

The Arnisador as a Barehanded Fighter

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“Attributes are the inner qualities that shape technique...that provide the ground from which technique springs. The victor in a fight is the fighter who possesses superior attributes.”

◆ Paul Vunak

Perhaps the ultimate question that an arnisador has to answer is if he can still fight without sticks. There are so many styles of arnis, some have very sophisticated empty hand fighting methods while others barely addressed the subject at all. These unarmed combatives more often than not are a fusion of indigenous Filipino, Malaysian, Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese and Western boxing concepts. But what if an arnisador trains almost exclusively with sticks, can he still put up a good fight *mano y mano*? I believe so. It is my humble opinion that the greatest strength of the Filipino martial arts lies in the fact that it develops key psychophysical attributes. I am presenting here concepts and principles latent to the arnis combat structure that make its practitioner a formidable opponent even in the absence of sophisticated empty hand fighting skills.

Explosive Forward Pressure

Arnis and Wing Chun share a common characteristic and that is, the use of explosive forward pressure. Fighters of the above mentioned arts deliver their flowing hits in a sudden forward burst of energy (good example is the Wing Chun straight blast and Arnis' running figure eight blitz). Arnis practitioners who have deeply ingrained this instinct into their brains will respond in the same manner whether they have a weapon in hand or not; whether they have sophisticated empty hand skills or not. This simple concept is the reason why in certain instances the street fighter beats the martial artist. Sometimes, just sometimes, sheer aggressiveness can overcome a superior structure.

Ability to Link Techniques

Another attribute developed by arnis weapons training whether the practitioner is aware of it or not is the ability to link techniques. You won't see a good arnis man with hands tangling with each other while performing his art. *Sinawali* drills and other weapon exercises help the practitioner to relate the movement of the left hand to those of the right hand and vice versa. Again, I believe that this instinct will manifest in an unarmed scuffle defensively or offensively, regardless of the arnisador's level of empty hand fighting skills.

Hit Rather than Block Concept

The primary concept of Filipino stick fighting is to incapacitate an opponent by destroying his hand that's holding the weapon (defanging the snake). When you further simplify this concept it implies to hit rather than block whenever possible. The defanging the snake principle translated to empty hand fighting simply means to punch the punch and kick the kick. With or without weapons an arnisador programmed to such response will automatically destroy anything that invades his personal body bubble.

Trapping

Kali master Ben Largusa once articulated that there are three elements of defense in kali. The first is the parry or the initial block; the second is the safety factor, the phase wherein the alive hand immobilizes the opponent's weapon hands nullifying its further use (this is trapping in the purest sense); and the third is the killing blow. The use of the alive hand and the subject of trapping can get pretty technical in some areas but I believe these are habits and instincts to be developed rather than sets of techniques to be memorized. When you've tasted the sting of the stick, you will instinctively develop ways of delivering strikes in a position of relative safety, meaning a location where you can unleash blows with reduced possibility of being hit yourself. A raw example of trapping is to immobilize (grab, twist, lock, etc.) with your weak hand and pummel with your strong hand.

Power

Years of swinging the stick will inevitably lead to two things as far as power is concerned. One is the ability to apply whip-like motion to one's punches (reason why some boxers use to chop wood with an axe to develop body torque) and second is the development of a very strong grip. A punch that packs a wallop is an advantage in stand-up fighting while a vice-like grip (for gouging, clawing, pinching) is definitely a plus when the fight hits the ground. An opponent who possessed these attributes whether he is a scientific fighter or not is definitely a force to be reckoned with.

Reflex

If you can duck a stick being swung at you. I don't see any reason why you can't duck a punch. So what do we have here? A shortcut to empty hand fighting invincibility? No. Please do not misinterpret that I am offering an overly simplistic solution to empty hand fighting or I am implying that systematic *pangamut* (empty hand skills) training is unimportant. Those were not my goal. My aim is merely to present the extreme pragmatic nature of arnis and its immense benefits even in the most rudimentary level. The practice of the Filipino martial arts is like a deep pond, you can dive into it and it's up to you to decide whatever depth you want to reach. To the uninitiated I am extending an invitation. Go take a plunge, the water's just fine.