

# Students get immersed in martial arts

More than 20 take part in 22-hour training session

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Chris Braun's students eat and sleep martial arts training.

At least, on this weekend, they ate and slept in the same place they trained, spending 22 hours in and around the Braun Karate and Martial Arts Academy dojo inside St. John's Lutheran Church, 3833 Eighth Ave.

Braun said 22 of his academy's 42 active students showed up for the overnight. The class began at 7 p.m. on Friday with a memorial workout for Army Staff Sgt. Robert Basham, an original student and eventual instructor with Braun who was killed last month during a tour in Iraq.

The academy's 22-hour schedule included more than seven hours of active training interspersed with yoga, meditation sessions, tai chi, a movie, two meals and some well-deserved sleep.

"We're not your average martial arts school, because I've never charged a student," Braun said. "I give my time and they give theirs. If they don't have to pay you get real dedication out of them."

"And I have the greatest students," he said. "The harder I push them, the more they accomplish."

Braun, who celebrates his 26th birthday today, has put 20 years into martial arts, starting at a young age as a way to lose some weight.

"Basketball camp didn't go too well, so it was this or soccer," he said.

He said there's no one reason why his students, who range from age 4 up into their 30s, decided to pick up martial arts. Dakota Welchers, a 7-year-old from Kenosha, is partial to the speed.

"My favorite part is when we fight," Dakota said, during



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**Zanshin Do Karate Club Sensei Rick Cesario, of Kenosha, shows students of Braun's Karate and Martial Arts Academy Jesse Gonzales, 10, of Racine (in black) and Dakota Welchers, 7, of Kenosha, some self-defense techniques Saturday during the waning hours of a 22-hour overnight training session at St. John's Lutheran Church.**

a quick break from parrying and returning punches with 10-year-old Jesse Gonzales. "You try to use everything you learn, and it goes real fast."

Fast enough that the schedule periodically calls for slowing down. More sedate yoga, tai chi and meditation are necessary to keep the students limber and on track, especially during the marathon overnight training.

"We will stop to meditate for about half an hour," Braun said. "They come back much more focused on what they're working on. Sometimes you just need that meditation or you keep hitting the same blocks."

Few of the students looked all that sluggish on Saturday afternoon, even after 20 hours. They listened intently as Kenosha Rick Cesario, one of five instructors from around southeastern Wisconsin who made guest appearances, guided them through a series of moves to counter attacks.

"You know how the willow tree blows in the wind?" Ce-

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For more about Braun's Karate and Martial Arts, contact Chris Braun at 412-5942 or 553-9564.

sario said, slowly swaying to demonstrate the proper weight shift during one series of blocks, kicks and punches. "That's what you are representing here."

Cesario, sporting a few fingers with funny kinks at the joints, showed the students how to guide an attacker's momentum and respond with short, explosive movements, driving elbows and fists. Most of his class delivered the blows with slightly less speed and oomph, but Cesario still warned them when to hold back.

"Don't put too much pressure on the elbow," he said while pairing students off to repeat a grappling maneuver. "You will hyperextend it and get some boo-boos."

Boo-boos are rare enough that Lorie Caracciolo doesn't

worry too much about her classmate and son, young Jesse Gonzales, while he spars. Just like Braun's mother pointed him to martial arts, Jesse's involvement at the academy was Caracciolo's idea. But Braun's mom probably wasn't working out in the same dojo.

"It's something I've had a passion for, and it's just that much better that he does, too," said Caracciolo, happy to see her son embracing the academy's discipline and self-control. "Now that he's 10-years-old it seems like he is growing into it."

And still hanging in there Saturday while other students started stifling yawns.

"It really kind of gets you going," Jesse said.