


STORY BY **Guido Ebert**

IRON MIXED MARTIAL ARTS



On Fitness, We Agree. Tools Needed to Get Fit? Not So Much.

MIXED MARTIAL ARTS GYM OWNERS AND TRAINERS AGREE ON ONE THING: FITNESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR FIGHTERS AS WELL AS YOUR NON-FIGHTING CUSTOMERS. BUT THEY DISAGREE ON THE TOOLS NEEDED TO GET A FIGHTER FIT. IT'S A MIXED BAG. WHERE IS YOUR FACILITY ON THIS MMA FITNESS SPECTRUM?

FIGHT FIRST: Hard-core fight schools and training centers shun a broad array of fitness equipment, with trainers here preferring to concentrate on “ground and pound” technical training. They let their customers focus on fitness somewhere else. David Stacy’s Octagon Gym in Greensboro, N.C. offers training in Jiu Jitsu, Muay Thai, Greco-Roman wrestling and submission grappling. Like many of his counterparts, Stacy is a proponent of teaching his arts on the mat and through the use of tools like bags, kettle bells, tires, hammers and power bands rather than employing an expensive line of circuit machines.

“We do have a weight room but most of our members do not use it,” Stacy says, his comments mirroring a trend many long-time MMA practitioners say resonates deep within the MMA gym industry.

FIT FOR ALL: Many MMA gym owners are bringing in a wide variety of cardio and strength equipment options – the products inherent to the “fitness centers” occupying all corners of the United States – to give their fighters a one-stop shop, and to attract new members interested in the MMA fitness trend. “It’s a big mistake when mixed martial arts gyms don’t have a selection of cardio and weight equipment, because they’re ignoring the greater part of the game,” says Rodrigo Galvanosi, principle of Fearless Fighting,



a gym in Greenville, N.C. offering Jiu Jitsu, Aikido, Muay Thai, Judo, Kung Fu, Choy Li Fut, Wing Chun, wrestling and boxing classes, training in “The Way” self-defense system — a fusion of defense styles he perfected — and even yoga.

CAN YOU RELY ON TECHNIQUE AND TRADITION?

“Ultimately, when it comes down to it, what we’ve learned is more people come here for the fight technique training,” says Ryan Couture, manager of the Xtreme Couture MMA gym in Las Vegas. “A lot of our members also go to gyms, like 24-Hour fitness, to get in their weight training and cardio, and we can’t compete with that.”

Randy Couture, Ryan’s father, opened the facility three years ago. It covers 11,000 sq. ft. (and is expanding soon) and features locker rooms and a pro shop, a bag training area, octagon cage, boxing ring, and public and private mat areas. As for the “fitness” area, there are two treadmills, two stationary bikes, a step machine, and a generous selection of free weights, racks, benches and ancillary gear.

While Ryan Couture says the current fitness equipment line-up at Xtreme Couture MMA offers “a helpful selling point” to prospective members, he says the ultimate customer draw has proven to be their specialized fight training. And, although plans call for the gym to double in size with the takeover of adjacent warehouse space, the new space is

to be filled by additional mats, rings and cages while the fitness area is to remain unaltered.

“It’s important to manage your overhead and your start-up costs versus what you want to be able to offer and what you think will bring more members to sign up, whether that be more mat space or more floor space for fitness equipment,” Couture says.

Galvanosi takes a different approach. “A lot of the traditional martial arts schools — what we call the Classical Dojo, the Gi Dojo — don’t use a lot of weights and cardio equipment because they’re based on such old-school teachings from the 15th and 16th century,” Galvanosi says. “They basically just have mats, striking boards and bags, and forget about being muscularly, cardiovascularly and endurance strong.”

“But you can’t just rely on technique anymore,” he says. “There are guys coming in that can go five-minute rounds all day long. Watch the guys like GSP or Randy Couture or BJ Penn work out, you’ll see them using weights, elliptical machines, that P90X-type workout, everything above and beyond because they’re realizing it’s not just about the quick knock-out but about being cardiovascularly strong and endurance strong.”

Galvanosi says he also thinks MMA training facilities without weight and cardiovascular equipment are “absolutely, without a doubt” missing out on an opportunity to attract more students and members.

“What I found from my own experience is that you have to become competitive as a gym, and not just a Mixed Martial Arts gym, because a student is looking for an all-

SHOULD YOU BENCH THE BENCH?

