



KICKS * FLICKS * & CHICKS!

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Dow Jones & Company. All Rights Reserved

"It's no secret that fights are big business on cable television"
"Blackbelt TV: a cable network devoted solely to fists of fury"
- Wall Street Journal

[FRONT PAGE]

Martial-Arts Channel Aims to Leap Onto

Can Blackbelt TV, Selling Itself As MTV for Fight Fans, Break Media Titans' Programming Grip?

By JOE FLENT



JACKIE CHAN and Jet Li may be his action

SPECIAL ISSUE Forbes

www.forbes.com

OUTFRONT

For the Love of the Game

BY MONTE BURKE

BlackbeltTV

The brainchild of Larry Kasanoff, creator of *Mortal Kombat* movies, will show Thai kickboxing championships, martial arts workouts and reruns of Bruce Lee flicks, all hosted by six scantily clad female "fight jocks."



"The brainchild of Larry Kasanoff, creator of Mortal Kombat movies..."

- Forbes

Lipsticks and nunchucks.

BLACKBELT TV



24 TRIPS of a LIFETIME
 THE ONES THAT SHOULD BE ON EVERY MAN'S LIST

Men's Journal

Hunting Al Qaeda
THE CIA'S LATEST WEAPON

AGENDA

COMBAT

TV That Kicks Butt

WHAT DO BEAUTIFUL WOMEN have in common with the martial arts? For one, men love to watch both. That bodes well for Blackbelt TV, a cable network debuting this month that boasts nearly 15,000 hours of classic films, fist-flinging tournament action, and more — as well as a crew of six "fight jocks" (kung fu VJs) like Jaymee Ong, a model whose experience includes five years of karate and tae kwon do and acting stints alongside Jackie Chan and Pat Morita. Jumpin' Jaymee (her screen name) and the other women — Rockin' Robin, Kung Fu Karen, Killer Kadee, Swingin' Sheba, and Tuff Trisha — will add some feminine yin to the male yang of the genre. "We're hot," we k just And men mart

24 BLACK-BELT BEAUTIES



"TV That Kicks Butt"
- Men's Journal

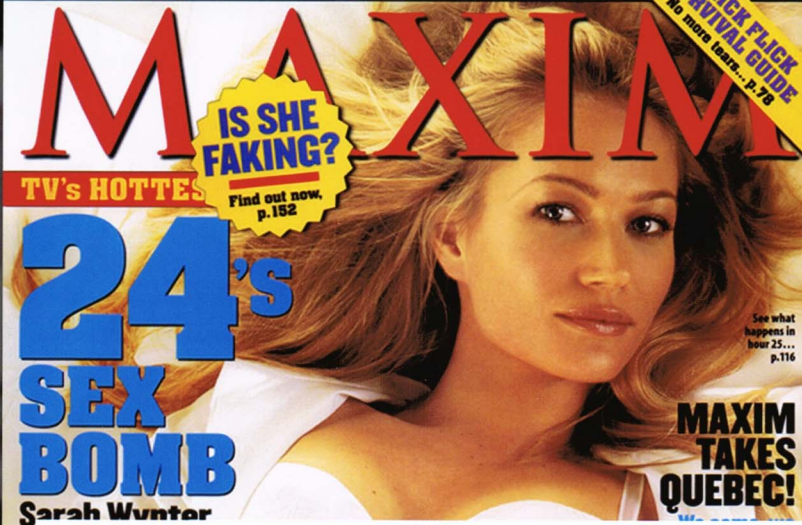
MARTIAL ARTIST:
 Blackbelt TV
 "fight jock"
 Jaymee Ong.



KICKS * FLICKS * & CHICKS!

