

# Lamorinda Jiu-Jitsu and Kickboxing women's self-defense class empowers participants

By Emma Wong

The Lamorinda Jiu-Jitsu and Kickboxing studio hosted its bimonthly women's self-defense class on Aug. 20. The 90-minute session taught participants strategies to confront potential predators and prevent assaults.

Eighteen female participants – including middle and high schoolers, college students, and adults – attended this month's class, including Colbie Freese, a sophomore at Campolindo High School. "I came here to learn more about self-defense," Freese said. "Self-defense is super important for all women and girls to become empowered and be able to fight back when the opportunity arises."

According to the Lamorinda Jiu-Jitsu and Kickboxing website, class attendees learn "dynamic striking skills from any position, effective strategies for any attack, [and] the ability to stay calm in high-stress situations."

Coach Stephanie Moon, owner of Lamorinda Jiu-Jitsu and Kickboxing, led the class alongside Coach Melissa Quintana-Velete. Moon is a Gracie Jiu-Jitsu black belt and a lauded MMA, boxing, and Muay Thai champion. Quintana-Velete is an active coach and a Muay Thai-kickboxing specialist with over 20 years of experience.

"People ask what the most effective way to defend yourself is," Quintana-Velete said. "I think any martial art can be effective because it gives you confidence to say 'back up, what do you want?' and 'I can handle myself.'"

Participants learned core concepts of self-defense, including the four stages of assault. In stage one, the attacker identifies a subject. To initiate stage two, the attacker grabs the subject. During stage three, the attacker tackles the victim to the ground. In stage four, the assault is committed.

Moon's class aims to prevent women from entering stage one by teaching awareness.

"It's always important to be aware: make eye contact and stay off your phone," Moon said. "It's been statistically proven that when women fight back, they fare better." The National Institute of Justice reports that more than half of women who use physical resistance prevent sexual assault.

During the early stages, the class stresses escaping an attacker at first contact. "When someone grabs you, you have to start fighting back right away. Don't get into their car or go anywhere with them," Moon said.

Should the assault progress to stage two, the women learned how to re-

spond to physical threats, from an assaulter grabbing their wrist to being caught in a headlock. "We teach things like wrist escapes and ponytail grabs, which we have participants practice at home," Moon said. "[The moves] become visceral so you don't have to think about them."

In stage three, when an attacker pushes the victim to the floor, ground exercises are critical for escape. The women practiced breaking their falls and returning to a fighting stance. If pushed back down, they rehearsed a "guard get-up," an exercise stemming from jiu-jitsu. The last exercises dealt with stage four. Participants turned the tide against their attackers with techniques such as arm-bars – a type of martial arts hold.

The women formed a tight-knit community, partnering up to rehearse each tactic. "The community is really important, with all these girls gathering together for the same purpose," Stanley Middle School student Zoe Freese said.

In addition to a good workout, women across grade and age levels gained training and knowledge from the class. "I loved how educational the class was," Colbie Freese said. "We learned the techniques, but we also learned why we performed them and how they can be more effective. Not



Photo provided

only was it very hands-on, but we also learned what happens in a self-defense situation."

Statistics on assault in the United States highlight the need for self-defense, especially among women. According to the U.S. Department of Justice's 2022 Violence Against Women report, 91% of sexual assault and rape victims are female, with cases often involving intimate partners or other acquaintances. Additionally, the CDC reports that more than 1 in 2 women and nearly 1 in 3 men have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime.

The importance of self-defense is not limited to women. "We want this class to be available to all people, not

just girls and women," Moon said. "You can fight back. Unfortunately, a lot of victims are attacked by someone they know. It's never the victims' fault."

"The key takeaway is that you can believe in and stand up for yourself," Quintana-Velete said. "There are a lot of dangerous people out there. Even just using your voice and telling people to stay away is very powerful."

Lamorinda Jiu-Jitsu and Kickboxing also offers jiu-jitsu, Muay-Thai kickboxing, adult wrestling, and kids' martial arts classes. Women's Brazilian jiu-jitsu sessions are held every Saturday at 9 a.m. For more details, visit <https://lamorindajiujiitsu.com/>.

