



What to Look for When You're Choosing an Instructor

by Dave Young and Roy Bedard | photography by Rick Hustead

FORGOTTEN REALITIES OF REALITY-BASED TRAINING



KNIFE ATTACK FROM OVERHEAD:

Wearing safety glasses in case of accidental eye contact, Dave Young (left) and Roy Bedard face each other (1). When the attacker unleashes his downward slash, Young moves forward and grabs the limb between the wrist and the elbow (2). Controlling the other man's momentum, Young pivots to the outside and locks the limb straight to prevent him from using the weapon (3). Next, he applies downward pressure on the man's elbow using his own elbow (4). As a result, the assailant will be forced to the ground or suffer a broken arm. The key to staying safe is never letting go of the weapon arm—even if you're cut, Young says. "Getting cut doesn't mean you're losing; it just means you haven't gotten control just yet."

One of civilization's greatest minds belonged to the Greek philosopher Plato. While most of the world will acknowledge that Plato was brilliant, they may not know that he was an advocate of compulsory combat training for Greek citizens. The Hellenistic solution was *pankration*, a reality-based fighting method that included strikes, kicks, blocks, grappling techniques and submissions.

Throughout history, there's always been a demand for methods of empty-hand combat that can enable unarmed citizens to protect themselves against violence. Eclectic styles continue to flourish around the world to satisfy the human need for safety and security as outlined by psychologist Abraham Maslow. Grouped together, they're known as reality-based fighting.

Whenever a concept or practice enjoys a large audience, experts come out of the woodwork, all too eager to enter the arena with their own version of the popular product. Often, their claims are unsubstantiated and never validated, and the product can be destructive to the unwary consumer who doesn't know all the facts. In the case of the martial arts, the marketplace for reality-based fighting is large and growing, giving rise to not only new tactics and services but also new definitions of "reality."

In combat, reality is what it is. It's based on what happens or may happen in an unadulterated, unedited, circumstantial contest of survival. Multiple variables factor into a real fight, not the least of which are the skills of the fighters and the weapons they have available. Soon after firearms were invented in the late 13th century, they

altered the reality of all the edged-weapon warriors who were at the top of the food chain. History documents many incidents in which soldiers charged into a hail of bullets without seeking cover or concealment because they'd never seen the effects of firepower. Lines of troops were flattened as the harsh new reality set in. Fast-forward to the 20th century, when the new reality of the atomic bomb forced the Japanese into submission. Reality is context-based. As the context changes, so does the reality.

Today, the Internet abounds with video clips of fights. TV programming caters to the masses by presenting mind-numbing hours of ground-and-pound combat in which two pugilists square off in an alleged contest of superiority. Although they're frequently packaged as "reality fighting," the truth is that there are rules to protect the participants from serious bodily harm or death. Does that make the event any less real? No. But it does bring to mind an incident that took place on the streets of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. An enterprising salesman opened a case to show an American visitor some spectacular watches: Rolex, Omega, Breitling, all shiny and new. The price? \$100. "Sorry," he was told by the American. "I prefer real watches."

"These are real watches," he said. "Real fakes."

The Malaysian was right—they were real watches, but as with anything else that's real, a line has to be drawn so quality can be judged against similar products. Again, it's the context that matters. If your



GUN DISARM FROM THE FRONT:

Dave Young assumes a surrender position when Roy Bedard points a gun at him (1). Note how Young positions his hands up and elbows in, which permits a quick reaction. Young steps forward and grabs the weapon using a "C-clamp" with his fingers (2). His thumb is under the trigger guard, and his straight arm keeps the muzzle of the gun pointed away from him. Young uses his other hand to grab the weapon and rotate the barrel toward the attacker's head (3). He continues the rotation until the gun points downward toward the man's chest (4). If the gun goes off, Young is prepared for the blast because he's shielded his head. Once the weapon has been turned 180 degrees, Young pulls it toward his chest (5). He immediately creates distance as he clears the gun (6), then prepares to fire, if need be (7).

purpose is to own a watch that keeps good time, one of the fakes might be adequate. But if you want to wear a watch that suggests status and success, the knockoffs simply aren't good enough.

In today's reality-inspired mixed-martial arts contests, you don't see biting, eye gouging or intentional groin strikes. There are no weapons, and the environment is safe and free of debris. The "reality" is two people striking and grappling in a con-



FRONTAL ATTACK FROM A STANDING OPPONENT:

Partially suited up in RedMan protective gear, Dave Young lies on his back while Roy Bedard stands over him (1). Young assumes a stable ground position, with his legs back, knees bent, elbows in, chin tucked and shoulders raised. Keeping his kicks low, Young unloads a series of bottom-of-the-foot strikes to the nearest leg (2-3) and then to the other one (4). If the attacker falls backward, Young will get up quickly. If he falls forward, Young will use one or both legs to keep his opponent off him. For maximum realism, quality protective gear is necessary, as is proper training in its use.

trolled contest. That's not intended to marginalize the events or make them seem less important. Rather, it's to put them in context so inexperienced eyes aren't deluded and fans don't feel compelled to boast of an athlete's total combat superiority. To be sure, MMA matches are extraordinarily difficult and involve high-level skills, strength, attitude and bravado, but all that can be nullified on the street by the introduction of a gun.

