

LADIES ONLY CLASS TEACHES SELF-DEFENCE AND EMPOWERMENT



PUT 'EM UP: Rayana is a pro fighter, trainer, promoter and motivational speaker – apart from being a world champion



LEAN AND MEAN: Kareema Leetz is getting back in shape

SA's home to Muay Thai world champs

THEY say dynamite comes in small packages and that is exactly the case with Muay Thai world champion Rayana Ameerodien.

Rayana – a professional fighter, trainer, promoter and motivational speaker – is the World Professional Muay Thai Federation women's bantamweight world champion.

She is also South Africa's first female to win a world title in the sport of Muay Thai.

Muay Thai is what the Thai mense call their own martial art.

Sport

Although the sport is relatively new in South Africa, we have already delivered some thumping good champions, including two former pupils of Rayana.

Irshaad Sayed, 18, won the World Muay Thai Lightweight title in Bangkok and Don Madge, 17,

won silver at the World Muay Thai Championships held in Thailand in 2007.

Rayana herself won her world title at the Cape Town International Convention Centre in July last year. Her opponent was Nong Karn from Thailand.

"I fought her in Thailand last year for the title and she beat me on points," Rayana says.

"Three months later in Cape Town I knocked her out in the second round. It was awesome." Rayana will be defending her title in Thailand in April.

Being the only female Muay Thai promoter in the country, Rayana knows how difficult it is for women to make an impact in the sport.

She founded Fight Girls SA in 2006 to provide women fighters with a platform to compete and receive exposure.



KICK-ASS: Champion Rayana Ameerodien



GOOD OPPORTUNITY: Housewife Gouwa Conrad fights to keep fit

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY

THE WOMEN'S enthusiasm is infectious.

The mood is exciting and optimistic.

They come into the gym in ones or twos, most wearing a long dress with a scarf.

These are quickly shed as they change into tracksuit pants and comfy T-shirts, then they help each other wrap protective tape around their hands.

Then onto the blue training mat.

They joke and laugh as they jab and kick at each other, interspersed with thumping music and the trainer's voice occasionally calling out instructions.

Some aim a few high kicks, a few others spar with intent, three others are jabbing and kicking at two large punching bags suspended from the ceiling.

Academy

The women are being trained at Ray's Muay Thai & Fitness Academy, which recently opened in Lansdowne Road, Lansdowne.

Muay Thai (pronounced Moo Tai) is a popular form of martial arts from Thailand.

Owner and professional Muay Thai fighter Rayana Ameerodien says she was astounded at the public interest in her sport.

"People who have never trained before are joining our gym," Rayana says.

Women are joining the academy and empowering

By WARDIA SALVESTER
Pictures by SHAWN UYS

themselves with valuable skills to defend themselves.

"I'm proud to say that this is the only Muay Thai gym in South Africa with 'women only' classes.

"I am inspired by the women's eagerness to learn and the way they have embraced the training.

"It's clear how important it is to them because of their dedication to attend the classes.

"Since this group of women joined, nobody has left.

"In the classes you'll find housewives, doctors and students training alongside each other.

"There's a good, positive energy," Rayana says despite

Flats women take up martial arts for fitness and well-being

being fun and a stress reliever, Muay Thai has a host of other benefits for women.

"You lose weight, your body is toned, you develop self-confidence and co-ordination and Muay Thai can be used as a very effective method of self-defence," she says.

"Absenteeism is virtually non-existent in my class.

"I think the women see it as a time for themselves to de-stress after a hard day at work or doing house chores.

Smiles

"Though red-faced and flushed, they're all smiles by the time they walk out of the class.

"I have great belief in the self-esteem boosting powers of my sport.

"The training has a ripple effect and affects our performance in all aspects

of our lives – when you feel good about yourself, you can be a better worker, wife and mother."

And the ladies agree. Gouwa Conrad, 30, a housewife of Lansdowne, says she joined to keep fit.

"I'm loving it, I like everything but I'd say the best part for me is learning self-defence."

Kareema Leetz, 39, of Grassy Park says she's doing it to get back into shape after having her baby three years ago.

Her sons are both Muay Thai fighters.

"I like the peace of mind it gives me," she says.

"I can defend myself, criminals like to take advantage of women."

Nazeema Conrad, 38, of Rondebosch-East says Muay Thai relieves stress after a hard day at work. Her husband and sons

also train at the gym.

"I'm doing it for fitness and to get rid of stress," she says as she puts on her boxing gloves.

"I walk out of here feeling good."

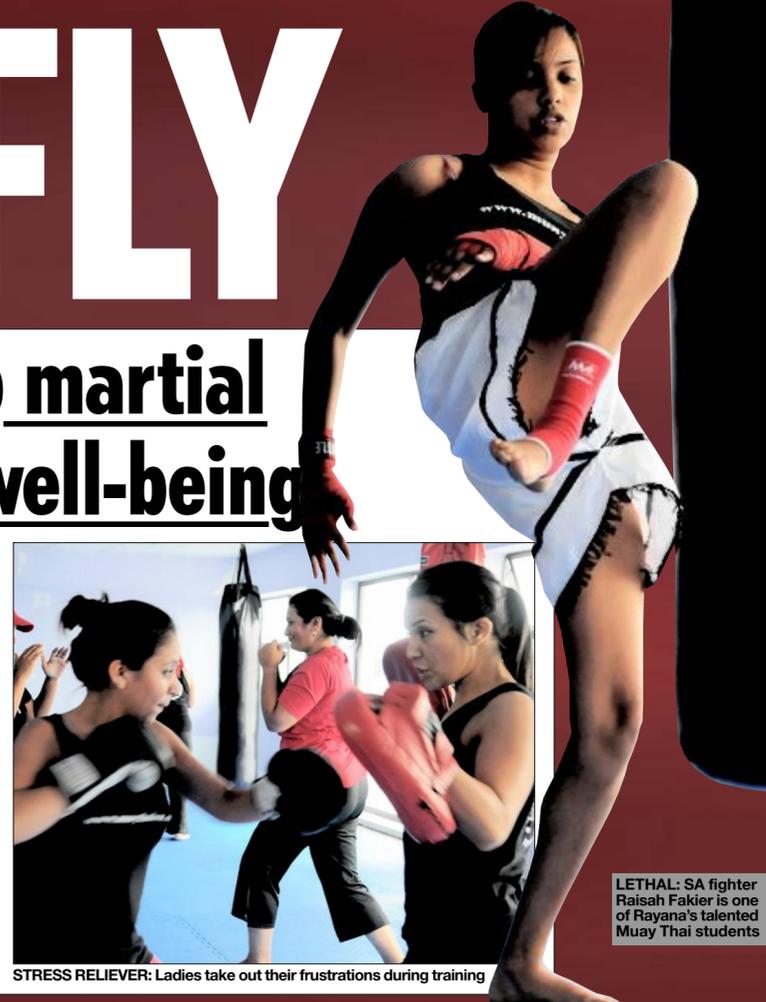
Wafeeqah Petersen, 23, of Pinelands, says: "I was looking for a way to lose weight after I had a baby, and also for a place where it's women only.

"The best part for me is knowing at the end of the day that I can defend myself."

The slogan *Women stand up* is featured on Rayana's shorts whenever she fights.

She says she is a great believer in women's rights and fighting against gender injustice.

If you are interested in learning Muay Thai, contact Rayana on 021 761 34 99 or 073 0777 040. You can also visit the website www.muaythaisa.com.



STRESS RELIEVER: Ladies take out their frustrations during training

LETHAL: SA fighter Raisah Fakier is one of Rayana's talented Muay Thai students