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Amelia Benner '09

Illinois Wesleyan University, iwumag@iwu.edu

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In Profile: LJ Hachmeister

A School of Nursing alumna quickly masters an ancient martial art.

BY AMELIA BENNER '09

This past summer, LH Hachmeister '02 proved that she's a fast learner. In July, the IWU School of Nursing alumna became world champion in the martial art of Eskrima — only nine months after her first lesson in the sport.

Eskrima, or Filipino stick fighting, is a lightning-paced martial art that pits two opponents armed with wood or rattan sticks against each other. One of the only martial arts disciplines that emphasizes the use of weapons by beginners, stick fighting requires quick reflexes, agility, and control.

“Despite the all-out brawl that it appears to be, there is actually a lot of skill and thought involved in it,” Hachmeister said.

When she first discovered the sport in September 2005, Hachmeister had never competed in the martial arts.

“I happened to find stick fighting only by chance — it just happened to catch my eye in the telephone book,” she said. “When I tried it out I instantly loved it.”

Although the history of stick fighting is shrouded in myth, the discipline has its roots in the Philippines. Ferdinand Magellan might be called the European discoverer of Eskrima; he was killed and his men defeated at the Battle of Mactan in 1521 by Filipino tribesmen wielding wooden instruments and spears.

Today's stick fighters avoid the fate of Magellan and his crew by wearing pads and protective gear.

“Yes, it looks dangerous, but it's not as bad as it looks,” Hachmeister said. “One of our masters broke his thumb trying to block a strike, but that's the worst injury I've seen.”

In competition, stick-fighting bouts consist of three one-minute rounds. Competitors begin the fight with 10 points and judges deduct from their scores for missteps such as dropping a stick or failing to defend themselves. The scores for the three rounds are added together to determine the winner. A tie leads to a “death match.”



Hachmeister (left) keeps cool in the heat of battle at the world championships.

While preparing for competition, Hachmeister trained six days a week, both in class and on her own time. Her classmates were primarily men in the 175- to 220-pound weight range, so competing against women in her own 132- to 145-pound division was “a nice break!” Hachmeister said.

Her winning performances in the regional and national tournaments qualified her for the 2006 world championship, which was held in Orlando, Fla., in early July 2006.

The competition is held every two years by the World Eskrima Kali Arnis Federation, with over 40 countries represented.



Hachmeister attributes her victory over the previous world champion to the ability to “read” her opponent and stay focused in the heat of the match.

“You can imagine being hit makes you mad, but those who lost their cool often lost their gas in the match trying to overpower their opponent,” she said. “And the biggest reason I won my match was because my opponent got frustrated and lost it.”

But Hachmeister’s memorable summer didn’t end with her world championship title. Later that month, she wed Nic Peschel in Placencia, Belize. The couple live in Denver, where Hachmeister works as a registered nurse on the

medical/oncology floor at Rose Medical Center.

When not stick fighting, Hachmeister, a former captain of the IWU women’s soccer team, still competes in amateur and semi-pro soccer tournaments. She said that while she still loves competing on a team, Eskrima has taught her to focus on her individual performance and control her emotions.

“In soccer I used to get so worked up that the first 15 minutes of any game I played was horrible,” she said. “Stick fighting forced me to teach myself how to care about how I performed, but not focus on achieving victory.”

Hachmeister isn’t sure she’s ready to rest on her laurels.

“Right now I’m just glad to have a break from training and see my family again,” she said. “Maybe in two years I’ll be ready to go again and defend my title. Otherwise, there are so many other sports out there ... so we’ll see.”