While it appears MMA gym owners may be starting to recognize the need to expand their facilities to include equipment that the general public has come to expect in places practicing physical fitness, many in the industry continue to believe they can accomplish their workouts without the need for expensive machines.

“You don’t need a lot of fancy equipment to get it done,” says Kevin Kearns, currently training fighter Alex Karalexis. “Bench-pressing is great if you have a refrigerator parked on your chest, but do you want to look like a body builder or do you want to look like a fighter? It’s a waste of time. If you think about it, it’s one plane of motion, it’s supported, and it’s not realistic.”

“The majority of guys going into MMA gyms probably don’t fight competitively – they’re not full-time fighters who are sponsored – but they still get a good all-around workout,” says Corey Beasley, co-owner of Innovative Results, a personal training service provider in Orange County, Calif.

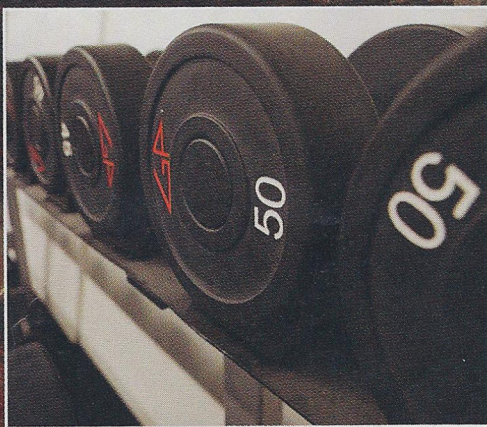
Beasley has been a personal trainer for more than a decade, working with hundreds of clients that include a variety of professional athletes. He supports Kearns’ notion that using machines or resistance training that isolate muscles isn’t necessarily a good thing for MMA athletes.

“From a fitness standpoint, when a customer comes to the gym after a day of sitting behind a desk, the last thing I want them to do is sit on their butts some more and worsen the imbalance they already have in their hips, legs and back,” Beasley says. “From a performance standpoint, in looking at training as an MMA fighter, name one position where somebody has to sit or use the same guided movement a machine would provide.”

“A lot of those machines stem from the ‘80s and are what I would consider of a bodybuilding mentality – to isolate and exhaust the muscle as much as you can. That’s the wrong type of strength. It’s like teaching a firefighter to become a locksmith and then telling him to go out and fight a fire.”

According to Beasley, “the old-school, minimalist stuff like barbells and dumbbells and sand bags and tires and pull-up bars and dip bars are among the basic things needed to make MMA guys strong head-to-toe. The side benefit is that none of that equipment is very expensive,” he says. “All of those cardio and circuit machines cost a lot of money, so if you’re a guy on a shoe-string budget trying to get a gym off the ground, eliminating those units is multiple, multiple thousands of dollars in savings.”

“We can outfit a decent size karate school with about \$3,000 in equipment,” Kearns says. “We use bands, dumbbells, kettle bells, medicine balls, stability balls, and sledgehammers to produce a circuit with probably 40 people in it.”



around workout – looking for that school that has it all,” he says. “When you don’t have that kind of equipment in your gym, you’re setting yourself up for a fall.”

“People don’t want to pay a Bally’s membership, or a Crunch membership, or a Gold’s membership along with a martial arts gym membership. They want a one-stop shop – to be able to walk in, do some weights, get a good cardio workout and hit the bags, learn how to defend themselves, do Jiu Jitsu, do Muay Thai, do boxing. You don’t go to the supermarket expecting to find only bananas, you go there expecting to find all of the fruits.”

‘TWO SEPARATE ENTITIES’

“You should lift weights aside from only doing martial arts, but the gyms often are two separate entities,” says Erik Paulson, a 35-year martial arts practitioner, fighter and trainer who runs the CSW Training Center in Fullerton, Calif.

“Most people who go to martial arts schools don’t go there to lift weights, they go there to do martial arts,” Paulson says. “They’ll go to 24-Hour fitness and keep their martial arts gym as their martial arts gym.” CSW is outfitted with a selection of circuit training stations that include kettle bells, climbing ropes, strength ropes, strength machines for the neck, back and legs, plus body weight exercises like the TRX Suspension Training system.

Nevertheless, Paulson admits most CSW fighters go to a neighboring fitness studio to do circuit training on a vast array of equipment, then return to CSW to complete smaller, specialized circuits.

“I think fighters who also want to cross-train with all of that modern fitness equipment probably also spend their money on dedicated fitness studios, where they can also swim, go to the sauna, a spin class, use the basketball courts, etc.,” Paulson says. “I like going there, too. It’s really a change of scenery, and beats just staring at the wall when you’re running on the treadmill.”