## Lamorinda girls' volleyball

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"For us to be successful, we have to improve our serving and passing," Walsh said. "We've been working hard to improve our overall consistency in our serving and our side out percentages."

### Miramonte

Miramonte head coach Leslie Ray doesn't beat around the bush. "We're in a rebuilding phase," Ray said. "I lost 10 seniors from last year, seven of whom were the top killers on offense, so last year's underclassmen are stepping into big shoes that they have to fill."

With a roster of six seniors, four juniors, four sophomores and two freshmen, this is a team that is building for the future. "We're working hard and striving in every practice to get better," Ray said. "We're trying to figure out what our DNA is and what defines us as a team and all that will all come with the growth of the team."

Being a little undersized, Ray is working hard to put together the right combination on the front line. "It's about building the mentality that they can get out there and compete with anybody," Ray said. "We're going to work more on making sure that we're more control driven and taking our swings when we need to and just being smart with the ball."

The front line is led by co-captain Sadie Symonds, Hannah Rush, junior Amanda Roach, and freshman Sena Hens. "Sadie has been one of my top hitters and Hannah who played in the back line last year is now playing opposite and has one of the best arm swings as a lefty on the team. Amanda has been playing very well and Sena has a nice swing and has been doing very well as an outside hitter. I'm not afraid to play freshmen and in a year like this, I have to get them on the court."

The strength of the team is on the back line led by co-captain and four-year starter, libero Nicole Tuszynski and senior setter Keira Elliot. Also being used in the back line are senior co-captain Tara Dao, sophomore libero Ava Burton and freshman setter Maddie Yun.

"Nicole is one of the top liberos in our league and with Keira are a strong pair," Ray said. "Tara who is listed as an outside hitter will also be

playing as a defensive specialist along with Sadie Symonds. Ava Burton should also see a lot more time as a libero as the season develops. Maddie, who played club prior to entering high school, plays so calm and is really mature for a freshman and is playing a lot behind Keira."

Having coached for so many years, Ray knows what it takes to put together a winning team. "For us to be successful it's just not letting any team that comes your way win, or lose, but knowing how to deal with it. It's up to us to grow from every experience and our ultimate plan for every game is to get better."

### Campolindo

It's accepted that every team will lose players to graduation but for the Campolindo team, there were other key losses for the team that had not been expected. Charlotta Bell, the team's MVP last season, is coming off knee surgery and is out for the beginning of the season, Makenna Crosson moved with her family to San Jose and another starter simply opted to no longer play high school volleyball which has led to Campolindo having an uncharacteristic 3-4 record.

"When you lose three starters that had Division I college potential, you have to build with what you've got," head coach John Vuong said. "We're improving and progressing but with those losses, that's why we are where we are at today."

At this point, Vuong is looking for the chemistry on the team to develop. "We've had a lot of unforced errors which is showing that the girls don't have the necessary understanding of each other on the court," Vuong said.

Right now, our leader in the front court is Aveya Stone who is getting a lot of looks," Vuong said "We also have Hanna Bjornson, Gwen Koplun, and Charlotte Eirich on the outside. Mia Walloch and Ava Rogers are up from JV and we have a junior transfer that came in from Texas, Gia Okulicz, who is an athletic, well-rounded player who will be playing on the outside."

Things just don't come together that quickly with so many new players. "It's going to take about a half a season for these guys to come together," Vuong said.

Things are also in a bit of flux on the back row as well.

"At this point it's still wide open as to who among six players is going to establish themselves as the starting libero and another five who are competing for the defensive specialist position," Vuong said. "We don't have a true, established lineup and we're still trying to figure out whether to run a 5-1 or 6-2 lineup. There is a lot of uncertainty right now for us to define who we are."

Rachel Andre is the Cougars' senior setter along with sophomore Cassidy Woo who is up from last year's JV team. "It's a challenge now," Vuong said, "and I believe that it is going to be wide open in our league and anybody can win it, so it does make it more

interesting and exciting."

Vuong's advice to his players is simple and succinct: "I tell them to accept who you are. You can't be last year's team or other teams from the past. You have to be who you

are. Be better than yesterday and set small goals. That's what I am asking of them, and I've seen it in practice."



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