

# Defensive maneuvers

## Children take up Japanese martial arts form

By Megg Crook

Staff Writer

"Ichi! Ni! San! Shi! Go!" the four children chanted, counting in Japanese, in unison. Spinning, twisting, rolling and falling, the students made moves that looked easy but are actually difficult to learn without regular practice.

Every Wednesday and Saturday, children ages 7 to 12 come to Woburn Aikikai to learn from martial arts instructor Michael Baron. Though Baron offers mostly adult classes, he has several younger students who take their lessons very seriously. Aikido is a Japanese martial art, but one that focuses more on defense than hurting the opponent.

"There are no strikes, you don't defend by overpowering," Baron explained. "It doesn't rely on brute force. It's a philosophy of not overpowering but putting the person in a position



Staff photo by Shawn Lynch

**Michael Baron watches while one of his students, Chihiro Kodama, 8, of Lexington, does a forward roll over the foam sword during a children's martial arts class on Saturday, Jan. 12.**

where they can fall and be OK."

And fall the opponent does.

The students practice punching each other and grabbing

wrists, pulling their opponent

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## Students take up martial art

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into a forward roll and using the momentum of the punches to keep the opponent rolling away.

"I've been coming since October," said Yusuke Nakano, 8. "At first it was hard and it's kind of hard now."

"You have to make things more obvious with kids," Baron said about the difference between lessons with children and adults. "We do similar things, but we repeat a lot. They really need the repetition because they only have muscle memory at that age. Adults can remember

more things that kids can't."

The warm-up, Baron said, is very important for the children because it gives them five minutes of silence, something they rarely get during the day. They are forced to watch Baron closely as he performs the stretches, sometimes trying to trick them to see how closely they are paying attention.

When CJ Benson, 11, first started taking lessons a year ago, his original thought that the techniques would be difficult, and he was proved right.

"It takes effort," CJ said, "but

I think it's fun and something I should learn. It helps keep my mind focused," he added.

In addition to focusing and rolling around on the floor, avoiding punches, the students also have the chance to have a little bit of fun, something Baron said he really enjoys about teaching a younger class. Pulling out a firm foam bat, Baron encouraged the children to jump and roll over it, giving them something fun to do while keeping their skills sharp.

Megg can be reached at 978-371-5775 or [mcrook@cnc.com](mailto:mcrook@cnc.com)