

# Lightweight

There's more to boxing than simply flooring an opponent. It's a great way to reduce stress and keep fit. And now, thanks to increasing popularity and accessibility, it is a sport that newcomers are flocking to. **Will Peach** steps into the ring and gets beaten down. Photos by Khoa Tran.



"YEAH, I'M PRETTY TRIM," I THINK to myself gazing in the mirror of my unpretentious flat. But admittedly I'm a little blind. What really reflects back is the trembling body of an adolescent. A scrawny 23 year old in skimpy black Y-fronts, body all goose-pimpled from a faltering air con unit and frail from decades of geekery.

Today I'm going boxing for the first time. Will I come back a broken man? Probably.

◦ **A Little Rumbling in the Jungle**  
Bound for the ring, I arrive to meet David Minetti, owner of K1 Fitness and despite his lack of height, a cumbersome boulder of a man. I catch a quick glimpse into my potential place of rest. Heaving men are smashing the full weight of their bodies into the punching bags while nodding gracefully to hip-hop music at 100 decibels. My organ literally shrivels in my pants. "This is where the big boys come to play," I

say to myself.

Minetti, although fearsome in appearance, is a very congenial man. I rub up against him like a mouse does to an elephant. His shirtless tattooed physique puts my pale white body to shame, while his shaven head makes me feel considerably effeminate. His brother Francois Xavier is almost his carbon copy, if a little taller. Either way I want to go home.

But as he welcomes my slender frame with an open but firm handshake I realise he is a man of a courteous nature. We begin our appointment by discussing just why boxing is on the rise in Vietnam.

"It's a very good way to get out stress and keep in good shape," he explains, as we observe his brother forcing a man into painful body crunches. "It's grown a lot in the six years I've been here, thanks to TV, film and the Internet."

In fact, 90 percent of David's customers are newcomers to the sport, attracted by its

## KNOCKOUT LADIES

A trainee gives her best shot (*opposite page*) while David Minetti takes a punch from a woman (*top*).

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**THE GLOVES ARE ON**  
The guys from K1 Fitness sparring with their trainees.



strict cardiovascular regime and emphasis on body conditioning.

"Forty percent of our clientele are women," he says, "who have found kickboxing to be a very effective way of keeping slim."

Kids and teenagers are even getting in on the action; K1 offers weekend and nightly classes in mixed martial arts, boxing and Krav Maga. Taking on a kid, I might stand a chance, but these flexing hulks? I think not.

#### ◦ Float Like a Butterfly

But boxing is the order of the day and box I shall. Having been assigned Francois-Xavier as a coach I receive a typical beginner's introduction to the discipline.

He hands me a jump rope and I look at him disgustingly. "What am I to do with that," I think to myself, associating skipping, rather incorrectly, with girls. "Do this for five minutes," he challenges me, throwing down a seemingly easy gauntlet.

I start swinging and my bony little arms appear as if they're about to snap. I make the rookie mistake of going too hard too early and end up leaping several inches off the floor with each jump. Two minutes later I'm panting heavily and being asked to move. Having kept shuffling back continuously I have rather innocently taken up the floor space of the four brutes behind me.

Three minutes later and I'm gasping for breath. But at least I'm displaying some technique. He shows me where to rest my hands as a guard, the correct boxing stance

and I even had a go at my first jab. At the moment it's shadow boxing but I'm hoping to soon graduate to the ring. Francois-Xavier reaches for the eight ounce gloves and has to strap them on for me. He puts on some pads and asks me to pummel him.

#### ◦ Sting Like a Mosquito

He teaches me how to jab and hook and their differing combinations. I get a sense of real euphoria in letting off steam and begin to realise the lure that boxing casts over newcomers. After about twenty minutes, the gloves come off and I hit the canvas for some serious conditioning. Francois-Xavier pushes me hard, laughing at my whimpering efforts to do a push up. We squat and crunch before hitting the dumbbells which he incorrectly assumes I can lift with ease.

My ability is pitiful, three squat reps later and I'm begging for relief. He agrees to call it a day, having given me my allotted 45 minute session. My face is deathly white and I want to puke. The guys at the gym are all very accommodating and encouraging throughout this ordeal.

"Don't worry, all beginners find the first class tough," they assure me.

Did I enjoy it? I couldn't move the next day but I'm very keen to go back. I can certainly see the intensity of the training paying off. The best thing for me, however, is unlike Evander Holyfield I came out with both my ears intact.

*For more information about boxing in Saigon visit K1 Fitness Centre, 346 Ben Van Don, Q4. Or go to [www.teamminetti.com](http://www.teamminetti.com).* 