

ANALYSIS ON CONTACT SPARRING

By Gary James

To do any analysis on contact sparring it is important to be able to differentiate between contact sparring, street based fighting and ring fighting. We will start with a breakdown on each.

RING FIGHTING

This area encompasses arts such as boxing and kick-boxing. These arts should be classed as to what they are, and that is sports. They are bounded by a comprehensive set of rules that limit the fighters and they are put into a fixed environment. With these sports the fighters are told who their opponent is, where their opponent is, where they are allowed to hit their opponent, how to hit them and with the intervention of the referee, when to hit them. The environment is a ring 6 metres square with no obstructions, bright lights and the right to say "I've been hit enough, let's call it quits". Another limitation is that there is only one opponent and he is unarmed. Both fighters have trained for this event and are ready to fight when told.

The fighters themselves do not require any formal martial arts training to qualify themselves as fighters; in fact some of the world's best kick-boxers have not had any real martial arts training.

The positive side to these sports is that the fighters are usually fitter than martial artists per se and do have the ability to absorb an attack and to retaliate from that attack.

STREET BASED FIGHTING

Street defense differs very much with the above. In this situation there are no rules, there is no pre-determination of who or where your opponent is, there is no limitation on the number of opponents you have or whether they are armed or not. There are no limitations on where you can hit or when you can hit, no referee and usually the attack is random and spontaneous.

A successful street fighter must also contend with an environment that can be difficult to fight in e.g. crowded room, narrow doorway, stairs, rocky ground, roadways and footpaths etc., there is also the consideration of day or night, wet or dry, hot or cold. Imagine trying

to do a kick standing in knee deep mud in pouring rain.

A level of skill is required to successfully defend yourself in the street, not just your abilities as a martial artist but your ability to adjust to and to use the street to your benefit. Complex techniques do not work and simple moves done well are the most effective.

CONTACT SPARRING

This is a compromise between street defense and ring work. As there is no one way that a person can completely prepare themselves for a street situation without getting out there and doing it, contact sparring helps to fill the void.

Contact sparring has been set up to give contact in a controlled manner between the participants. The only rules are that you respect the other person's level of ability and control yourself. Protective equipment is used to prevent any nasty injuries.

Contact sparring is similar to ring work in that you know who your opponent is and when the attack is to start, the use of gloves and other protective devices, but the similarity ends there. In contact sparring you are not governed to one opponent, unarmed opponents or a controlled environment. Each of these factors is a variable and can be adjusted depending on a person's level. Attacks to every part of the body are acceptable, throws, trips, grappling, knees and even head butts (if controlled).

The limitations of contact sparring are:

1. Inability to follow through with a technique to its ultimate conclusion vis. kick to knee, elbow to face.
2. The lack of total concentration on the objectives. There is a tendency to become complacent by wearing protective equipment and thinking "I'm not going to get hurt anyway".
3. The reaction of your opponent to a strike is different in contact sparring to street based fighting and therefore follow up techniques are more difficult to use.

A lot of the fundamentals of ring work can be applied to contact sparring i.e. the way to cover the head, ducking, bobbing, weaving and the use of timing and broken rhythm.

To be prepared for a self defense situation one must take a good look at the way their training is structured to suit the situation they are readying themselves for. Ring work prepares you for the ring and receiving an attack albeit governed by rules. Contact sparring will prepare you for a self defense situation and still allow you to do formal martial arts

training and participate in ring work if the desire is there.

It is important to always remember that there is no one way to be totally prepared for a street situation, there are just too many variables, but the main factor in determining your ability to survive is yourself.