Acquiring the Skills

If you're interested in learning real self-defense, you must study more than physical skills. Combat doesn't happen in a vacuum. Everyone who engages in a fight must justify his actions within the context of the law. All 50 states have statutes describing the parameters of personal defense

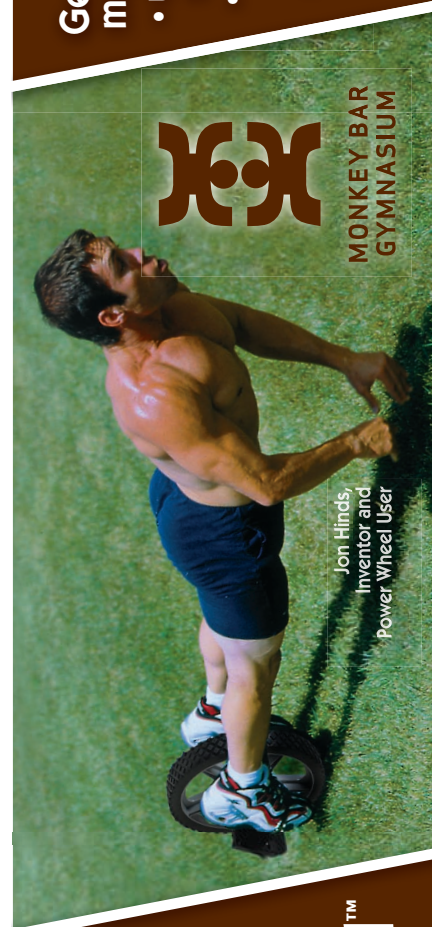
and the use of force, but there are nuances with which most people are unfamiliar. A civil and/or criminal court will preside over your fight, judgment will be passed and penalties may be imposed based on the reasonableness of your actions. To be fully protected, you must acquire an understanding of the law, either from your instructor or from written sources.

Another point you must pay attention to when evaluating a reality-based program is time frame. If you're like the average student, you cannot commit years to the pursuit of proficiency in self-defense. Some traditional systems are built on the use of fine-motor skills, but those skills can take decades to develop. That's why you should never choose a system based solely on the teacher's skills. Certainly, the teacher will be impressive, but it's his stu-

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dents who are the measure of the system and the method.

With respect to physical skills, a reality-fighting curriculum must include empty-hand tactics, ground fighting, stick and knife defense, submissions and deadly force techniques. There may be room for other tools commonly carried by civilians, like pepper spray and Tasers. However, the context of the fight must always be taught so that whenever a technique is employed, it's lawful.

If you don't think legal concerns should be part of reality-based training, consider what can happen when an act of self-defense takes place without prior knowledge of the law. In 2003, Alexander Pring-Wilson was involved in a physical altercation with two men who had histories of violence. Using what he thought was reasonable force, he drew his pocketknife and stabbed one of the assailants, but he was subsequently prosecuted for the man's death. Unable to justify his actions in the alcohol-fueled fight, Pring-Wilson was charged with murder. He wound up being found guilty of voluntary manslaughter and was sentenced to six to eight years in prison. He was later retried and sentenced to two years.

Obviously, if you're studying self-defense, it's essential to learn from a teacher who's versed in context as well as in combat. The training should entail scenarios based on real experiences because looking at past events is the surest way to prevent future problems.

Making the Training Real

The realism of a training scenario is often limited by safety concerns. Fortunately, technology has given us superior self-defense tools and better training equipment so we can accomplish the mission.

Several companies produce padded suits that allow for near-perfect simulation of offense and defense. They protect participants from serious harm while allowing them to engage in intense and aggressive assault. Some are designed for full impact with sticks, bats and batons, while others are constructed to permit the wearer to be shot with simulated munitions.

Indeed, the most important part of reality-based training is the ability to train without hurting or injuring the student or instructor. To enable the student to respond to an assault with realistic intensity, speed and power, while at the same time expecting no injuries, is a tall order for any suit and the course that's designed to go with it. School owners have to know the difference between pain and injury and choose their equipment accordingly. Where pain may inoculate a student against quitting, injuries stop the training.

The point of wearing gear is simple: It's designed to keep both parties safe.

For that objective to be realized, the instructor has to know how to use the pads. Modular gear is excellent for specific types of reality-based training as long as the relevant instruction is provided. That will prevent the wearer from accidentally using a shoulder panel on his shin, for example. Because most gear is designed to fit the human frame, putting it on incorrectly is worse than not having it on at all. Why? It can leave the wearer with the impression that he's protected when he really isn't because of an open seam or unnatural fit.

It's crucial to choose gear that's easily cleaned. Because padded suits tend to collect sweat, they can become a breeding ground for bacteria, mold and fungus. Students have been infected with rashes, ringworm and even strep from wearing unclean gear. With the proliferation of MRSA, this precaution is not one to be taken lightly. If you're a prospective student, ask the instructor how often he cleans the suit. If you're an instructor, ask the manufacturer how to launder it.

Future of Reality-Based Training

A foundering economy is a known environment for increased criminal activity. Making matters worse, lawbreakers are getting more violent and more desperate, as is shown by predatory crime indexes. Meanwhile, reduced budgets and job freezes make the prospect of putting additional police on the streets unlikely. More than ever before, citizens are finding themselves in the unenviable position of having to deal with these problems on their own.

As more people search for answers, greater numbers will turn to reality-based self-defense. Ideally, trainers will rethink their strategies and curricula to ensure that they meet the demand responsibly. In some cases, the instructors will have to become students again as they receive schooling in the law, the use of weapons and the utilization of state-of-the-art protective equipment. ✕

About the authors:

Dave Young is the director of specialized programs for Northcentral Technical College (Wausau, Wisconsin) and the director of training for the RedMan Training Division. He has more than 28 years of experience educating civilian and military law-enforcement personnel. Roy Bedard is president of RRB Systems International, a police-training corporation located in Tallahassee, Florida. With 22 years of experience in law enforcement, he serves as an expert witness in police and civilian use-of-force cases. For more information, visit blackbeltmag.com/archives/who/.