

Martial Arts for Fitness

March 17th is upon us and for some it'll mean wearing something green and celebrating St Patrick's Day, but for others this date is also significant as it is World Muay Thai Day or Nai Khnom Dtom day. So in this article I'd like to explore what role martial arts play in fitness today, particularly focusing on Muay Thai and Brazilian Jiu Jitsu which are both widely regarded as the most efficient and effective martial arts for either stand up or ground competing.

The great warrior 'Nai Khnom Dtom' is regarded by Thailand as one of the first officially recorded International Muay Thai fighters to compete in mortal combat, outside of borders of Siam. After being captured during the battle for Ayudhya, he was taken prisoner to Burma as a slave. He was well known for his bravery and prowess as an athlete and excellent unarmed fighter in the art of Muay Thai. During a celebration ceremony where many sports and games including Muay Thai were being presented, he was given a choice to continue to be a slave or to fight for his freedom to show if his skills could defeat the Myanmar Champion. He was rewarded with his freedom after defeating not only the Myanmar champion, but 11 more Myanmar combatants one after the other.

That Historic day took place over two centuries ago. Later on, the local boxing circle had marked the day March 17th (*approximate date of the fight between Nai Khnom Dtom and the Myanmar fighters*), in commemoration of his spectacular feat of bravery and fighting skills. Thailand dedicates one fight night a year in memory of this great warrior 'Nai Khnom Dtom' the first recorded International Muay Thai fighter.

Today Muay Thai has continued to grow and is one of the most rapidly growing sports in the UK as it is a great way to keep fit, is a great skill to develop and teaches discipline and culture to its participants. Muay Thai has paved the way for many variations including kick-boxing and boxercise (no contact). There are several reasons people learn Muay Thai, some to compete and fight in a ring, others to advance their skill and achieve gradings and those who do it just to stay healthy as it is great cardio-vascular exercise and can be very stimulating and enjoyable.

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is divided into three broad categories, each mutually supportive of the others; self-defense (including striking techniques and unarmed techniques against armed opponents), free fighting competition (commonly referred to as "vale tudo" or "anything goes" events, now popularly called MMA), and sport grappling with and without the gi (matches that include a wide range of submission holds, but no striking). Even the rules of sport grappling matches are designed to ingrain the proper strategy to be

applied in the street. For example in a sport BJJ match, points are awarded based on achieving superior positions, positions from which not only grappling techniques can be more readily applied, but also from which strikes may be applied or defended. Students naturally seek the positions that will garner them the most points, thereby constantly reinforcing the most efficient strategy for real life confrontations. This "position-submission" strategy has proven to be the most effective for real life confrontations.

The overall fighting strategy of Brazilian Jiu Jitsu is designed to equip a physically smaller or weaker individual with an effective method of defending against a larger and stronger attacker. When applying BJJ techniques, leverage is paramount, as leverage is the secret to the amplification and most efficient use of force. BJJ also has the most developed methods of fighting while on one's back, a position weaker fighters will often find themselves when attacked.

Jiu-Jitsu came to international prominence in the martial arts community in the early 1990s, when Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu expert Royce Gracie won the first, second and fourth Ultimate Fighting Championships, which at the time were single elimination martial arts tournaments. Royce fought against often much-larger opponents who were practicing other styles, including boxing, shoot-fighting, karate, judo and tae kwon do. It has since become a staple art for many MMA fighters and is largely credited for bringing widespread attention to the importance of ground fighting. Sport BJJ tournaments continue to grow in popularity worldwide and have given rise to no-gi submission grappling tournaments, such as the ADCC Submission Wrestling World Championship.

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) are now recognised the world over and are the fastest growing sports in the world with many predicting brands such as the UFC to take over from more traditional Western fighting such as boxing. There are several martial arts competitions and governing bodies in the UK and this is continuing to grow. MMA is open to all at any level of fitness and is superb for fat-burn, fitness and to build confidence as well as teach respect. If you would like to know more about Muay Thai, Brazilian Jiu Jitsu (BJJ) or MMA you can contact Phillip Hanna at Evolve. www.evolveManchester.com

Dan Fisher REPS

Personal Trainer and Managing Director

Kosher Fitness Ltd.