

## NEWS

# BULLY BLOCKER

*In an age of iPods, smartphones and Facebook, physical self-defence is still the key to confidence – in the schoolyard and beyond.*

By Joanne Tran

When William Knight came home from school upset, his parents, Victoria and Malcolm, desperately tried to find out what was wrong. William was quiet at first, but eventually opened up.

Bullies were picking on the eight-year old. Their rough play turned into forceful hits and the Knights knew things had gone too far.

It sometimes surprises people, in an age where cyber bullying grabs all the headlines, that violence is still a major problem in the schoolyard.

But while some kids have discovered smartphones and Facebook, physical intimidation is still the number one problem for most pre-teens. These victims can't just switch off a screen and walk away.

To equip William with the tools to stand up to his peers, his parents decided to get self-defence classes for the whole family, including Annabel, 10, and James, six.

Enter John Gill, reigning world champion in self-defence. He's held the title 11 times and he's still entering world championships. He also teaches self-defence classes.

John believes it is important for everyone to have self-defence lessons. It's not about creating Rambos, it's about confidence and self-esteem.

When I requested an interview he insisted: "It's better if you participate as it's easy to learn, fun and safe to practice as it's non-contact."

"My aim is to have every woman and child go through a five week self-defence course."

The session I attended involved the obligatory "Kiai!" (martial arts shout) as John reinforced "if you're going to defend yourself you need to put real force behind it."

While the class paced up and down the hall practising their kicks and blocks, John reminded us: "We're not fighting, we're defending."



It's not punches and kicks that deter bullies, as William soon discovered.

"When [the bullies] came to me I just did a block and they didn't do it again," he says.

His mother says learning self-defence helped William a lot.

"It gave him the confidence to do something back," she says. "And it's not aggressive, he just blocked and pushed him away."

In fact, it benefitted the whole family.

"I like coming to classes because it's practical," Victoria says. "I feel safer now that I know how to defend myself. And it's the most exercise Malcolm gets after being stuck in the office all week," she adds, watching her husband kick a punching pad.

During the week, the Knight family has regular practice sessions in the lounge room.

"It is something we can do together that really benefits all of us," Victoria

“My aim is to have every woman and child go through a five week self defence course.”

John Gill

says. "And the kids definitely look forward to going to classes."

The class is filled with an eclectic mix of kids, teenagers, couples and families. It's an important mix for father Albert Tran, who wants his Year-four son, Alfred, to practise with people of all ages and sizes. "I want

Alfred to get more confidence and it's important to have less bullying at school," he says. "It's not just for school. He learns with adults so he can block adults. You don't know what can happen on the street."

Alfred agrees. Sometimes it helps him defend himself against rough play in the schoolyard. "At school the kindy kids attack you, so you just have to block," he says.

The benefits of the sport extend to any age bracket. Christine Wong, 45, has been attending classes for six months and loves the weekly workout.

"I come here because it helps me with my coordination and fitness and it's calming. It's fun, but also teaches discipline and importantly, it gives me confidence," she says. "You learn technique. Without technique you can hurt someone or hurt yourself. Attending lessons keeps you healthy."

John also believes it's an important

sport for boys to channel their physical impulses in a controlled setting.

"Boys can get it out of their system in a controlled environment. It's not real fighting and we promote respect," he says. "Self-defence is non-aggressive and is to be used only when your life's in danger."

To John, martial arts can also help children's performance at school. "It teaches discipline and philosophy as well as respect. They can bring this into the classroom."

And while everyone in the class lauds the benefits of self-defence classes, John thinks more needs to be done to attract people to the sport. He's always trying to come up with new ways to appeal to more students.

"I'm formulating martial dancing. It will be a fusion of dancing with martial arts techniques," he says.

"We need to attract more women in martial arts and introduce them to a stylistic way of defending themselves, so I'm combining it with a sport they like."

John envisages a future where every woman and child will have access to free self-defence safety courses. He's having talks with local MPs about providing programs. He also gives lessons at local schools.

"I already have enough instructors who are willing to do it for no money. We just need funding."

He maintains self-defence lessons could save lives.

"There are some tragedies out there," John says. "Hopefully you'll never need to use it, but if they had known self-defence, there may have been different outcomes."

*John Gill runs classes on Saturday mornings and is looking to start a class on Thursday night. He's offering one free lesson to interested readers. For more information email [enquiries@johnngill.com.au](mailto:enquiries@johnngill.com.au).*

## DESIGNERS MOVE IN AS ABBOTT PLEDGES \$1.5 BILLION FOR WESTCONNEX

Opposition leader Tony Abbott has pledged \$1.5 billion to the WestConnex Project, if he is elected to power on September 14, on the condition the M4 East Extension is the first infrastructure priority for the State Government.

Abbott has guaranteed the WestConnex, a highway designed

to alleviate the bottleneck of the Parramatta Road, "will be happening" 12 months after a Liberal Government is formed. He told *The Daily Telegraph* the M4 East Extension was important to the growth of Strathfield and western Sydney.

"I lived in Emu Plains in 1986 for a

year and caught the train into the city on numerous occasions," Abbott said.

"On numerous occasions I was forced to drive into the city. It was a nightmare. Twenty seven years later, we still don't have an expressway from Strathfield to the city. It's not good enough."

A spokesperson for Transport, Roads

and Maritime Services told the *Scene* that the Sydney Motorways Project Office (SMPO) has contracted panels in traffic modelling, financial and economic, legal and infrastructure development.

"Acting Premier Andrew Stoner announced the NSW Government was bringing together leading Australian and

international design and construction industry partners to develop the best possible design solutions for the project," the spokesperson said. "The SMPO will work with consortiums led by Ferrovial Agroman and Leighton Contractors to develop the key design aspects along Parramatta Road."