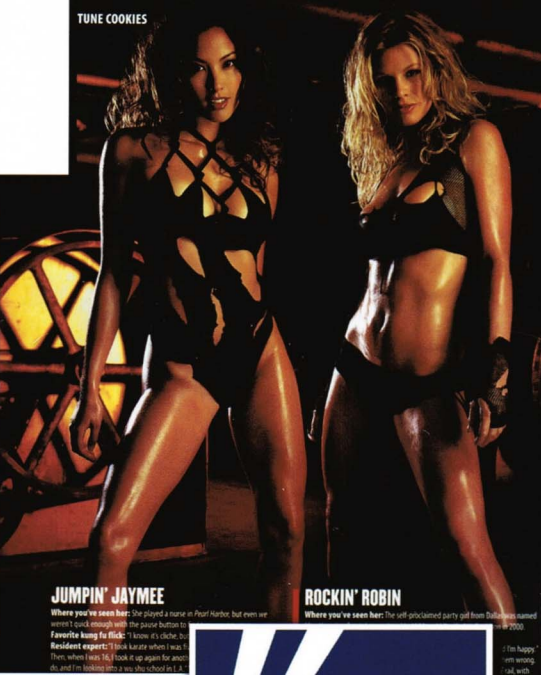
BLACKBELT TV

SEX ♦ SPORTS ♦ BEER ♦ GADGETS ♦ CLOTHES ♦ EGGS



"Why has it taken so long for someone to give your cable box a roundkick? Fear not – Blackbelt TV is here! Best of all the network is hosted by gorgeous high kicking hostesses call the Fight Jocks."

- Maxim



"More Martial Arts than you can shake a razor sharp bamboo stick at...promising to load you up with scores of intense Kung-Fu flicks"

- Fox News Channel



BLACKBELT TV





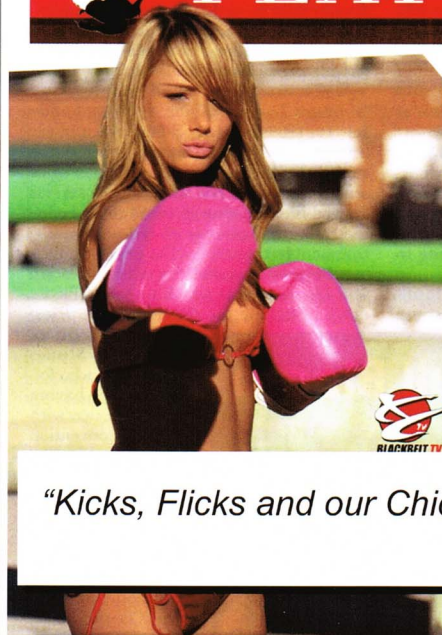
KICKS * FLICKS * & CHICKS!

PLAYBOY

ENTERTAINMENT FOR M www.playboy.com

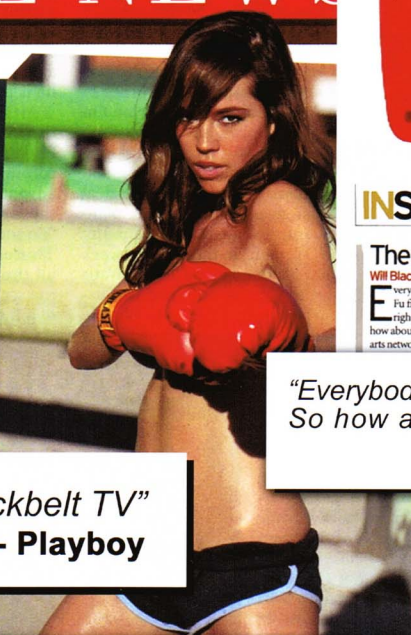


PLAYMATE NEWS



KICKS, FLICKS AND OUR CHICKS BOLSTER BLACKBELT TV

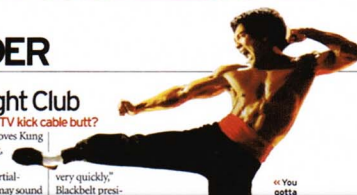
PMOY 2007 Sara Jean Underwood (left) and Miss June 2007 Brittany Binger are strapping on the gloves for Blackbelt TV. Don't worry; no Playmates were harmed in the process. Rather, the 24-hour all-martial-arts pre-



INSIDER

The Fight Club

Will Blackbelt TV kick cable butt? Everybody loves Kung Fu fighting, right? So how about a martial-arts network? It may sound very quickly, Blackbelt presi-



"Everybody loves Kung Fu Fighting, right? So how about a martial arts network?"

- TV Guide

"Kicks, Flicks and our Chicks Bolster Blackbelt TV"

- Playboy

The New York Times

"Blackbelt TV is the most unusual offering. Created by Larry Kasanoff who has produced two Mortal Kombat movies...[he] has amassed an archive of matches from around the world and a library of films and television shows to augment live coverage to create his network."

- The New York Times

nday [FRONT PAGE]

l Sports Dial:
ar Sensations

BLACKBELT TV





KICKS * FLICKS * & CHICKS!