MMA gyms offering cardio and weight exercises “are really in a unique niche,” says Steve Paterson, VP of Used Gym Equipment, LLC.

“Right now, in MMA, you have two different types of gym owners,” Paterson says. “First, you have the businessman who wants to own some MMA gyms and get as many customers as he can and run a business. Then, you have the down-and-dirty fighter who just wants some more guys like him around to grind it out.”

YOU GOTTA HAVE IT

The fitness equipment debate will surely continue. In spite of the disagreement, there are standards of fitness and training that every MMA gym should have.

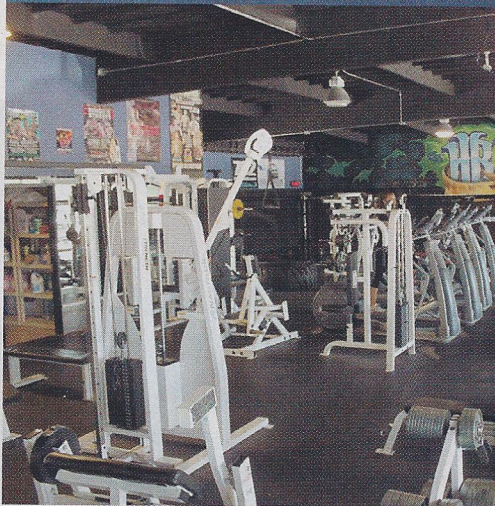
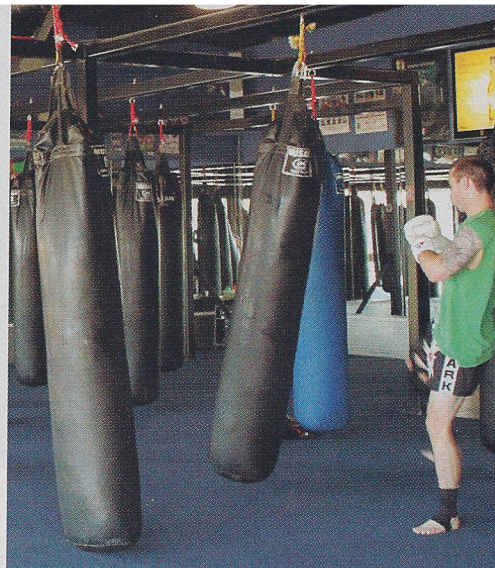
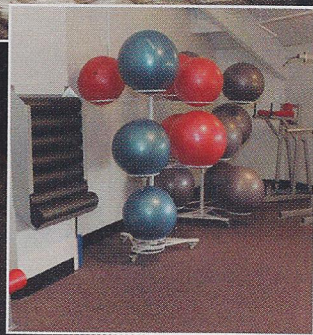
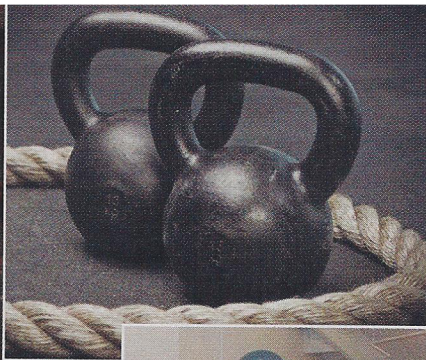
First, MMA training is primarily about mats, bags, and the octagon. Not every gym has the money or the space for a full elevated octagon. But some kind of cage configuration is vital to the MMA image as well as the training. Plus, the mats, bags and associated pads are essential. We are saving that feature article for the next issue where we'll dive deep into this must-have equipment.

Second, in our visits to MMA gyms and training centers, we've noticed several pieces of fitness equipment that we consider essential.

- **Kettlebells.** If you haven't used these in your own training, you may look at them and think they're simply oddly shaped dumbbells. But these tools of ancient Soviet strongmen have provided powerful all-around fitness training for 300 years. Kettlebells can take the place of a large number of resistance tools, and when used well will supplement endurance and cardio training, too.
- **Stability balls.** Every gym needs more of these fitness tools; they've progressed far beyond the aerobics and yoga rooms. Stability balls add an off-balance and real-world fitness element to resistance training that is hard to beat. I've even seen these used as office chairs.
- **TRX.** This is becoming better known as a home-gym tool or as fitness equipment that travels. And it does work well this way. But with some TRX tools at use in your gym, you can continue to serve your clients as the fitness-training expert, offering them advice and training tips for at-home use. And these clients will recommend their friends come see you.
- **Versa Climber.** The biggest difficulty with some cardio training is that it can take a long time, especially cycling or treadmill running. But a machine like the Versa Climber provides a whole-body training experience that can wear you down in a short amount of time.

