened over the weekend will be thoroughly tested, but also consolidated by this process, and you will leave - not only qualified - but a far more competent and confident trainer. You may have noticed that I've switched to addressing you directly in the latter half of this article. That's because you're next: Padbox is the best fitness-industry weekend course I've ever done and you would be mad not to try it.

For more info go to: www.padbox.co.uk

