

“WHY” Mixed Martial Arts?

Is it the right choice for Self Defense?

With the extreme popularity of Mixed Martial Arts fighting, many men and women are flocking to that sport. Thinking that fighting in a ring using grappling as a primary form of fighting with the occasional haymaker or head kick would be the preferred method on the street.

The reality is there are no referees and no rules on the street, and you cannot “Tap Out” when you want to quit and expect your opponent to stop.

This does not mean that a “cage” fighter is not a skilled fighter. M.M.A. fighters are very skilled “at what they do.” As a rule, on the street, going to the ground is too dangerous, there are too many unknowns. Multiple attackers, weapons, bar stools and cement curbs. The last place you want to be in a real fight is on the ground.

Many will disagree in whole or in part with the above statements. You cannot argue with success. There have been many people that have used MMA type techniques in real situations and prevailed. But is that the norm?

Mixed Martial Arts very meaning is a mixture of different martial arts. In this case only two. Mixed Martial Arts essentially consist of Jujitsu and Muay Thai. Some fighters carry heavy training in other disciplines but end up punching and kicking very much like a Muay Thai and employ Jujitsu or something very similar (Judo or Wrestling) when on the ground.

When training in any Martial Art, repetition of techniques and responses creates habits that many times cannot be broken without conscious thought. I have recently learned that **33 rules** must be adhered to in the UFC. **33 rules!** I do not know them all, but some are you cannot gouge an eye, rip an ear off, break fingers (no small joint manipulation), strike to the groin or bite.

Allow me to ask a question. Don’t you think that if you purposefully train NOT to do certain things (abiding by the rules) that it would be nearly impossible to change that response or lack of response in real adrenaline filled situation? Now if you are fighting another MMA fighter on the street, they will very likely have the same problem you have.

However, if you engage a person that does not partake in training that recognizes rules and only trains with an “I have to get in and do as much damage as possible, the moment I can.” This means they would gouge eyes, the moment you grab them or bite anything that is near their mouth. An attacker that is so vicious and focused on damaging you that while you are figuring out that this is a real fight and that the rules do not apply right now, you are already blind in one or both eyes.

You will do, under stress what you are trained to do. Which is to say if you have practiced a single leg takedown 200 times a week, you will very likely do that the moment something “real” happens. What are you trained to do, or not do?

Defining Martial Arts is not as simple as you might think. The word “*Martial*” is “**of or appropriate to war; warlike.**” The word “*Art.*” is described as “**skill acquired by experience, study, or observation .**” Basically “***The Study of Interpersonal War.***” Occasionally when speaking to people about Reality Defense Training, they will ask if it is like Martial Arts. This is understandable because as a culture we began using that term as it related to fighting styles from the orient. By definition, a High School Wrestler is a Martial Artist.

There are countless “styles” of Martial Arts to choose from, but there are only **four** forms of Martial Arts.

1.) **Exhibition** -

The exhibition, theatrical or dramatic martial arts are represented by styles that require extreme movement, flexibility, posturing, and balance to apply. Things that you would likely see in Martial Arts movies. The techniques are flashy, beautiful and graceful, but have little to do with the realities of street violence. (*Theatrical Martial Art is to self-defense what James Bond movies are to espionage: one is practical - the other is fantasy*)

2.) **Competition** -

Competition Martial Arts represent pretty much every traditional and what is today considered (*a modern approach*) Mixed Martial Arts (M.M.A.). The issue with trying to use competitive Martial Arts for self-defense is not that the skills developed will not work. They “**can**” work but the approach to the skill development is structured to operate within specific guidelines or rules. These rules are very limiting, and you will do what you train most to do under stress.

In all organized competition fights, both combatants wear some form of protective gear and agree to abide by a set of rules. Then, they don't even trust the fighters to completely abide by the rules though because they place a referee into the equation to intervene if someone steps out of line. Lastly, you can quit anytime you want, Tapout, throw in the towel or whatever vernacular is used to "QUIT." None of the previous element will be present in a real-life situation.