Third, MMA innovators are creating fitness and strength-training tools with a fighter's specific needs in mind. Here are just a couple of fitness tools we will surely see more of in the future. Though these may look like home gym equipment, adding them to your school is effective and inexpensive.

- **The Burn Machine** (theburnmachine.com) is designed for use almost anywhere, including in an aerobics class, or in intervals while you sit on a stationary bike. The tool mimics a boxing workout on a speed bag and improves coordination, speed and endurance.
- **The Forearm Max** (forearmmax.com) trainer looks similar to the Burn Machine, but is targeted to lower arm muscles crucial to fighters for striking and grip needs. The tool is inexpensive and easy to keep in your gym for use in a variety of applications.
- A tool like the **Grapple Grip** (grapplegrasp.com) connects to standard fitness equipment at your gym and transforms ordinary resistance training into a unique strength-enhancing and grip-improving workout that will have your opponents wondering where you got it.
- In the "why didn't I think of that" category, the **Powerstaff Workout** (powerstaffworkout.com) offers a unique mix of resistance and endurance-style training for fighters or those simply looking for improved fitness.



UsedGymEquipment.com has supplied equipment to clients like Big John McCarthy's MMA Training Center in Valencia, Calif., Randy Couture's two Xtreme Couture MMA gyms and to Tiki Ghosn for his facility in Huntington Beach, Calif.

"The pro fighters don't need this equipment, they're putting it in as a business, to attract the non-professional fighter to come in and sign up for a gym membership," Paterson says. "They're doing it specifically to make money, to attract those people who want to go to 'Randy Couture's gym' to work out. And it's those people who are getting on the elliptical machines and treadmills."

Paterson equates the MMA gym industry to the early stages of the health club industry. "Back then, you initially had only the muscle heads. But every gym owner soon learned that they couldn't make a living off of just the muscle heads. They had to soften up the gym and bring in the housewives and families. And once they started doing that is when the health club industry took off."

WANT MORE INFO?

We've given you contact information for a variety of products that can improve the workout experience for your members and fighters. Here are additional resources to help you locate unique and MMA-specific fitness tools and equipment like kettlebells, stability balls, ropes and elastic bands, and more.

Everlast – Apparel, gear and equipment for a variety of combat sports, (www.everlast.com).

Cageside MMA – MMA t-shirts, fight gear, pads and equipment. (www.cagesidemma.com/wholesale)



Fitness Factory – Fitness Factory has a complete catalog of commercial-grade fitness equipment including freeweights and cardio machines. (www.fitnessfactory.com/commercial/)

Truesport Alliance/TapouT Training – Truesport Alliance provides a variety of MMA gym equipment, and can produce private label mats and more for your facility. (www.truesportltd.com)

Champion Sports Equipment – Champion Sports has a comprehensive selection of sports and fitness equipment available. (www.championsports.com)

Century Martial Arts – Best known for apparel and fight gear, Century also provides fitness equipment such as weight balls, ropes and bands, and more. (www.centurymartialarts.com) **mma**

LEASE FINANCING OFFERS ACCESS TO EQUIPMENT

There's no doubt most businesses must acquire equipment and other items to expand and prosper.

However, while some gym owners suggest building a fitness area slowly and through the purchase of pre-owned product, most gym members prefer to exercise with new product. For gym owners to satisfy those customers, equipment leasing can be an attractive option. And with banks less likely to offer up loans right now, leasing can be a good solution to get new equipment into your gym.

San Diego-based 21st Century Leasing, a resource for small to medium-size companies seeking access to equipment, says lease financing offers the following advantages:

- The business owner avoids depleting daily working capital and savings.
- The business owner avoids depleting bank lines of credit.
- The business owner avoids using precious and expensive credit cards.
- The business owner pays for the equipment as it is utilized, not all up front.
- The costs associated with a business lease can be treated as a business expense.
- Tax leases can be fully tax deductible.
- Leasing protects against equipment obsolescence.
- Multiple vendors and equipment can be consolidated into one monthly lease payment.
- Installation and delivery costs can be included in the monthly lease payment.
- Lease payments can be treated as an off balance sheet item, strengthening the appearance of a company's net worth.