"24 hours a day of martial arts movies and fights with hot chicks... I would get Blackbelt TV – I would subscribe to that!"
- Howard Stern

THE *Hollywood* REPORTER[®] 73rd year a VNU publication

Blackbelt TV dresses f

By Steve Brennan

gramm
license

"Thousands of hours of classic martial arts movies and TV along with actual kung fu fighting, Thai boxing and other combat sports from around the world-form the programming tentpole for...Blackbelt TV"

- The Hollywood Reporter



"High kicking TV...All Kung Fu...All the time"

- CNN

BLACKBELT TV



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2011

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Hollywood's New Kick

From Russell Crowe to Steven Soderbergh, top actors and directors are leaping into the global market for martial-arts movies. Why everybody is kung fu fighting.

By DON STEINBERG



BRUCE LEE IN "ENTER THE DRAGON" 1973.

Everett Collection

In "Haywire," director Steven Soderbergh's movie due in January, Gina Carano is an international black-ops agent whose handlers betray her, so she needs to beat the brains out of a series of gentlemen, using roundhouse head kicks, low leg sweeps, suffocating choke holds and limb-cracking arm bars. Ms. Carano, a star mixed-martial-arts competitor, is demure and brutal in her leading-lady debut opposite veterans including Michael Douglas, Ewan McGregor and Antonio Banderas. She looks like the cute girl in your office, if the cute girl could choke out Michael Fassbender with a leg triangle.

Forty years after Bruce Lee's "Fists of Fury" hit U.S. theaters in 1971, martial-arts movies are hitting the A list. The kung fu fix that we used to mainline from Hong Kong—with a little help from Japanese samurai flicks and artless American duds—now is available from a surprising number of countries.

As the world is shrinking, it's also coming together in its appreciation of kicking, lunging and screaming. Film-makers in countries like Thailand and Indonesia do just fine feeding their own high-powered local economies—Asia-Pacific box office was up 21% in 2010. But everyone is exporting, too, with an especially covetous eye on China, especially if import restrictions lift.

Gareth Evans is a Welshman who directed "The Raid," an Indonesian action film which features the martial art known as

silat. "This genre travels well," he says "You don't need to understand a foreign language to understand a martial-arts film." Sony snapped up the U.S. rights to "The Raid," one of several new films tailored partly for Western audiences, a generation happily raised on videogame mayhem.

Hollywood also is gearing up with bigger-budget films, with better scripts, more-accomplished directors, and bigger stars than Chuck Norris, Steven Seagal and Jean Claude Van Damme. With international revenues increasingly important, studios are targeting Asia with all kinds of films: "Avatar" and "Inception" were big hits in China. But "Kung Fu Panda 2" broke the opening-weekend record there this summer.

The marquee names attached to martial-arts projects are piling up like Uma Thurman's body count in "Kill Bill." Ryan Gosling has been training in Muay Thai to star in "Only God Forgives," about an exile in Bangkok who takes on nasty gangsters, to be directed by his "Drive" director Nicolas Winding Refn. Leonardo DiCaprio is attached to a planned series of films based on the Don Winslow novel "Satori," about a martial-arts-trained as-



Zhang Ziyi in "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," 2000

Sony Pictures Classics/ Everett



Tom Hardy and Christian Bale filming 'The Dark Knight Rises.'

-sassin. **Keanu Reeves** has wrapped up "47 Ronin," a Japanese martial-arts epic due next November, and plans to make his directorial debut helming "Man of Tai Chi," which he says will include 18 fights and 40 minutes of kung fu action.

Russell Crowe recently finished shooting "The Man With the Iron Fists" in Shanghai with **Lucy Liu**. The gory kung fu extravaganza was co-scripted by Eli Roth and musician RZA, who directed it.

"It's a blend of classic kung fu moviemaking with Hollywood storytelling," says RZA, whose rap group **Wu-Tang Clan** got its name from his lifelong fanaticism for vintage kung fu flicks

Filmmakers already redid "The Karate Kid"—now there's talk of a feature-film version of the 1970s TV series "Kung Fu." In December, **Robert Downey Jr.** will display kung fu mastery in the "Sherlock Holmes" sequel, battling Dr. Moriarty in a climactic balcony fight. Next July, **Christian Bale** will put his kung fu training to work again as Batman, facing a villain played by Tom Hardy, who became a star this fall playing a mixed-martial-arts fighter in "Warrior," and with **Anne Hathaway**, who studied martial arts prepping to be Catwoman.

It's not hard to imagine why some of Hollywood's rich and famous have embraced martial arts. It's a lifestyle double play: Eastern philosophy plus a hard-core workout.