In a real fight, there are no rules, referee and no practical way to quit unless escape is an option. You can never assume that you will be able to escape until or unless your attacker has been neutralized. Unless you are going to compete in the combat sports, then don't train in "Combat Sports." As stated above, techniques taught can work on the street. You can never deny success but as a philosophy is whatever it is you are training in the best thing to do every time? Maybe, maybe not, you are rolling the dice if you come across someone that has trained only for survival and will unhesitatingly engage you with such viciousness and directness that it will be over before it starts. All because one of you prepared to fight for 15 minutes and one for 9 seconds.

3.) Reality Based -

In the last decade, a phrase that I have used since the mid-1980's started Based Martial Arts is not complicated. Remove the sports aspect and attempt only to develop and apply techniques, tactics, and strategies that will work in "real" life. Sadly, the later is where most all fail. What I have noticed is there is a lingering "sport" element to their approach. I believe the largest culprit is the ground fighting and grappling arts. ***I maintain that ground fighting and grappling have no business on the street or battlefield. (Unless it is required for your job)*** Even this should be applied sparingly due to the uncontrolled environment and the dangers of being on the ground or wrapped up with someone.

Unfortunately, this phrase has been co-opted by factions of the Martial Arts and Defensive Tactics Community, mainly Law Enforcement, Military and the like. In my opinion, their use of the word is not applied correctly in some cases where it really matters. I understand that the definition that I use is not necessarily the same as theirs. *(I will be covering these issues in great detail in the future, the purpose of "survive the fight" is to challenge the validity of these skills)*

4.) **Survival Based -**

“Survival Based Martial Arts.” is a phrase I started using about 12 years since Reality Based was co-opted. There two factors that are required to qualify as a “Survival Based Martial Art.” Firstly, **“Mindset.”** This is the most important of the two and also the easiest (*theoretically*). The conscious decision must be made that you will not bother developing skills and concepts that do not directly increase your potential for survival. You must be diligent in this regard. Secondly, **“Techniques That Support That Mindset.”** This factor is the engine that makes all this possible. Without this element, you simply do not have the makings of a **“Survival Based Martial Arts.”**

The example I use to explain this is an article I read years ago in a Martial Arts magazine. A Taekwondo school was attempting to become “street.” They went on and on about how useless katas were, all the pomp and circumstance and gis were utterly unnecessary in this day and age (*which I agree with*). They transitioned to wearing Black BDU’s, combat boots and wife beaters (*oh the 80’s*). That outward changes in my mind represented the mindset change moving away from the unnecessary things. However, they were still standing, punching, blocking and kicking the same way. Those techniques did not support the changed mindset.

“Survival Based Martial Arts.” Accept that real violence can and probably will be messy if it turns bad. We assume it will turn south on us; that we will mess up, and that the bad guy will get lucky. This may sound pessimistic, but it is not. We don’t actually “expect” those former things will happen, but we know that they can occur and train with that in mind at all times.

The bottom line is that we are more concerned with function over form. We do not train for aesthetics beauty or the ability to take punishment in the ring. We teach to avoid and escape conflict and if left with no other option, to use whatever force is necessary to survive or protect the innocent life of another.

In closing, if your passion is competition and fitness, then I would encourage to find the best MMA/Competition based training you can. If you are **NOT** going to get the ring and compete, perhaps a **Survival Based Martial Art** would be more appropriate.

In closing:

There is a quote in **Nassim Nicholas Taleb's** book **"The Black Swan."** He is discussing the **"Ludic Fallacy"** where people take something like casino games and then try to extrapolate it to the real world and expect similar results. ***(The 2nd edition, the paperback has a footnote that applies to fighting (page 127):***

There is a martial version of the **"ludic fallacy"**: organized competitive fighting trains the athlete to focus on the game and, in order not to dissipate his concentration, to ignore the possibility of what is **not specifically allowed by the rules**, such as kicks to the groin, a surprise knife, et cetera. So those who win the gold medal might be precisely those who will be most vulnerable in real life." (emphasis mine).

You cannot dispute success in fighting. However, the quote above makes a very compelling point. What we must do as Martial Artists purposefully take part in training to limit liability in techniques, tactics, and strategy. To do otherwise would be foolish and decrease our survivability.

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