



Milton's own fight club

Milton kickboxing gym is still fighting for the community, **writes Michael Beaumont.**

MANY will have seen the lights on and wondered what goes on under the grandstand at the Tokomairiro Sportsground.

Few would have guessed that Milton has a former international kickboxing champion providing high-level training there.

After completing his professional kickboxing career, Mejiro Gym New Zealand founder sensei Wahid Wennekes had always wanted to start his own gym, organise sanctioned fight nights, and help his community.

Wennekes, a former European kickboxing champion, who also had a world title fight in a successful career, opened Mejiro Gym New Zealand in Milton in October 2009, where he teaches Mejiro style Dutch Thai Kickboxing.

A year and a half later his post-career ambitions of a sharing his experience and talent with those prepared to put in the hard yards was progressing well.

The gym had attracted a strong following from children,

teenagers, and men and women of all ages.

In many cases entire families were getting involved with his training nights, he said.

As well as kickboxing novices and those looking to get fit, Wennekes had developed a talented stable of young Milton fighters including Che Vai Thomas-Kavanagh, Deahan Maloney and Nick Aratema.

His fighters had gained a reputation of having impressive technical ability and excellent conduct in the ring, attributes Wennekes was extremely proud of.

They were currently focused on a World Association of Kickboxing Organisations' training day in Queenstown on April 30. Fighters would be chosen from the training day to join the New Zealand team heading to the Amateur Kickboxing World Championships.

The long-term plan was to one day have a homegrown fighter compete in K-1 in Japan, he said.

"I'm a firm believer that we've got the talent in Otago, not only in rugby but also kickboxing and martial arts – just our hard-working normal blokes."

Wennekes had been heavily involved in social development programmes in the Netherlands and believed it was important his gym looked after people seeking inner strength, a confidence boost, discipline, fitness, or a new direction in life.

"What we gain in here goes further than the front door, it goes out into the community.

"Everyone who comes in here gains something for themselves."

The gym had already organised an early-morning activity programme for local youth and run a fight for life charity kickboxing event in association with CanTeen Otago.

Another charity fight night in Mosgiel was being planned for May to raise funds in support of those affected by the Canterbury Earthquake.

Wennekes said he wanted to share his kickboxing talent throughout Otago and was looking at holding training nights in Balclutha and Mosgiel, and working alongside Mosgiel-based mixed martial arts fighter Matt Toa.

Despite wanting to expand in to other areas, the gym in Milton would always remain his focus, he said.

"Over my dead body will I ever close this place because this is where it all started for us.

"It's not about me it's about the community and the guys, and they deserve to have their home base here."

Wennekes said his time in Milton had already been hugely rewarding, but he was always happy to see more people interested in his sport coming through the doors of the grandstand.

FIGHT FOCUSED

What: Mejiro Gym New Zealand

Where: Tokomairiro Sportsground, Rugby Grandstand, Milton

When: training nights on

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 6pm.

For more information: call Mejiro Gym New Zealand founders Esther and Wahid Wennekes on 03 417 8881, 027 8416324, visit www.dojomejirogym.co.nz or email mejirogym.newzealand@gmail.com.

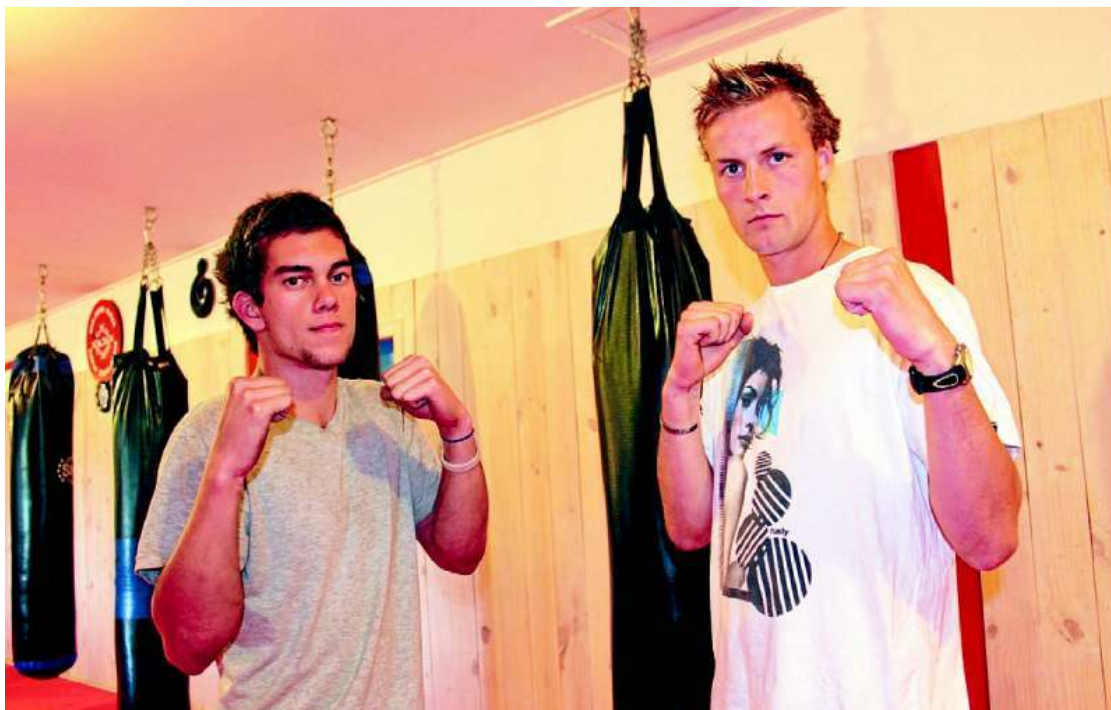


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Page 2 of 2



Kicking on: Mejiro Gym New Zealand founder sensei Wahid Wennekes is helping the community where he can as well developing a stable of talented South Otago kickboxers.



Young guns: Promising Mejiro Gym New Zealand fighters Nick Aratema, 18, and Deahan Maloney, 19