"We're in more of a fitness-obsessed Hollywood, an extreme-fitness-obsessed Hollywood," says Colin Geddes, a martial-arts-movie expert and programmer for the Toronto International Film Festival. So **Evan Rachel Wood** knows tae kwon do. **Taylor Lautner** and **Courtney Cox** do karate. **Naomi Watts** does Brazilian jiu-jitsu.

Mr. Downey has credited kung fu with helping him kick drugs. He has worked with Wing Chun kung fu trainer Eric Oram since 2003.

"I was his fight double in the first film [in 2009], but I didn't need to do much," says Mr. Oram, who also has trained Mr. Bale and **Jake Gyllenhaal**.

Asian pop culture began seeping into the West in the 1990s, with a stream of Japanese imports: "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers," Nintendo's Pokemon, "Iron Chef" and anime cartoons, notes Adam Ware, CEO of Mnet, a new U.S. cable channel featuring only Asian content. Decades of videogames like "Mortal Kombat" and "Street Fighter" have put martial arts in front of a generation. So have the karate and tae kwon do academies that seem to be in every town in America, trying to teach our kids some discipline. And mixed martial arts, where athletes combine Japanese, Chinese, Thai, Brazilian and American fighting styles, has exploded as a professional sport. The Ultimate Fighting Championship and Fox recently signed a \$90 million, eight-year TV deal. (Fox is owned by News Corp., which publishes The Wall Street Journal.)

It's no surprise all this could lead to **Michael Cera** and **Jason Schwartzman** clashing swords in the comic-book-and-videogame-inspired movie "Scott Pilgrim vs. the World" (2010), or Emily Browning facing a giant samurai in "Sucker Punch" (2011).

Once upon a time, it was Hong Kong that cranked out most of the world's kung fu and swordplay movies, notably from the prolific Shaw Brothers studio. But early films weren't especially accessible to Western audiences. Director King Hu's "Come Drink With Me" (1966), which any genre snob will tell you is a seminal masterpiece, begins like a familiar Western. Bandits kidnap the governor's son on a dirt trail, hoping to trade him for their leader, who is in jail. The governor sends a killer called Golden Swallow—his daughter. The gang confronts her in a bar. She wins a sword fight and pays the proprietor for two horses. Then it quickly gets un-Western: the bandits shoot a boy in the eye with a poison dart. Then there's a musical number.

Bruce Lee was able to bridge cultures. Born in San Francisco to globe-trotting parents, he became a child actor in Hong Kong, where he learned kung fu and became a dance champion. He returned to the U.S. at age 19, invented the awesome "1-inch punch" (an extended-arm shoulder shrug), and trained celebrities in "the way of the intercepting fist." His role as Kato in the 1966 TV series "The Green Hornet" led to American success for his Hong Kong-made fight films, beginning with "Fists of Fury." With his cocky smile, come-fight-me hand gestures, and graceful but deadly moves, the chiseled Mr. Lee became an international sex symbol.

"There was physical appeal to him you didn't generally get in traditional representations of Asian men," says Minh-Ha Pham, an assistant professor of Asian-American studies at Cornell University. "His popularity among African-American and Latino audiences is interesting, too, as a racial underdog during the civil-rights era."

After Mr. Lee died in 1973, Hollywood's attempts to put Western (white) actors in his place fell flat. Messrs. Norris, Seagal and Van Damme were accomplished athletes, but they just seemed dorky out there. Anyway, why is a Chicago cop using Japanese aikido against armed drug dealers, like Mr. Seagal did in "Above the Law"?



"The Matrix Reloaded" with Keanu Reeves, 2003.

Mary Evans/Ronald Grant/Everett Collection

"People are like, 'Why is he running around kicking people and no one's shot him yet?'" says Marrese Crump, an American martial artist who is starring in a new film being made in Thailand.

Hollywood auteurs like Mr. Soderbergh are trying to class things up. Of his "Haywire" he says: "I think there's maybe an assumption that if you take someone like Gina [Carano] and put them in a movie, it's going to have the patina of a B-movie. We wanted it to look like a piece of cinema."

In the 1980s, acrobatic Jackie Chan restored the fun by adding slapstick and hit-the-rewind-button stunts, performed without a double. He leaped from a cliff onto a hot-air balloon ("Armour of God") and slid down the outside of a skyscraper ("Who Am I?"). Mr. Chan co-starred with Chris Tucker in the blockbuster "Rush Hour" in 1998, the same year Jet Li made his Hollywood debut in "Lethal Weapon 4."

