

# LIFE'S MORE THAN A SLAM FOR THE 'BAM'

Martial arts instructor juggles many roles, including role model

by **Kimberly Garn**  
Staff Writer

When you ask fifth-degree black belt Willie "The Bam" Johnson about the highlight of his martial arts career, he doesn't point to his vast collection of awards that includes an amazing five world championships.

He doesn't rush to talk about the martial arts superstars he's met, or the leading role he has in the nationally-broadcast Fox television kids show "Quest for the Dragon Star." He also plays down the bit-parts he's had in motion pictures like "Major League II" and "Thicker Than Water."

Johnson doesn't immediately mention that he is a respected instructor at his Universal Martial Arts Concepts school in Laurel, with clubs in Burtonsville, Baltimore and Silver Spring.

No, when you ask what sticks out in his mind as one of the milestones in his career as martial arts educator and actor, Johnson quickly refers to a 1994 cover story that appeared in Masters of Kung Fu magazine. It was an article about his tumultuous life and career called "A Journey of Self-Discovery."

So of all the press coverage that he's gotten, why should this piece stand out?

Because it's the story of the real Bam.

The article tells a rags-to-riches, backslide to rags, then climb up again to success story of the approachable, non-impe-rious master instructor.

"It means more, because it's me. It's where I came from," Johnson said.

Where Johnson came from is far from

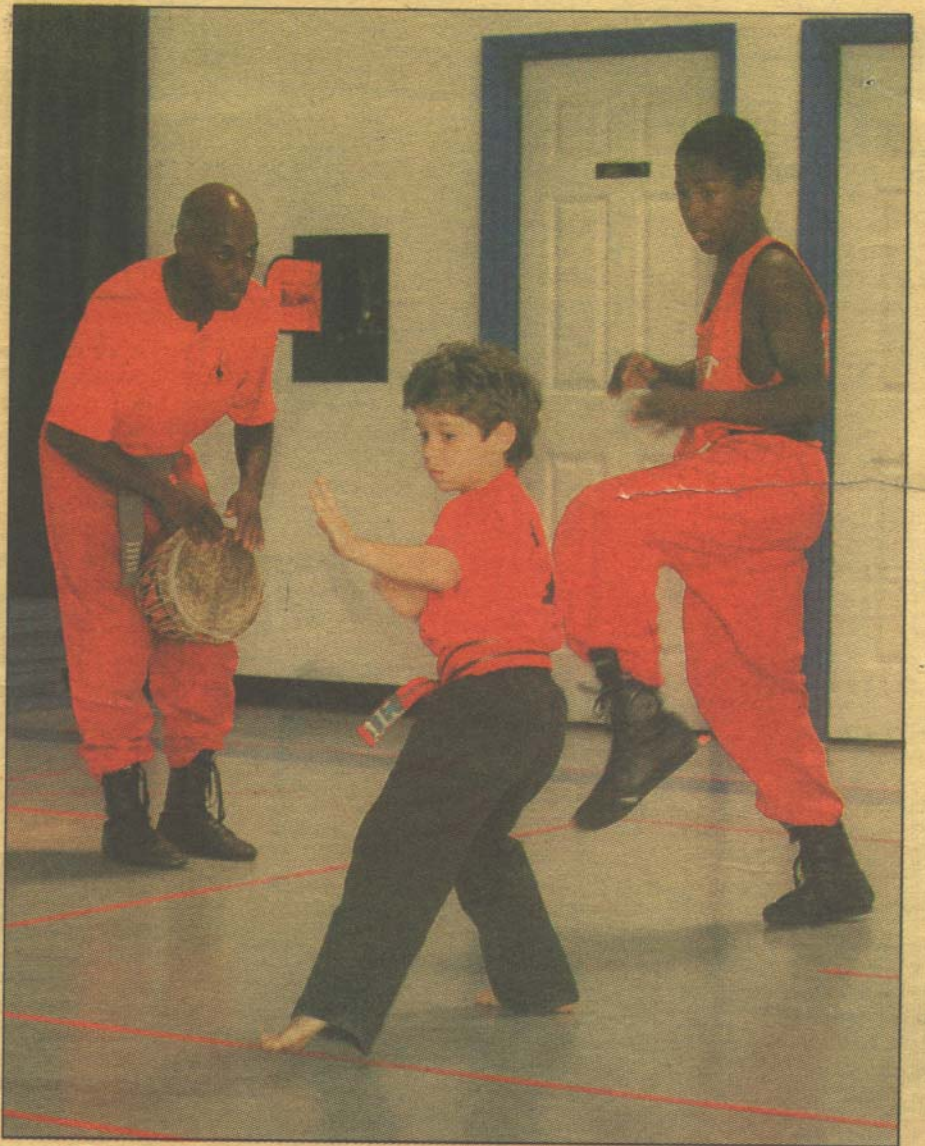


Photo by Bill Ryan  
Willie "The Bam" Johnson, star of a Fox television martial arts show, beats out a rhythm for students Ryan Pinkston of Burtonsville and Marco "Little Bam" Johnson of Baltimore, Johnson's son, as they work with a Shaolin form at Johnson's studios in Laurel.

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