

Moving to a Brazilian beat

By GEMMA PHILLIPS

PERFORMED to the steady beat of drums and the samba rhythms of Brazilian song, the acrobatic moves of Capoeira seem to have little in common with other martial arts.

Watching the players perform their moves in the middle of the circle can look like two dancers expertly executing a routine.

But beneath the graceful exterior, the white-clad players are often using moves as forceful as you would see in any other discipline.

There lies the secret to Capoeira: the disguise of combat.

A widely-held belief about the origins of the sport was that it began in colonial times when slaves would conceal their deadly training sessions by practising them to music and song.

Yet the element of disguise remains, with the graceful spinning kicks and cartwheel-style moves performed to the steady beat of music and song hiding the force of the strike within.

A unique mixture of music, dance, song, martial arts and acrobatics, Capoeira has since developed from its mutinous roots to become institutionalised in academies across the world, of which Townsville is one.

Matthew Eales, head instructor of the Townsville school of Capoeira Brasil, said the graceful look of the sport was deceptive.

"It's not a dance, it's not choreographed," he said. "It is like a game."

"We don't label a winner or a loser but the idea is to beat your partner."

Sometimes the games are very friendly, and when you are training in the first few years there is little contact. But the more advanced you get, the more you start to get into the martial arts aspect.

"You are using your body to trick your partner into thinking you're going to do one move and then do another — it's all about trickery."

The element of trickery and disguise remains, with instructors and performers alike going by nicknames: Eales is better known as Ukari (pronounced wacka-ree).

Yet words fail to do justice to a sport which has to be seen to be believed.

Watching a Capoeira expert in action can be nothing short of spectacular, with the moves extending to flips and even somersaults — giving a hint of just how great the physical benefits can be.

"You get more flexibility, strength, co-ordination, rhythm, balance, and from a mental perspective it's good for your soul," Eales added.

"You get lots of kids who come along and start making lots of friends and gaining confidence from what they are doing."

"Capoeira isn't easy, and the training makes them realise that other parts of their lives seem easy — they realise that you have to work hard to get results."



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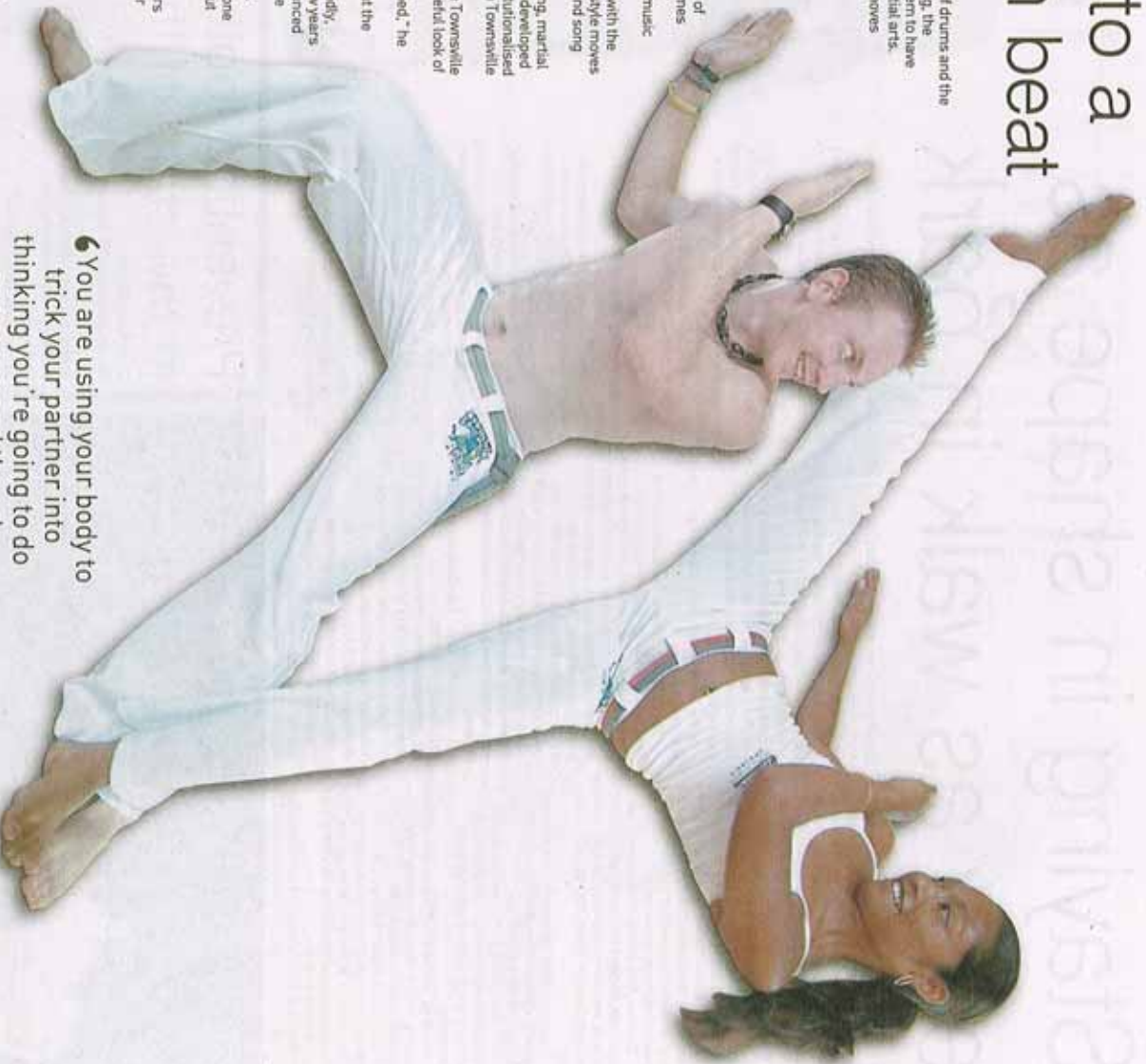
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