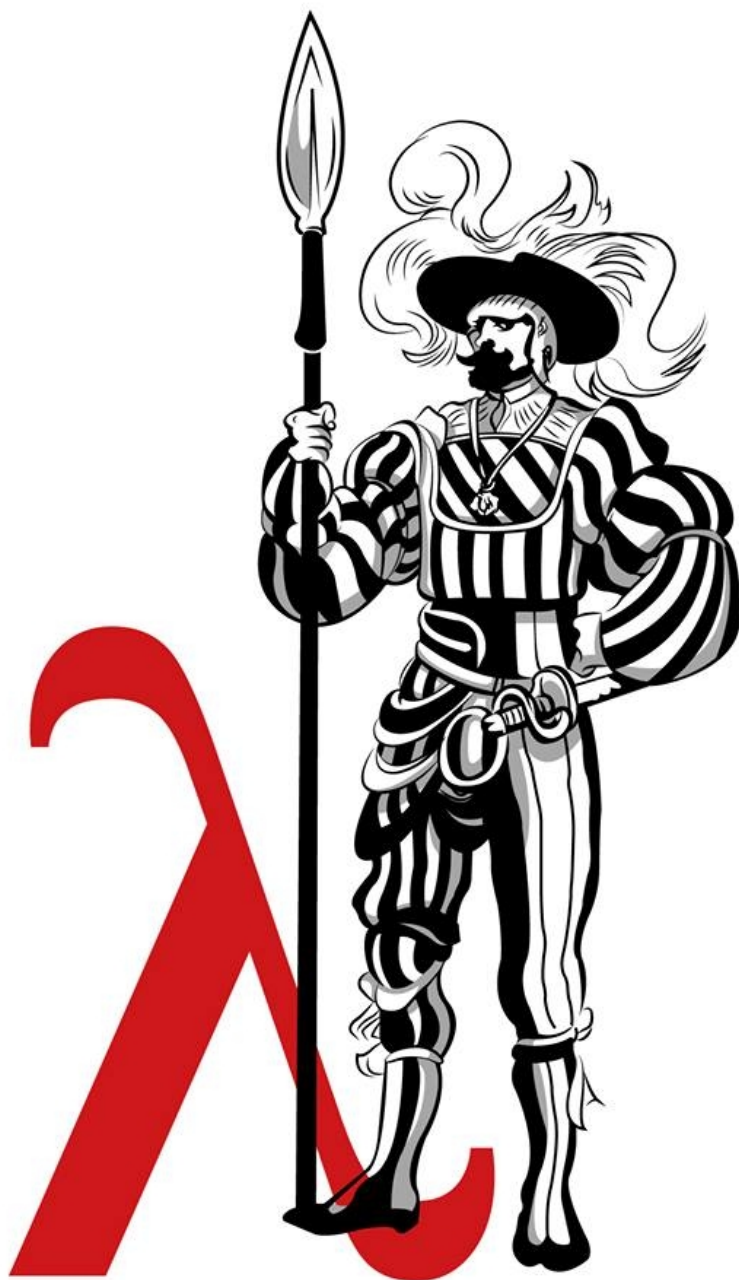




Martial Arts and Combat Sports: from power to action

por Luca Tinti

Castor: A contest between two men using fists.

Pollux: With fists as well as with feet.

Castor: With all the strength you have.

(Theocritus)

Nunc, si cui virtus animusque in pectore praesens, adsit et evinctis atollat brachia palmis. Now, if someone possesses skill and ready courage, let him come forward and raise his arms with bandaged fists.

(Virgil Canto V Aeneid)

French boxing is the product of great patience and long study. When you know everything there is to know you invent more. And when you have invented more, you still have to learn.

Georges Carpentier (boxer and actor)

When we talk about martial arts and combat sports, our thoughts naturally turn to the East, influenced by the Kung Fu films of the Seventies that showed us in a crude way an aspect of a culture alien to ours.

In my sixty-five years of practice and teaching I have noticed a difference in the teaching approach between the East and the West.

Here in the West a pragmatic mentality leads us to want to know many techniques in a short amount of time to satisfy a kind of knowledge that can be superficial and, once the initial enthusiasm is gone, expended, driven away by numerous stimuli from other sports activities, as well as non-sports activities available within a consumer society.

In the East - I am talking about traditional teaching - there is a process of Westernization in the field of martial arts, due to the progressive replacement - not entirely in Japan however- of several ancient and fundamental principles with the popularity of quick success and easy money.

These observations merit a more in-depth study that would cause our discussion to digress with considerations of the Taoist/Confucian roots in China and Buddhist roots in Japan of martial arts.

In the West, indigenous combat sports have developed that emphasize the practical and/or sporting aspect, they do not include forms of introspection and meditation.

Inward exploration- given that contact sports put us in direct contact with the deepest sensations of our Self: fear, courage, aggression, pain -the practitioner is allowed the freedom of initiative, whenever he receives the stimulus and possesses the ability, his skill will deepen under the unimposing guidance of the teacher toward a possible spiritual path never separated from the connotations of honor and loyalty to the group, which are the fundamental values of every discipline that involves physical contact in combat with an opponent.

Now I wish to speak of **Savate** - French boxing - a combat sport born in France in the mid-eighteenth century. Credit for its popularization goes to the Parisian Michel

Casseux (known as Pisseau) born in 1794, who studied ancient French fighting methods.

