

BEST Of Both Worlds

On Team Chat, the Players Work Hard and Play Hard

Story by Douglas Jeffrey/Photos by Doug Churchill

Their sleeping bags are lined up side by side in Mike and McKenzie Chaturantabut's one-bedroom apartment near UCLA like hot dogs in a package. There's Steven Horst, Matthew Mullins, Guy Burkett, Mychal Hasse and Jeff Ikejiri. It's midnight in Los Angeles, and Team Chat is sound asleep.

Now, wait a minute. Most of these guys are thousands of miles from home. They are minutes from downtown Los Angeles. There are movies. There are restaurants. There are the sights and sounds of L.A. at their fingertips. There's Howard Stern on CBS. There are no parents or curfews. Why in the world are these teens asleep at the wheel?

"By that time of the day, we wanted to go to sleep," says Horst, a 16-year-old American *taekwondo* stylist from St. Paul, Minnesota. "In



fact, we asked if we could go to sleep."

How could five supposedly tireless teens be tired? Easy. They have been training with Mike Chaturantabut, affectionately known as Mike "Chat" to his friends and one of the most dynamic and intense sport-karate competitors who ever put on a uniform.

"We might be up as early as 6:30 a.m.," says Horst, who is sporting a flashy 3.5 grade point average at Humboldt High School. "Our training days are rough. Mike kills us when we're working out."

But don't get the impression that Chat is some kind of a slave driver. These guys love every second they are around him.

"When we're training, there's no goofing off," says Horst. "Everything is serious. When we're not working out, however, he's (Chat) one of the kids.

He jokes with us. It's fun."

And that's music to Chat's ears. The 24-year-old actor says having fun is one of the most important benefits the kids can derive from being on the team. However, it is not the most important.

"The most important thing I want them to take away from the team is self-confidence in everything they do," says Chat, who is shredding UCLA with a 3.85 GPA in business economics. "I want them to be self-confident in the martial arts, school and their lives in general. Provided they are willing to put in the work and the time, I want them to believe they can overcome any challenge or hurdle. Aside from that, I want them to look back on the whole experience as fun."

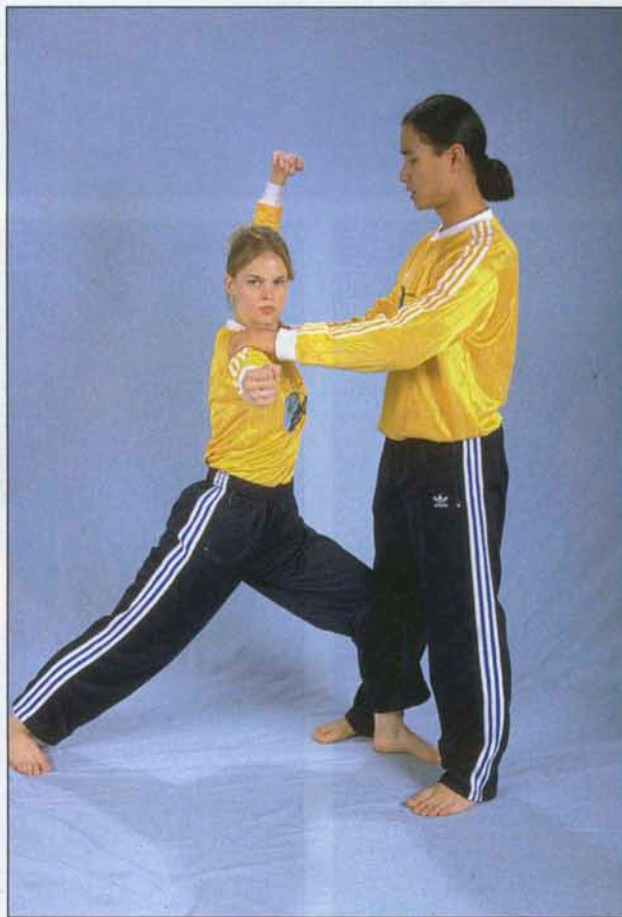
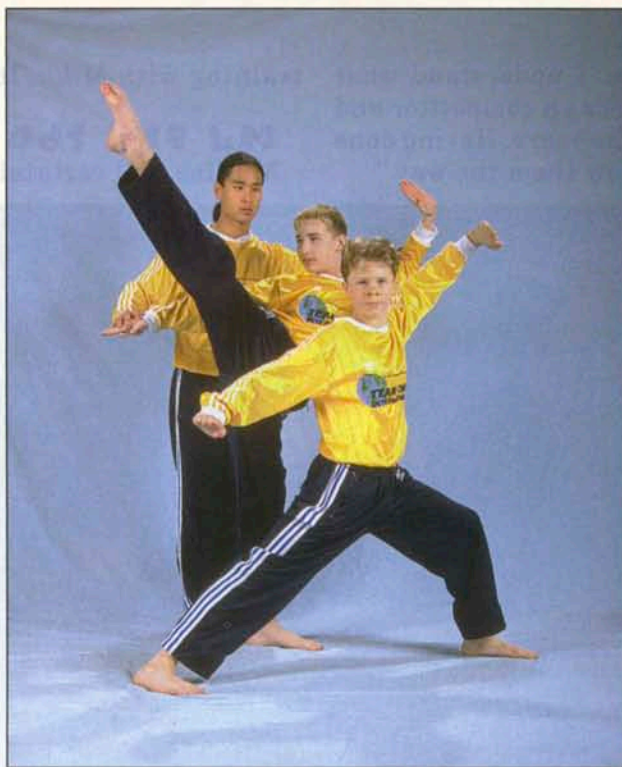
Big Dividends

