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Fighting fit in the boxing ring



TRAINING | Working up a sweat at the Jubilee Hall Club



PREPARATION | Boxing teacher Graham Boylan straps up Maxine

MAXINE CLAYMAN
for thelondonpaper

"YOU ready to fight then?" asks Graham Boylan, our boxing instructor, as he bandages my hands in wraps – a precaution I'm told will protect my wrists.

As a peace-loving vegetarian who has never hit anyone, I'm dubious. Nervously eyeing up Graham's bulging tattooed biceps, I notice that his bloodied knuckles look as if they could easily gouge a chunk out of someone.

But the personal trainer and Amateur Boxing Association non-contact tutor reassures me that the boxing classes he set up three months ago are designed for people who want to improve their fitness and co-ordination levels. There's

no hitting in the face, so there's no chance of me ending up out cold with two black eyes, which somewhat allays my fears.

And, as the gym fills up, I'm relieved to see the group mainly consists of young professionals, half of whom are women (and we're not talking butch bodybuilder types), which makes me feel less intimidated.

PR executive Leila Dastyar, 27, from Finchley, attends the class with colleagues. She says they get amusing comments from people for enjoying a sport normally associated with burly blokes.

"When we tell people what we do every week, we always get the same comment: 'You must mean boxercise not boxing.' But we love it – it's the best workout ever." While

everyone else warms up with some skipping or jabbing the punch bags, the gloves go on and I'm taken to one side with another new kid on the block, a cute 25-year-old called Callum.

Together we're put through our paces to see what kind of fighters we are. Callum, it turns out, is

orthodox, so leads with his left hand. I'm a southpaw, and a bit of a rookie given that I'm right-handed.

After learning the basic stance, we're shown how to throw a jab and – more importantly for me – how to defend ourselves by punching into Graham's hand. The key is never to drop your

guard and keep your hands up at all times. Then we join the rest of the group in a series of exercises, alternating between hitting punch bags and jumping over steps.

Having already worked up a sweat, we start sparring and tagging. We're paired with someone of the same sex and level to practise

some moves. Previously I'd questioned the categorising of boxing as a sport, but as the hour progresses I surprise myself at how competitive I become as I try to out-manoeuvre my partner.

As we do laps round the gym and play games to cool down, I feel like I've regressed to primary school. But it's all

part of the fun and I'm amazed at just how much I've enjoyed the session. It turns out there's more to boxing than testosterone, and I'll definitely be back for more.

Boxing classes are held on Tuesdays from 6.15 to 7.15pm at The Gym, 30 The Piazza, Covent Garden, £10