Pisseau, beginning with self defense techniques in use at that time in France, namely Chausson, combined it with football techniques from the North of France, and founded an Academy called Art de la Savate. His work continued thanks to a student of his who stood out from all the others named Charles Lecour.

Some of our French friends have argued that oriental fighting methods, which also involve the use of the legs (kicking, knee blows, leg tackles), were influenced by Savate. Theirs is a bold statement to say the least, since the most plausible hypothesis is that French sailors, who had relations with the East, copied the fighting techniques of those places, importing them to Marseille in France and modifying them as needed.

In early Savate, the aspect of self-defense was emphasized, which quickly spread including even to the Parisian nobility; here the walking stick, later transformed into canne de combat, found its use in the field of self-defense and was taught in well established schools.

From Marseille, Savate spread to Italy, particularly in Genoa where we find the oldest Italian schools of the method: that of Doria and Mameli.

Over time, Savate spread throughout Italy and, despite lacking the exposure of Kickboxing or Boxing in the popular media, it is growing in popularity on account of the elegance of its movements as well as its eye catching nature and effectiveness linked in part to the use of special shoes. Because of its intrinsic qualities, Savate is greatly valued by women.

In the past, contests between English boxers and French savateurs were the stuff of legend. Boxing as everyone knows uses only the arms and fists, but the pride of the practitioners of that sport pushed them in the nineteenth century to challenge fighters of a similar but potentially more complete fighting discipline, involving the use of the legs and feet. Those contests always ended in favor of the best individual fighter and not simply the adherent of this or that school of martial arts.

It is a rule that naturally still applies today and puts an end to any dispute regarding the superiority of one method over another. and generic that marks a myriad of varied styles)? Kickboxing or Savate? Judo or Olympic Wrestling?– it does not matter.

The distinction we must make is between traditional martial arts, which involve the study of forms (kata, tao lu) and therefore have a more nuanced approach to combat – a long and interesting discussion – and combat sports that dedicate all their time to athletic/competitive preparation with the aim of victory over an opponent.

Given these premises, for those interested in the great world of martial arts and combat sports, it is necessary to reflect on the reasons that attract the aspiring fighter to the practice of one or another discipline in order not to be disappointed or deluded, by training in a discipline that does not completely satisfy personal expectations.

Other aspects of fundamental importance are the teacher's ability to transfer his knowledge with passion and competence together with up to date teaching methods.

Then, given the proliferation of exotic styles of fighting, mostly inauthentic, it is

necessary to verify the historical roots of the school put into practice. For example, Boxing, Savate, Kickboxing, Karate, Olympic Wrestling, and in general the martial arts from Japan, have a well established history and teaching method; other facsimiles, which come from Israel or from exotic oriental countries, do not have a verifiable tradition and therefore a codified and authentic teaching method established in the distant past, if they are not altogether a knock-off contrived by some imaginative practitioner in search of fame and fortune.

In some oriental martial arts there is even the risk of running into a "master" who puts forward pseudo-philosophical and pseudo-spiritual ideas and concepts that, assumed as "truth" by the younger and older students, can inflict damage on the development of the student's personality. I cannot count the number times have I met "masters", who posed as gurus or holy men, literally subjugating unwary athletes.

Regarding some considerations on the aggressiveness of our Sports, allow me to quote Prof. Massimo Sciotti: *"The antagonism that translates into a desire to win is nothing other than the expression of aggressiveness, which derives from the Greek agonizomai, and has the same root as the word agony, the last struggle of the organism that tries to avoid impending death. It is therefore aggressiveness that allows one to fight, to compete with opponents, but also against adverse environmental conditions, for the survival of the individual and for the preservation of his species, of which sport is the most beautiful metaphor."*

A family, a clan or a culture, where everyone without exception knows how to behave in compliance with the common and shared written and unwritten rules, finds its embodiment and expression in a team of Martial Arts and Combat Sports worthy of admiration and respect.

Is it possible for Martial Arts and Combat Sports to trace a path for the man of distinction? If so how?

It can be done by the continuous exercise of martial arts which leads to a clear mind (as with Zen) and in pursuit of competitive goals among others, that turns oneself away from the vanity and stress of a society given to the satisfaction of hedonistic pleasure.

I think in this way that we can open the doors to a new critical awareness which goes beyond today's woke culture, which is spreading rapidly and influences the behavior of many people, especially the young.

Is this utopian? Perhaps, but we know that through utopian ideas great revolutions and changes have come about.

It is said that boxers are crazy. There is some truth to this. When American boxing promoters offered Teophilo Stevenson five million dollars to fight Mohamed Ali, Stevenson, a worthy and proud revolutionary, refused saying: *"What are five million dollars worth when I have the love of five million Cubans?"*

Boxers can also be poetic.

"One day they will write a blues song dedicated to boxers: there will be a languid guitar, a muted trumpet and the sound of the gong in the ring" (S. Liston)

Boxers can be bitterly ironic.

"It is hard to be a black man, have you ever been a black man? I was once when I was poor." (L. Holmes)

Practicing our sports (Boxing, Savate and Combat Sports) is like trying to start a fire with wet matches. After several attempts you can get some sparks and, if you are patient, from these you will spark a fire that will last forever (Master T. Kase).

"You cannot experience the true taste of fighting by reading a book. You will discover the meaning of many things related to the Way only by practicing without respite and practicing very hard." (M:Musashi)

The journey is very long ...

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