Chat's genuine concern for his team has not only made it fun for everyone, but it's created a close-knit family.

"We are definitely like a family," says Mullins, who intends to study the performing arts at the College of Dupage in Chicago this fall. "We warm up together, we eat together, we have a good time and we're always there for each other. We're all very close."

Chat, who has won more than 50 national and international forms and weapons championships, says he stresses the importance of closeness.

"To strengthen the bond of the team, I want them to walk into the arena as a team, warm up together, put their bags in the same place and cheer for their teammates when they are competing," says Chat, who recently moved to a three-bedroom home in the Hollywood Hills of Los Angeles with



McKenzie and their newborn son Talin Urso. "That way we become one big family and support group."

And the support pays big dividends.

"I perform better when everyone is cheering for me," says Horst, who has been on Team Chat since it was formed two years ago. "When you're in the ring, you can hear them cheering for you. You know they are always there. That support is important."

ON a Pedestal

In addition to the support they receive from their teammates, the members of Team Chat say they get a ton of support from Chat.

"Mike has definitely helped me clean up my techniques," says Mullins, a *shorei-ryu* stylist. "He's done that a number of ways. First, his intensity is motivational. Second, he inspires me when he performs. Third, he pushes us to try harder."

Not surprisingly, Chat—who starred in the children's television show *WMAC Masters* with a host of other elite martial artists—has a knack for helping others.

"[Sport-karate competitor] Casey Marks, who attended our camp last year, said she was nervous about training with Mike," says McKenzie. "Apparently, she had always put him on a pedestal. She said the neat thing about

training with him is that 'he did not come down. Instead, he brought everyone else up to his level.' I like that."

To motivate and instruct his team, Chat says he relies on 15 years of competition experience.

"I have done what they want to do," says Chat.

"I've been a grand champion. I understand what it took to maintain my status as a competitor and stay consistent throughout the years. Having done that, it's easier for me to show them the way."

A burning desire to learn is one reason why Chat has been so successful.

"I always tried to learn as much as I could," he says. "I was never satisfied. I was always searching for more knowledge. Even now I look for new ways to get motivated. When I find them, I pass them along to my team."

Another American taekwondo stylist, Burkett credits Chat for helping him in numerous ways.

"He's helped me mentally, physically and academically," says the 14-year-old Burkett, who has been training for nine years. "There's nothing negative about

training with Mike. It's all good."

MJ and the Bulls

Mullins will certainly second that.

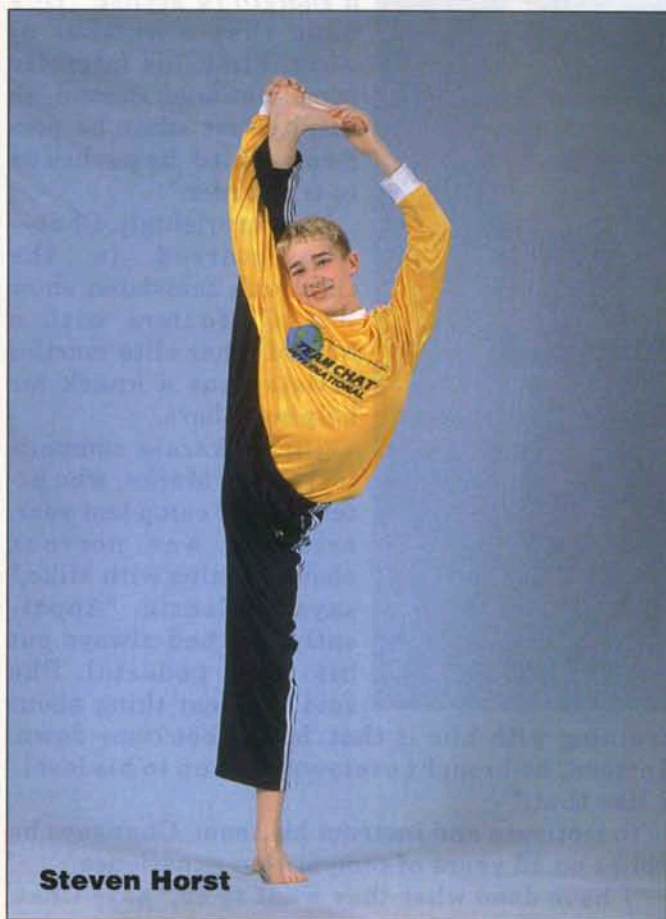
"When we work out, we work out hard," says Mullins, who has a lofty 3.64 grade point average. "When we relax, we relax hard. It's business, and it's fun. We get the best of both worlds."

It's particularly nice to be on Team Chat because they get to train with national competitors, says Mullins.

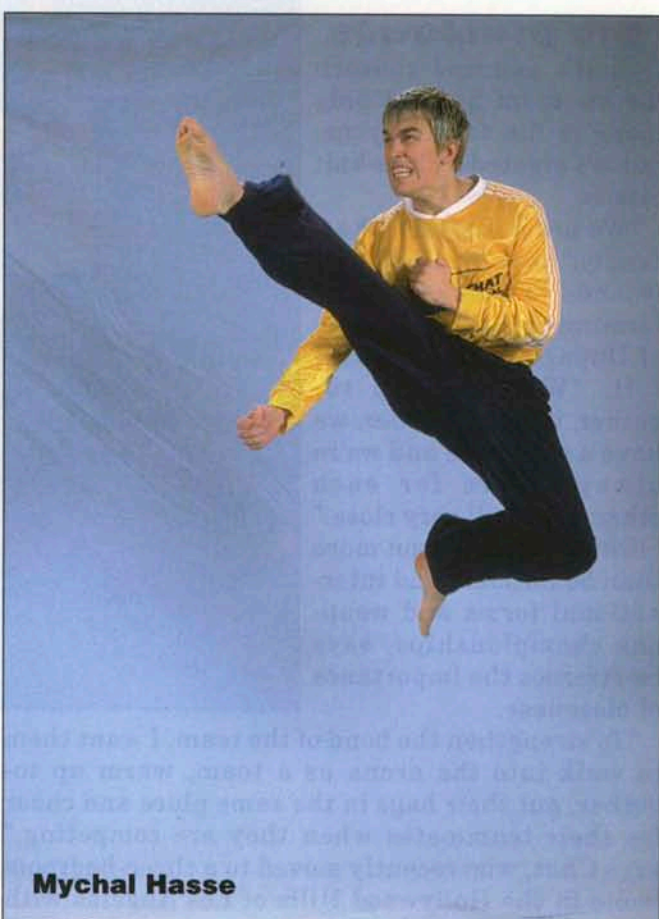
"You don't get a chance to train with national competitors that often," he says. "When you do, however, it's a great experience. It's like working out with Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls. And Mike is Michael Jordan." BBK



Guy Burkett



Steven Horst



Mychal Hasse

Team Chat Training Drills

by Stacey Gallard

Team Drill #1

This drill—which prepares you for the jump-split kick, jump front kick or jump split kick and the jump round kick—focuses on the hip flexors, lower abdominals, and body posture for explosive chambering and dynamic body positioning. This drill works your fast-twitch muscle fibers so you can build your speed and power.

To do this drill, you will need a partner to hold a pair of paddles above his head. To begin, you will stand a few feet away, leap, chamber your leg for the appro-

prate kick and strike the paddle with your knee.

Sets and repetitions: Do one set of 10 to 15 repetitions.

Tips: Make sure your body is tight but relaxed. Begin slowly and gradually build up your speed.

Team Drill #2

This drill not only builds speed and power, it strengthens your hips.

To do this drill, you will need three people and six paddles. Have the trio

hold the paddles about head-high and horizontal to the floor. Your mission—should you accept it—is to throw a double kick and then a triple kick at the paddles.


Sets and reps: Do one set of 10 to 15 repetitions.

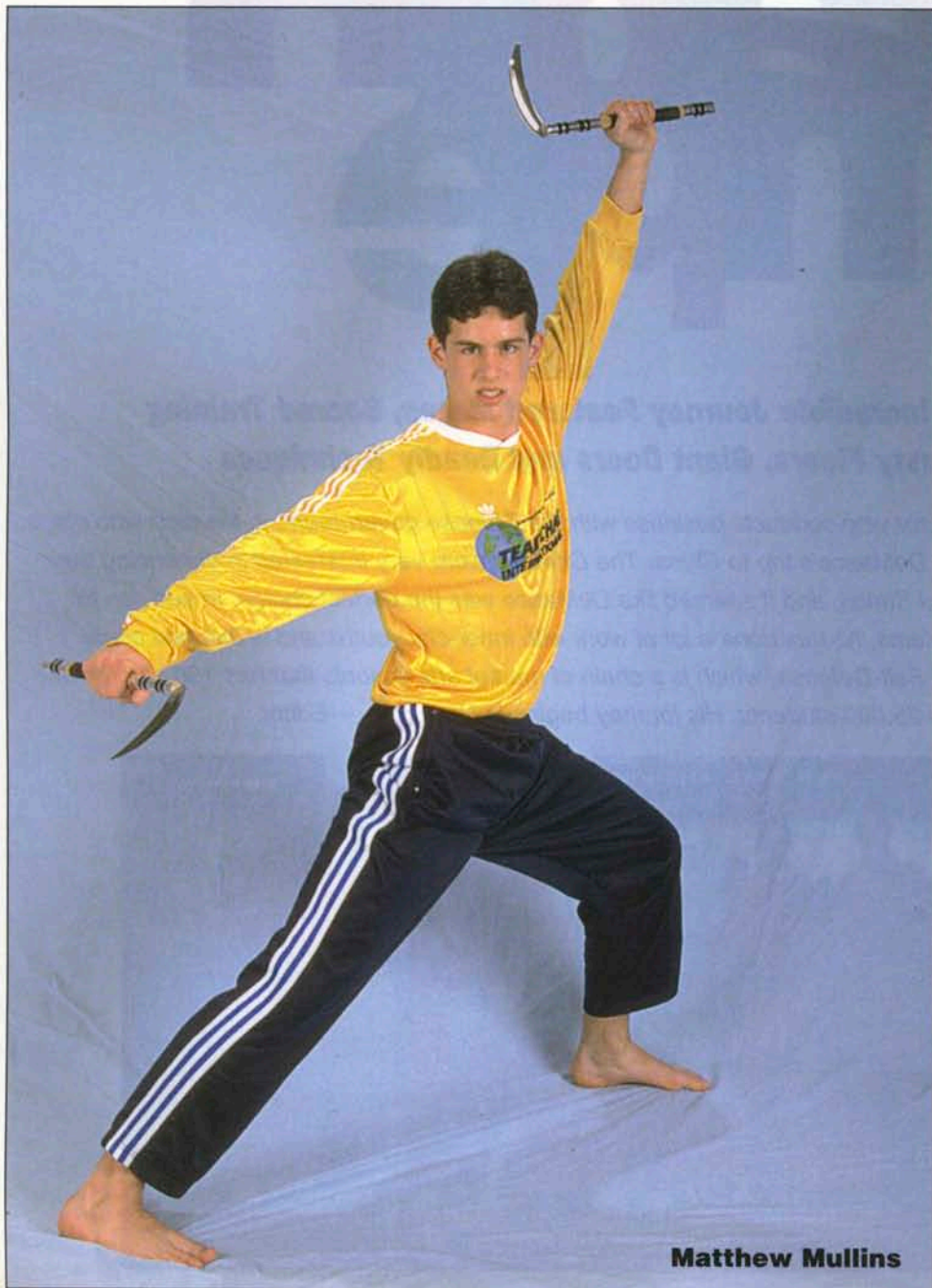
Tips: To begin, walk through the drill. After perfecting the walk-through, do the drill full speed.

Team Drill #3

To do this drill, which is designed to enhance your ability to throw multiple round kicks in a circle, you will need four partners. There should be two on each side of you, and they should hold their paddles about head-high. To begin, throw a round kick at the first paddle. Retract your leg, move to the second paddle and repeat until you've kicked all of the paddles.

Sets and Reps: Do one set of 12 kicks.

Tips: Concentrate on each individual kick and make sure you extend your leg. This will ensure you get the maximum power in each kick. More advanced students should throw different kicks. For example, intermediate-level students should throw roundhouse kicks and reverse-spin hook kicks. Advanced students should throw round kicks, tornado kicks, hook kicks and 540s. 



Matthew Mullins