

reality

Some healthy competition

michael lallo

SOMETIMES, when Nova presenter Ed Kavalee is cooking dinner, his girlfriend will sneak up and attack him from behind. "I learnt a new wrist lock once and I wanted to try it out," says former *Gladiator* Tiffany Hall, now a trainer on *The Biggest Loser*.

"So I grabbed his hand and he's going, 'Aaaaah! Tiff, I'm trying to cook!'

"Or I'll make him lie down on the floor and get him in a choker hold and I'll say, 'You're going to pass out in five seconds: five, four, three ...' and he's going, 'Tiff, please!' After a long day at work, he just wants to chill out."

Still, the fitness-focused pair is well suited — Kavalee is a buff gym junkie and Hall has a black belt in taekwondo. Which raises the question: who would win in a fight?

"We've actually done that," Hall says.

"But he's just too strong and he pins me down. I'm much faster than him, though. I always get one in."

It's clear she is obsessed with martial arts, which is

why she was roped in for the sixth season of *The Biggest Loser*.

This year's format is a little different: there are four trainers — Hall, Michelle Bridges, Shannan Ponton and the Commando — and each has been assigned a family of four who are competing to lose the most weight. But there's a twist: as shown on Sunday's premiere episode, every trainer spent one week living like their family.

For Hall, that meant following the diet and inactive lifestyle of Duncan siblings Sarah-Jayne, Meg, Emma and Jarrod, all in their 20s.

"I've never drunk before in my life," she says. "And then, suddenly, I'm having beer with breakfast. They were smashing the alcohol and I had to drink it all, too. I was throwing up."

Instead of her usual egg-white omelet, she started one morning with a one-kilogram steak, a tin of spaghetti, a box of Scotch Finger biscuits, a bag of Doritos and three beers. Another breakfast consisted of an enormous bowl of pasta with carbonara sauce.

Hall is not allowed to specify how much weight she gained but admits: "It was

like a pregnancy." By the end of the week, she was tired, emotional and run-down.

"But it helped me understand their mindset," she says. "And I could say, 'Right, I've committed to you 100 per cent and I want you to commit to me. Now you're mine.'"

She did not, however, whip them into shape by barking orders through a megaphone. Rather, she made every routine an enjoyable martial arts activity, hoping to instil a love of exercise.

If her own physique is anything to go by, it's a good strategy. Tall, tanned and lean, Hall strides energetically around the *Loser* compound in Sydney, seemingly unperturbed by the intense humidity that's left everyone else feeling listless.

"My team loves it," she says.

"I say to them, 'Come on, we're going to get our ninja on!' and they run in and hit stuff and scream. They actually look forward to it."

"I don't believe in punishing people with exercise; I want them to have a long-term love affair with it. If you take the joy out of it, they're just going to revert to their old habits when they get out."

Her strategy is a little different to those of the other trainers, each of whom has their own unique style. Which means the competition also serves as a test of various coaching techniques, from military-style drills to Hall's make-it-fun approach.

It's not just the physical movement that makes martial arts an effective weight-loss tool, though — it's also the required mental focus, which leads to a more mindful attitude overall.

"For [the Duncan family], Sunday night is cards night," Hall says.

"There are bowls of chocolate and litres of soft drink ... it's unconscious eating. I'm all about preparing a meal, sitting down and being every conscious of every mouthful.



The *Biggest Loser* trainer Tiffany Hall takes a fun approach to fitness.

"How many times do we eat because we're tired or even bored? You have to feed the soul with other things."

Not surprisingly, Hall has grown quite fond of the Duncans and has even had to rely on them for support.

"They nicknamed me the soggy samurai because I keep crying when my contestants [are up for eviction]," she says. "They're going, 'Toughen up, Tiffany!'

"I'm so proud of them; I'll call them my weight-loss warriors and they're totally committed to that now. They have necklaces that say 'weight-loss warrior' and they said they're even going to get it tattooed across their bums when they get out."

The *Biggest Loser* airs 6.30pm on Sundays, 7.30pm on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays on Channel Ten.