

Poekoelan instructor Micah Hogan, 24, leads a class in this Indonesian style of martial arts on Saturday at his studio in downtown Bend, the Tulen Center for Martial Arts and Wellness. Hogan says he took up Poekoelan (pronounced POO-ka-lon) at age 19 in order to strengthen himself both physically and mentally.



Photos by Rob Kerr / The Bulletin

Poekoelan in motion

Oregonian instructor brings a fluid Indonesian martial art to Bend

By Abbie Beane
The Bulletin

Without focus, a baseball player could never hit or catch a ball. Without self-discipline, a track and field athlete could never achieve time and distance goals. And without mental fortitude, a football player could not withstand three to four hours of physical abuse.

Most athletes know that it takes more than physical strength to defeat an opponent.

A player must also have confidence, a clear head and inner strength.

For Micah Hogan, those crucial qualities were learned through a form of Indonesian martial arts known as Poekoelan Tjimindie Tulen. The words mean “series of blows with returning hands and feet,” “beautiful, flowing waters,” and “original,” respectively.

Hogan, 24, also found life’s joy in the protection, peace and creativity offered by this martial art form.

“When basketball and baseball ended for the season, I needed an

athletic outlet,” explains Hogan, who grew up in Southern Oregon. “So I took up Poekoelan, which is more than just a workout. It has taught me discipline, focus, flexibility and balance, which has

made me a better athlete.”

Some of Poekoelan’s (pronounced POO-ka-lon) other rewards, says Hogan, are gains in strength, confidence and energy, and a sense of calm.



Instructor Micah Hogan demonstrates a tiger crawl during an introductory Poekoelan class on Saturday at his Bend studio. The Indonesian martial art has students mimic the movements of four different animals: tiger, snake, crane and monkey.

“Poekoelan is different from other martial arts because it’s more fluid and soft, yet snappy and fast,” muses Hogan.

Hogan moved to Bend from Cape Cod, Mass. — where he had been training in Poekoelan — in October 2004 and in just over a year has opened his own business here called the Tulen Center for Martial Arts and Wellness, something he has been visualizing since he was 19 years old, when he began his Poekoelan training in Portland.

Although Hogan has already earned his black belt in Poekoelan, he says he is only beginning to understand how extensive the discipline is; that it is not simply about self-defense or fighting, but about meditation and teaching. After all, he had to put in 500 teaching hours just to earn his black belt. But he was more than happy to give back.

“Above all, I am thankful to my own teachers for sharing (Poekoelan) with me,” says Hogan. “It is the best thing I’ve ever done.”

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Now Hogan teaches Poekoelan full time, and he has even introduced the art to his six sisters, his girlfriend and his step-mother.

"Now I never have to worry about them," he smiles. "I know they will be safe. They can handle themselves."

Last Saturday morning, Hogan invited me to observe and even participate in one of his introductory Poekoelan classes in his new studio, which opened in mid-January. According to Hogan and Poekoelan's official Web site, it is only the 13th Tulen training center to open worldwide.

The students were practicing Cun Tao, an 18-week introduction to self-defense, which entails kicks and strikes used to free oneself from more than 100 different kinds of attacks.

"Dee-AH! Dee-AH!," shouted the participants dressed in white uniforms, or gi, as they delivered slice blows to their invisible attacker.

For the most part, the walls in the studio are still bare and white, save for two significant centerpieces essential to any Poekoelan training center: a vase holding roses and bamboo shoots, and a picture of Mas Geroe Agoeng (his title) Willy Wetzel, the founder of Poekoelan.

According to Poekoelan's official Web site, the rose symbolizes the body: beautiful in its movements yet with thorns to protect itself. And the bamboo represents flexibility and the whiplike motions common to Poekoelan.

What: Tulen Center for Martial Arts and Wellness.

Where: 20 NW Greenwood Avenue in Bend.

When: Open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4 to 8 p.m.; Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Cost: \$99 per month for three visits per week.

Contact: 389-1419.

The Web site also tells the story of the roots of Poekoelan, which Wetzel created by traveling throughout Indonesia and piecing together many styles of Pentjat Silat martial arts. He first brought Poekoelan from Indonesia to the United States in 1956.

The American student who Wetzel chose to be the direct heir of Poekoelan was Barbara Niggel, who opened the first Poekoelan training school in the United States in 1973 in Lowellville, near Youngstown, Ohio.

Hogan says he chose to bring the art to Central Oregon because of the area's astounding growth and his appreciation of the High Desert's quality of life. The center also offers yoga, cardio kickboxing, massage, and bio-energy treatments.

"Bio-energy healing is hard to explain," says Hogan. "Mostly, it's using the power of intention to heal."

Hogan emphasizes that Poekoelan truly is more about healing and peace than about active combat.

"We learn how to fight so we never have to fight," says Hogan.

Although it took Hogan only four to five years to earn his black belt, he says there is no predetermined amount of time required for a student to move up in rank. In fact, the more focused a student is on earning his or her black belt, the longer it might take, says Hogan. The student's eyes should simply be focused on the art itself.

"In Poekoelan, you never stop learning," explains Hogan. "Now that I have my black belt, I'm just humbled. I realize how vast it is."

Hogan is currently working on his Kumbongs, which follow basic Cun Tao training. Kumbongs, which are fighting forms, or short martial arts routines, require each student to create individual fighting-style movements that reflect motions exhibited by any or all of four animals: crane, monkey, tiger and snake.

Although Poekoelan has not been featured in any high-profile films to date, according to Hogan, Poekoelan movements observed at a Tulen training center in Ohio have been used in a Bruce Lee video game.

"There are Tulen centers in New York City and Los Angeles, so I think the movements will be in a movie soon," says Hogan.

Yet for now, Hogan is more interested in spreading Poekoelan on a local level.

"For me, Indonesian arts were the way to happiness, and I want to share that," explains Hogan. "They're about self-protection, and cultivation of the inner spirit."

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Poekoelan instructor Micah Hogan leads a class Saturday at his Bend studio. Hogan, 24, says achieving his black belt after five years of study was only the start of his work in the discipline.