Other kung fu talent streamed to America in the wake of Hong Kong's 1997 turnover from the British to China. To make "The Matrix" (1999) and its sequels, the Wachowski brothers hired legendary Hong Kong action director Yuen Woo-Ping as a fight choreographer—so Michelle Yeoh's scorpion kick from Mr. Yuen's "Tai-Chi Master" (1993) became Carrie-Anne Moss's scorpion kick in "The Matrix Reloaded" (2003). It reportedly took Ms. Moss six months to learn the move, in which you bring a leg looping up from behind your head, like a scorpion's tail, to bonk someone on the noggin.

"Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" smashed more barriers in 2000. Director Ang Lee, like Bruce Lee, was multicultural. Born in Taiwan, he'd directed "The Ice Storm" and other American films before "Crouching Tiger" and set out to make a picture that would please both sides of the Pacific. Wire-guided fighters alighting on treetops were wondrous to American audiences, but that was old hat for Mr. Lee, more like an homage. On the DVD commentary for the movie, Mr. Lee and producer/writer James Schamus joke about how they played to Western tastes by starting the movie with scene-setting dialogue instead of fights.

"I kind of feel sorry for the Chinese audience," Mr. Lee says. "They have to wait 15 minutes before the action takes off."

Since then China's film business has boomed. Despite restrictions, Chinese box office rose 64% in 2010, to \$1.5 billion, and is on track to hit \$2 billion this year, already one-fifth of U.S.-Canada revenues, according to the Motion Picture Association of America. The aggressive expansion is attracting U.S. filmmakers who want to tap the fast-growing market with China-friendly themes that make government censors happy. It's no coincidence the 2010 "Karate Kid" remake, with Mr. Chan and Jaden Smith, replaces the Japanese karate of the original with Chinese kung fu (Mr. Chan's "Rush Hour 3" had been banned in China, presumably for depicting a Chinese crime family). Films made as co-productions with Chinese companies aren't considered foreign there, so they can skirt the state quota of 20 imports per year. Mr. Reeves's "Man of Tai Chi" is being funded by Australia-based Village Roadshow along with the state-backed China Film Group and Wanda Group, China's largest movie-theater operator.

The Chinese market is large enough that films made there don't need Western appeal to make big money. "The question is, will their industry evolve the way Hong Kong's did, with a focus on exports, or more like India, where the country is so large and the tastes so specific that it's a completely in-country industry?" says Jonathan Wolf, managing director of the American Film Market.

One 2011 Chinese martial-arts film with Western sensibilities is "Wu Xia," from director Peter Chan, which Weinstein Co. signed for U.S. distribution at Cannes (so far there's just a Blu-ray with English subtitles available). Hong Kong superstar Donnie Yen portrays a modest paper-maker raising a family in a quiet village—but he may be a vicious killer in hiding! When he displays a bit too much expertise dusting off a pair of thieves, a detective (Takeshi Kaneshiro) starts poking around. The story focuses on character and plot more than many Chinese epics do, and its presentation is modern, using slow-mo fight replays and computer-animated anatomy sequences to illustrate the forensic detective work.

"The Raid" from Indonesia combines SWAT-team-versus-gangster slaughter with a discipline of martial arts called silat. Mr. Evans, the director, who discovered lead actor Iko Uwais while filming a documentary about silat in West Sumatra, explains the technique: "All of the strikes are done with an open palm. You strike with base of your hand, and your fingers are kind of in a claw, so you can immediately grab and pull

the person back in, for an extra hit." Sony Pictures bought the American rights to "The Raid" based on 10 minutes of raw footage shown in a Cannes hotel room this spring.

"The Raid" wraps its brutal fighting around an ingenious premise. A crime lord based on the top floor of a building has leased lower floors to various criminals, and the SWAT team must defeat opponents one level at a time before reaching the boss. It's a videogame. Still, Mr. Evans says it took creativity to feature so much martial arts in a movie where everybody is packing heavy artillery.

"We had to find ways we could get weapons to run out of bullets, to break, people to lose helmets," he says. "The first 20 minutes is very gunplay-heavy. We gradually get rid of those guns and move towards nightsticks and knives. Once we lose those, we can go into hand-to-hand combat. We didn't want it to start martial-arts-heavy, because it just wouldn't make sense. I'm hoping that plays well in the U.S." ■



Emily Browning in "Sucker Punch," 2011.

Warner Bros./Everett Collection



Robert Downey Jr. in "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows," 2011. Robert Downey Jr. says his study of kung fu helped save his career. His Sherlock Holmes showed martial-arts skills and will again in next month's "Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows."