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Structure, conditions and shaping “opponent feeling” in opinion of combat sport athletes

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A Study design
B Data collection
C Statistical analysis
D Data interpretation
E Literature search
F Manuscript preparation
G Funds collection

Włodzimierz Starosta^{A,B,C,D,E,F}, Tadeusz Rynkiewicz^{A,B,C,D,E,F}

University School of Physical Education, Poznań, Institute of Physical Culture in Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland

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Summary

Study aim:

The aim of this study was to settle 8 problems connected with “opponent feeling” in combat sports’.

Material/methods:

Studies were conducted on 154 advanced wrestlers in classical style (n =50) and female and male wrestlers in free style (n=11+59=70), 20 kyokushinkai karatekas and 14 wrestling coaches (the age 18-40 years, and the training period was 5-25 years). On all the subjects a survey was conducted using an identical questionnaire, which comprised two parts (the first included information concerning personal data, training period, age, advancement in sport, achievements etc., the second one comprised 21 questions connected with the notion of “opponent feeling”, its structure and determining conditions).

Results:

“Opponent feeling”, its contents and structure were difficult, but all the same proved to be feasible for initial defining. This feeling acquires a particular significance in technical mastering at champion level. This fact was admitted by the majority of surveyed athletes. Similarly, as the relation that occurs between this feeling and external conditions. Optimum conditions are advantageous for the manifestation of a higher level of “opponent feeling” and of the technique. It also depends on the psychical state of the athlete. Excessive emotions may affect it in an adverse way, while optimum ones – in a stimulating way.

Conclusions:

Opinions expressed by the surveyed athletes were formulated in a synthetic way with respect to 12 issues. A lot of them have not been analysed here for lack of available space, even though they present a highly interesting material. Of exceptional value are statements of highly experienced athletes, particularly classical style wrestlers, many of whom belonged to the world elite.

Key words:

combat sports • opponent feeling • Olympic medallist

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Author's address:

Prof. Włodzimierz Starosta, University School of Physical Education, Poznań, Institute of Physical Culture in Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland wlodzimierz.starosta@insp.waw.pl



INTRODUCTION

In combat sports a high level of motor abilities is a requisite for achieving a significant result. In the event of an equal level of physical abilities and technical and tactic preparation, coordination abilities become of crucial importance. The application of appropriate proportions in the development of physical and coordination abilities allows achieving a champion level of technique. Combat sports belong to sport disciplines that are of complex coordination, as they necessitate manifestation of accurate and quick movements in changing conditions (fig. 1). This means that they should be classified to the third, highest level of movement coordination. They occupy leading positions in the hierarchy of sport disciplines taken into account at this level, along with sport games. They demand from the athletes high level of almost all coordination abilities. Their higher level is advantageous when mastering the technique at a champion level. One of particularly significant elements are specific kinaesthetic impressions called “opponent feeling”, “mat feeling”, “tatami feeling”, “distance feeling” etc. Those sensations form an individualised synthesis of all types of preparation of an athlete (fig. 2). The concept of “ball feeling” or “water feeling” have been present in theory for quite some time [6, 8, 9, 10, 18, 19, 24] and also in sport practice. Representatives of psychology have dedicated to them most attention [5, 7, 14, 15]. A lot of attention was furthermore dedicated to “ball feeling”. For example, for T.T. Džamgarov and

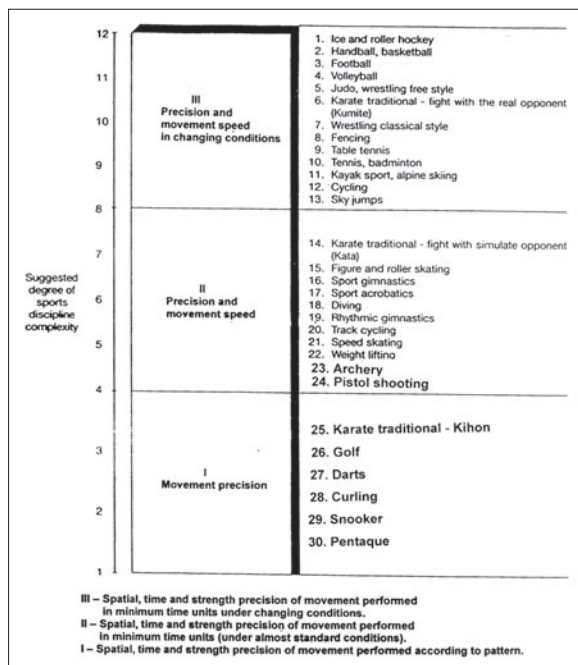


Figure 1. Suggested classification of selected sports disciplines according to their degree of complexity of coordination level. [Starosta, 2004]

A.C. Puni [5] “ball feeling” > is a multiform complex regulator of motor activity and a manifestation of sensory culture <. A comprehensive definition was proposed by C. M. Gagajewa, who defined “ball feeling” as: “Ability of accurate regulation of movements and muscle effort based on observations in relation to specified activities and evaluation of distance between players, the ball and the goal” [7 p. 23]. “Ball feeling”, “opponent feeling” and its other specific types concern especially important elements of technique, and their high level is an indispensable component of sport championship. Hence, determination of the content of those notions, their structure and conditions is of considerable theoretical importance, and even of a bigger practical one. It would help activating reserves which up to now have not been sufficiently used, and would also modify the presently functioning system of training in sport games and in combat sports.

Despite the fact that the notion of “ball feeling” and its importance has been emphasised by many sport theoreticians, research related to this issue has continued to a limited extent in football, which was commenced by G. Gagajewa [7] several years ago [23, 3]. They were expanded by “ball feeling” in basketball [12, 18] and in table tennis [21, 22]. Despite the fact that the exceptional importance of “ball feeling” for

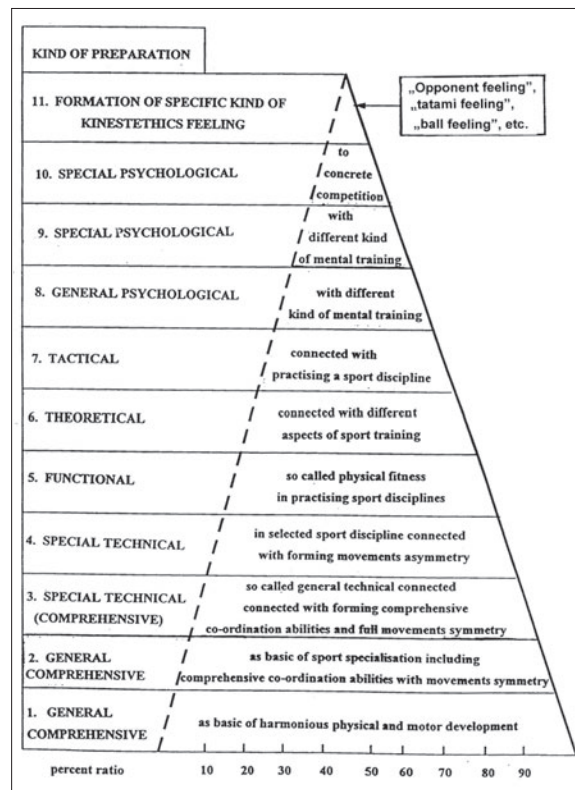


Figure 2. Formation of specific kinesthetic sensations (feelings) by competitors in comprehensive preparation during long-term training. [Starosta, 2001]

effectiveness of the game has never been questioned, hitherto studies have not taken up this issue too frequently [7, 18, 19, 20].

The situation was much less advantageous for the notion of “*opponent feeling*”, which up to now has not been used much, and which differs practically in each type of combat sports. It occupies a special position owing to its range and multiaspect character of manifestation. It was not long ago that the content of this notion and its associated conditions were taken up, probably for the very first time [2, 19]. A survey performed using a questionnaire with 21 questions was based on material that comprised 56 athletes from the national teams of 5 Arab countries practising taekwondo. It was found that the majority of tested subjects (64%) experienced a higher level of “*opponent feeling*” in the competition period, and the lowest one in the preparatory period (31%). In the opinion of the majority of surveyed persons (45%) the highest level of this feeling occurred in the basic part of the training, and its lowest level in the initial (33%) or final part (18%). Symptoms of high level of “*opponent feeling*” comprised: correct “*perceiving*” of intentions of the opponent (35%), appropriate mental attitude (29%), self-assertiveness during the fight (21%), appropriate body position (6%), quick reaction to a movement made by the opponent (4%). Almost a half of surveyed athletes (47%) have noticed a relation that occurs between “*opponent feeling*” and the level of movement coordination. The high level of this is affected to a large extent (57%) by the acquired training level, as well as by the quality of performed training (17%).

Results of those tests outlined a problem that appears in taekwondo for 56 high class athletes of five Arab countries. It was impossible to say whether research conducted on representatives training other combat sports and on a more numerous group would allow achieving similar results. Hence, the aim of this study was the: 1. Attempt to formulate a definition for the content of the notion “*opponent feeling*”. 2. Seeking of elements of the structure of this notion. 3. Determination of the level of “*opponent feeling*” depending on the length of the training period. 4. Attempt to determine associations between “*opponent feeling*” and the sport result. 5. Seeking of dependencies between “*opponent feeling*” and the dominant body side. 6. Endeavour at determining associations between “*opponent feeling*” and external conditions. 7. Determination of conditions that affect the high or low level of “*opponent feeling*” and methods of its shaping. 8. Determination of interdependencies between “*opponent feeling*” and the level of motor coordination.

MATERIAL & METHODS

Studies were conducted on 154 advanced wrestlers in classical style ($n = 50$) and female and male wrestlers in free style ($n = 11 + 59 = 70$), 20 kyokushinkai karatekas and 14 wrestling coaches [1, 4, 11, 13]. A particularly high level of advancement was recorded for wrestlers, who included former Olympic champions (A. Wroński, R. Wolny, W. Zawadzki) and medal winning athletes of the highest rank (among others J. Fafiński, J. Tracz, P. Stepień). A considerable majority of surveyed athletes belonged to a group of leading Polish athletes and had a long training experience. On all the subjects a survey was conducted using an identical questionnaire, which comprised two parts. The first one of them included information concerning personal data, training period, age, advancement in sport, achievements and self-evaluation of lateral differentiation of the upper and lower extremities. The second one comprised 21 questions connected with the notion of “*opponent feeling*”, its structure and determining conditions. Responses to 12 of them were then processed. The age of studied individuals was within 18-40 years, and the training period was 5-25 years. Hence, those were athletes with long sport training experience.

RESULTS

1. Notion of “*opponent feeling*” and its understanding by investigated athletes

The vast majority of advanced wrestlers in both styles (65%) understood this notion in the following way: “*ability of anticipating, feeling movements of the opponent and immediate response to them*”. Their individual opinions related to “*opponent feeling*” differed: “*ability of performing a counteraction with the entire body to the opponent’s action*”; “*ability of making use of the opponent’s force to one’s advantage*”; “*ability of the body to anticipate intentions of the opponent, as well as their full control*”; “*experiencing each factor applied on us by the opponent*”; “*ability of quick recognition and reaction to stimuli applied by the opponent*”. In a similar way it was possible to define the feeling based on opinions expressed by karate athletes: “*ability of anticipating the behaviour of the opponent during a fight*”. However, in individual statements they provided a different definition: “*feeling each factor that the opponent uses on us*”; “*feeling of distance and the ability of anticipating movements of the opponent*”; “*ability of foreseeing movements of the opponent allowing preparation for defence and counterattack*”.

In addition efforts were made to define interpersonal conditions for shaping the “*opponent feeling*”. Athletes



Table 1. Symptoms high and low level of “opponent feeling” in opinion advanced wrestlers of free and Greek-roman style and karate, n = 156. [Starosta, 2006].

No.	Symptoms of high level	No.	Symptoms of low level
1.	Quick reaction to the opponent’s movement	1.	Delayed reaction to the opponent’s movement
2.	Correct feelings towards the opponent’s (i.e. distinguishing simulated from real attack)	2.	Lack of abilities to foresee the intentions of the opponent
3.	Adequate preparation for competitions	3.	Imadequate preparation for competitions
4.	Proper position of body during various parts of the fighting	4.	Improper position of body during various parts of the fighting
5.	Proper psychological attitude (towards the realization of the tactical programme)	5.	Improper psychological attitude (towards the lost fight) or its lack
6.	Contact with large surface of the opponent’s body	6.	Contact with small surface of the opponent’s body
7.	Ability to relax muscles at various moments of the fight	7.	Constant tension of the muscles during the fight
8.	Confidence in applying technical and tactic elements	8.	Uncertainty as far as own actions
9.	Lack of injuries and fear of them	9.	Fear of the recurrence of the injury or of suffering another one
10.	Control of actions executed by the opponent	10.	Inability to adjust the way of fighting or imposing one’s own style fighting
11.	Skillful use of the opponent’s strength	11.	Low level or lack as far as the use of the opponent’s strength
12.	Ability to anticipate the opponent’s movements	12.	Delayed reaction towards the opponent’s movements i.e. inability to foresee

of various combat sports have listed similar components: inborn predisposition, high level of movement coordination, “*muscles feeling*”, high level of technical training, mental resilience, ability of tensing and relaxing muscles, reaction time, ability of foreseeing the opponent’s movements, general frame of mind, intellectual fitness, experience.

2. Manifestation of the “opponent feeling”

A synthetic formulation of opinions expressed by female and male wrestlers showed that this feeling was manifested in: quick response, controlling progress of the fight, appropriate muscle tension, anticipating intentions of the opponent, selection of the best moments for attack, quick and accurate assessment of developments on the mat, suitable position during the fight. Also of interest were opinions of some wrestlers with respect to manifestation of this feeling: “*I manage to perform all the planned technical elements*”; “*readiness of response to actions of the opponent at an appropriate time, including also dominating over the opponent*”; “*muscle tension*”; “*the athlete is able to feel the opponent anticipates his actions, does not let the opponent take him by surprise or avoids a part of a fight which seems to him to be dangerous. He is able to foretell attacks in the so-called second and third intention*”. Statements made by karatekas were generally the same. Also of interest was a statement of one of them that this feeling is manifested by: “*appropriate fight control (during the fight I must feel well and be relaxed)*”. The original wording was maintained for

statements of the athletes, even though at times it was similar to slang used in the athlete milieu, as some of them pertinent expressed the essence of the discussed notion. Responses granted to the first two questions form constituents, out of which it may be possible to formulate a more comprehensive and a more correct definition of the notion of “*opponent feeling*”.

3. Symptoms of high and low level of “opponent feeling”

An analysis of symptoms of both levels of synthetic approach to this feeling in wrestlers (table 1) and karatekas has indicated a considerable convergence of their statements. A certain differentiation was observed in opinions of particular athletes. Below are some selected statements of wrestlers: “*a symptom of low level of this feeling is the insufficient anticipation of actions of the opponent*”; “*a high level of this feeling is associated with quicker response and vigour, and the lower level – heaviness, lack of fight concept, insufficient endurance*”; “*high level of the “opponent feeling” is manifested by correct response and control of actions of the opponent, and the low one with stress, continuous muscle tension and belated reaction*”; “*direct contact with the largest possible surface of the opponent’s body allows good feeling, the smaller this surface, the inferior is this feeling*”; “*at a high level of this feeling I can sense in the hands changes in muscle tension of the opponent and I know exactly when he is going to attack, and when he is only feigning an attack, and I can also tell when he is relaxed. Then I am*

Table 2. Factors influencing high and low level of “opponent feeling” in the opinion of advanced wrestlers of free and Greek-roman style (%), n = 43. [Starosta, 2006].

No.	Factor	Classic style	Free style
1.	Inborn predispositions	43.8	40.7
2.	Degree of training	37.5	40.7
3.	Level of motor abilities	25.0	25.9
4.	Level of technical preparation	25.0	14.8
5.	Number of executed fights	18.8	3.7
6.	Psychological features	18.8	7.4
7.	External (outside) practice	6.3	3.7
8.	Training period	12.5	7.4
9.	Level of sport advancement	12.5	-
10.	Competitor (sport) practice	-	14.8
11.	Adequate concentration of attention	-	11.1
12.	High speed of executed movements	-	7.4
13.	Recognition of the opponent	-	3.7
14.	Kind and quality of training	-	3.7
15.	Level of motor coordination	-	18.5

not overly tired in simple actions. At a low level of this feeling I must continuously be fully alert and careful, and I am unable to foresee the consequent action of my opponent, and if I get the feeling that he is weaker, I loose the fight”

Karatekas, have to a large extent, repeated symptoms stated by the wrestlers. Among individual opinions worthy of attention were: “*symptoms of high level of this feeling are observable when I am generally well prepared and when I am fully in form*”; “*at a high level of this feeling self-assertiveness appears*”; “*at a low level of this feeling I become unable to adapt to the fight of the opponent*”; “*low level of this feeling is manifested in erroneous responses to attack and in the lack of feeling of the distance involved*”.

4. Factors influencing high or low level of the “opponent feeling”

Wrestlers in both styles specified 15 factors and ordered them hierarchically according to percentage values (table 2). They agreed with respect to the first three of them: inborn predisposition, level of training and motor abilities. Divergence of opinions took place with respect to technical preparation, which was placed by classical style wrestlers on the fourth position, and free style on 5th- 6th, including professional training experience. For the latter ones the fourth position was taken by the level of movement coordination, which was not specified by classical style wrestlers (*it may not be ruled out that they have*

ascribed it to the level of motor abilities?). Karatekas took 12 such factors into account, a part of which did not come up for wrestlers: level of involvement in the fight, atmospheric conditions, health state, frame of mind. Medal winners of Olympic games have provided an interesting formulation of factors that affect the high level “opponent feeling”: “*high disposition, general physical, speed and endurance preparation, as well as freshness of the athlete*” (R.W.); “*first of all the attitude of the athlete, his involvement in training and general feeling during the fight*” (J.T.); *general feeling, temperature, acquired training level*” (P.S.).

5. Level of the “opponent feeling” in various training periods

The highest level of this feeling in the major part of free style wrestlers (88.9%), of the classical style (93.7%) and karatekas (95%) was observed in the competition period (fig. 3). In a very small group of surveyed subjects it took place in the preparatory period (5 to 11.1%). The appearance of the highest level of this feeling already in the preparatory period may be the proof of: application of adequate training loads for the given individual, appropriate proportions occurring between exercises that shape fitness and coordination abilities, high level of sensory sensitiveness of the athletes, as well as insufficiently correct self-evaluation. A considerable divergence of opinions concerned the lowest level of this feeling. In the majority of surveyed classical style (50%) and free style (59.2 to 100%) wrestlers and karatekas (10%) it



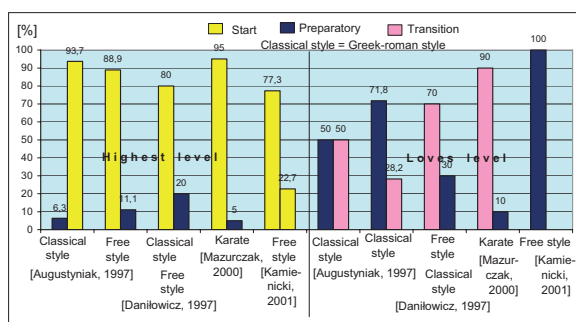


Figure 3. Level of "opponent feeling" in different periods of training in the opinion advanced wrestlers and karate competitors, n = 156. [Starosta, 2006]

was observed in the preparatory period, and in part of wrestlers (22.2 to 70%) and karatekas (90%) in the transitory period. In the light of modern training theory, it appeared to be difficult to explain the occurrence of the lowest level of "opponent feeling" in the transitory period, i.e. when the training content was supposed to have been focused on shaping various coordination abilities and kinaesthetic impressions.

6. "Opponent feeling" in various parts of the training session

In the vast majority of free style (62,5%) and classical style (92,5%) wrestlers, as well as karatekas (65%), the highest level of "opponent feeling" appeared in the upper part of the training session (fig. 4). The occurrence of such a level in a numerous group of athletes (classical style wrestlers – 7.5%, and free style wrestlers – 25%, karatekas – 35%) already in the initial part was surprising. Perhaps they belonged to sensory individuals, for whom a high level of kinaesthetic sensations appears after a short warm up. It was unexpected that the lowest level of this feeling appeared for wrestlers of classical style (6%), free style (11%) and karatekas (70%) already in the initial part of their training session. This may indicate an exceedingly intensive warm up or insufficient restitution of forces after the preceding training. In the considerable majority of wrestlers of the classical style (87,5%) and free style (85%) the lowest level of the feeling was found in the final part of the training session. Results achieved by karatekas clearly diverged from that trend, as only 30% of them have observed such a level of this feeling in the final part of the training.

7. "Opponent feeling" and the achieved sport result

A considerable majority of wrestlers in both styles and karatekas (90-100%) have noticed the relation taking place between the level of that feeling and the achieved sport result. For few wrestlers (10%) such a relation did not exist. Here are some selected opinions

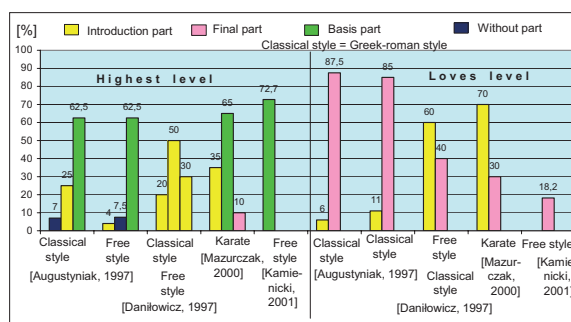


Figure 4. Level of "opponent feeling" in different parts of the training session in the opinion of advanced wrestlers and karate competitors, n = 156. [Starosta, 2006]

expressed by wrestlers: "This relation is manifested in the effectiveness of executed technical and tactical actions aimed at obtaining a score or technical advantage"; "High level of this feeling allows saving strength, endure the fight with regard to physical condition, and allows having some moments of rest during the fight. Following an unconscious tensioning of muscles in the arm, placing of the legs, and a >opponent feeling< in the hands enables quicker response", "if we do not >feel the opponent<, and if the opponent feels us we are not likely to win the fight. In such a situation the opponent would be quicker or counter our holds. The athlete with no >opponent feeling< would never be able to achieve a significant sport result"; "when I have a good feeling of the opponent I am able to make use of his mistakes, which allows me to win the fight with him". Some karatekas have drawn our attention to slightly different aspects: "when we feel the opponent we can avoid dangerous situations and gain advantage, and in addition appropriately distribute strength during the entire fight"; "the higher is the level of >opponent feeling<, the better is the style of conducted fights, and exhaustion of the organism is reduced and the number of injuries decreased". These opinions show that the level of this feeling is a determining condition for achieving a good result in a fight.

8. "Opponent feeling" and lateral differentiation of the lower extremities

In combat sports an important role is played by the lower extremities. Their importance grows particularly in free style wrestling and in karate. In karate actions with the use of legs get the highest scores. Speed of leg movement combined with the strength of the "blow" predetermines the result of the fight. Studies have shown a significantly higher level of kinaesthetic feelings of the lower extremities than of the upper ones [Starosta, 1975]. Long lasting sport training lowers the sensitiveness threshold, i.e. raises the level of space, time related and strength related differentiation of executed movements. The high level of technical

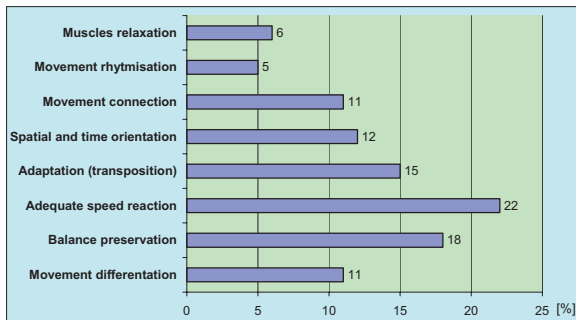


Figure 5. Hierarchy of coordination motor abilities influencing the process and the result of fighting in the opinion of advanced wrestlers, n = 24. [Starosta, Augustyniak, 2006]

championship requires an almost identical share of both extremities in the fight. A considerable majority of statements of the surveyed wrestlers of the classical style (87.5%), free style (81.5%) and karatekas (60%) indicates the domination of the right extremity. In a very small number of wrestlers a much better level of feeling concerned the left leg (6.3% in the classical style and 7.4% in the free style). In karatekas this was observed in almost 40% of investigated individuals. Very few wrestlers have indicated a uniform level of feeling of both the extremities (6.3% in the classical style and 11.1% free style). Also quite interesting were opinions expressed regarding causes of lateral differentiation between the extremities. Here are some selected opinions concerning the wrestlers: “I am a right handed athlete, and I tend to perform the majority of holds with the right arm and the right leg”; “because I use the right leg more frequently during training”. Karatekas have provided a different justification: “the right leg has a stronger blow, and is much more accurate”; “in karate a fighting stance is preferred, in which the left leg is in front and is characterised by a higher level of feeling, speed, but it is slightly weaker”. Formation of a functional differentiation of the extremities, including also the dominating leg, results from its more frequent use during training, which in due course becomes a permanent habit. Possibilities of improving the “opponent feeling” though symmetrical performance of technical elements was noticed by few persons – mainly wrestlers (6.3 to 11.1%).

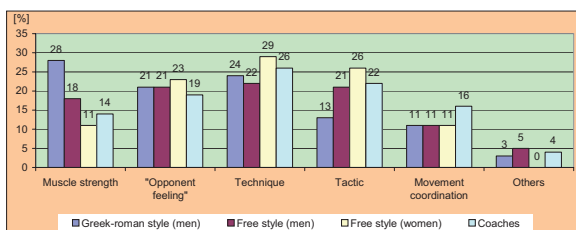


Figure 7. Influence of particular elements of competitor preparation on the result of the fighting in the opinion of women wrestlers, wrestlers of Greek-roman style and their trainers, n = 63. [Starosta, Daniłowicz, 2006]

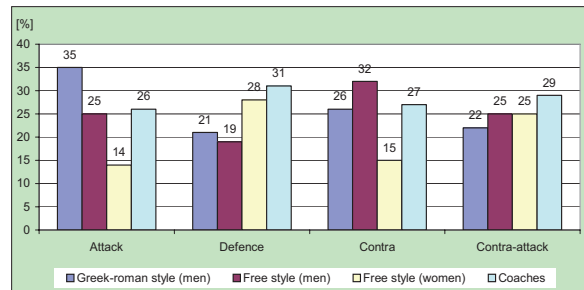


Figure 6. Utilization of “opponent feeling” in different forms of tactic during fighting in the opinion of women wrestlers, wrestlers of Greek-roman style and their trainers, n = 63. [Starosta, Daniłowicz, 2006]

9. “Opponent feeling” and the level of movement coordination

Such a dependence was acknowledged by a vast majority of the investigated wrestlers (96.3 to 100%) and a half of the karatekas. Such a relation was not observed by a numerous group of karatekas (50%). A vast majority of both styles of wrestlers (96.3 to 100%) and karatekas (95%) came to the conclusion that a high level of movement coordination is favourable to shaping of the “opponent feeling” as a component of the technical champion level. Medal winners in Olympic games have expressed quite interesting opinions with respect to such a relation: “coordination influenced significantly the level of the >opponent feeling<” (A.W.); “motor coordination and this feeling go well together. Movements become easier to learn and to train” (R.W.); “a fitter athlete has a better movement coordination and consequently his ‘opponent feeling’ is higher” (W.Z.); “the fitness and movement coordination allow easier learning of the wrestling technique, and consequently helps improve the feeling” (P.S.).

Materials collected through the questionnaire supplement results of a survey performed on 24 wrestlers which concerned the influence of a particular coordination ability on the course and result of a fight during contests. The questionnaire included 8 abilities, and the surveyed individuals were to define the impact of particular abilities on the result of the fight in percentage (fig. 5). In this hierarchy the leading places were occupied by the following abilities: manifestation of quick reaction (22%), maintaining balance (18%), adaptation (combining) (15%), space and time orientation (12%) and movement differentiation (11%). Such an approximate hierarchy may become the subject of discussion.

10. “Opponent feeling” and external conditions

The impact of those conditions on changes with respect to feeling was observed by the majority of



wrestlers (62 to 67%) and a half of the karatekas. Low ambient temperature lowers the quality of the applied technique, and an optimum one may be advantageous to the appearance of a higher level of “opponent feeling” and a better technique. Here are some selected opinions of wrestlers: “the excessively high or low temperature affects adversely the psychical and motor system, while lighting has a smaller impact on the >opponent feeling<, while the type and quality of surfacing affect significantly its level”; “a high ambient temperature and the consequent sweating of the opponent during a fight hinder the ability of anticipating potential actions”; “during a fight on a smooth and resilient mat in a warm and well lit facility the level of the >opponent feeling< tends to increase. It is also manifested in quicker response”. As many as 33 to 38% of the wrestlers and 50% of karatekas were of the opinion that external conditions do not affect significantly the effectiveness of the fights. Here are some opinions expressed by wrestlers to justify this standpoint: “on each surface and in all conditions, when an athlete has the feeling it would be likely to be the same”; “for me personally those conditions are of no importance at all; if I am well prepared then the feeling is also at a suitable level”.

11. “Opponent feeling” and emotions

Responses to the question concerning the impact of emotions were varied. Many athletes perceived the adverse impact of emotions on the level of the “opponent feeling” (37.5% of classical style wrestlers, 44.4% of free style wrestlers, 40% karatekas). This was further confirmed by statements of some of the wrestlers: “the higher the emotions, the lower is the ability of assessing the situation and the effectiveness of performed actions”; “under stress the level of >opponent feeling< is reduced”. Less numerous subjects were of the opinion that emotions affect them in a stimulating way (12.5% of classical style wrestlers, 14.8% of free style wrestlers). As many as 60% karatekas confirmed the beneficial impact of emotions on the level of “opponent feeling”. This is supplemented by their selected opinions: “the high level of emotions during a fight may release an increasing level of the >opponent feeling<”; “in a good and experienced athlete the >opponent feeling< affected by emotions becomes better. It is then assumed that such an athlete has achieved a champion level”.

Medal winners in Olympic games have pointed out to different aspects of the impact of emotions on the level of this feeling: “the more tense is an athlete, mentally blocked, the lower is the feeling” (R.W.); “the ‘opponent feeling’ is reduced because of a lost fight, irritation, unjust verdict of the referee” (W.Z.); “when

I am influenced by emotions during a fight, I tend to be less concentrated, and then this feeling tends to become reduced” (J.T.); “if an athlete is not thinking about the fight, and becomes tense, the feeling is decreased” (P.S.); “this is related to the psyche of each athlete. If he is to fight with a practically stronger opponent, his feeling is most probably also going to decrease (theoretically)” (J.F.).

12. Methods of developing the “opponent feeling”

The vast majority of studied individuals (80% of karatekas, 93% of wrestlers) stated that only contact with an opponent allows shaping this type of feeling, i.e. in natural conditions, which probably means during competitions. It seems that a fight directed at winning does not offer advantageous conditions for focusing on sensations that shape the “opponent feeling”. Perhaps the surveyed athletes meant improvement of this feeling once it had been developed during training fights. Few of them were convinced that it would be better formed in the process of the improvement of the technique (20% of karatekas) or during training meetings with a partner, especially during the so-called technical training, i.e. one focused specifically on improving the technique in particular exercises. Few subjects admitted the possibility of developing this feeling through imaginative training, or the possibility of genetic conditions of this feeling and the inability of its development (4.7%). Here are some selected opinions: “The >opponent feeling< may only be shaped through free style fights, in which the executed technical elements are not directed by anyone”; “fighting with various opponents, of various somatic build types, training level, and abilities”. Quite interesting were statements in champions of Olympic games: “during training in task related fights” (A.W.); “during control fights” (R.W.); “through training and watching fights on the video” (W.Z.); “during a fight with a lighter partner, who has a bigger speed and is flexible” (P.S.).

DISCUSSION

The conducted surveys allowed the definition of the highest level of “opponent feeling” in the competition period, and the lowest one in the transitory or preparatory periods. Similar results were obtained in studies of taekwondo athletes [2] and of those practising sport games [18, 19]. This trend conformed to assumptions of the sport training.

The extensive notion of the “opponent feeling” based on opinions expressed by the studied athletes was preliminarily defined, which may be of considerable importance for practice. A high level of this feeling allows the following: ability of foreseeing, feeling of

the opponent's movements and immediate reacting to them, ability of performing counteractions with the entire body to an action of the opponent, ability of using the opponent's strength to one's advantage, ability of foretelling intentions of the opponent, as well as their full control, ability of quick recognition and reacting to stimuli of the opponent. Those elements determine the effectiveness of the applied technical and tactical solutions during the fight, i.e. winning [18]. An analysis of results in the discussed survey allowed the determination of a strong relation that takes place between "opponent feeling" and the achieved sport result (95 to 100%).

Symmetrisation of movements consists of compensating the fitness in both sides of the body. This requires that the athletes perform exercises with the less fit side of the body (the upper extremity or the lower extremity, or with a turn/rotation), which favours the development of movement coordination and indirectly the higher level of the "opponent feeling" with the dominating side of the body [16, 17, 19]. In the presented material the relation of right-legged wrestlers to left-legged ones was as 5:1 (free style) or 7:1 (classical style). Only in karatekas it was more advantageous, i.e. 3:2. Very few wrestlers pointed to an identical level of feeling in both extremities (6.3% in classical style and 11.1% free style). They constituted a group of wrestlers not only both-legged, but also bilateral – athletes who performed symmetrical exercises. They belong to dangerous opponents owing to the considerable diversity of applied technical options. The group of such versatile wrestlers included, among others, A. Supron, R. Świerad, P. Michalik – multiple medal winners of the most prestigious international competitions. The process of symmetrisation seems to be underestimated in the training of Polish athletes in some combat sports, despite the fact that for example in Japanese judokas it was and still remains obligatory. This discipline appeared in Poland in such a version, but as time passed it has been completely abandoned. Meanwhile some Polish judokas endeavoured to their technical abilities, which allowed them to have considerable successes in international contests, as for example J. Pawłowski (vice champion in Olympic Games in Seoul).

"Opponent feeling", its contents and structure were difficult, but all the same proved to be feasible for initial defining. This feeling acquires a particular significance in technical mastering at champion level. This fact was admitted by the majority of surveyed athletes. Similarly, as the relation that occurs between this feeling and external conditions. Optimum conditions are advantageous for the manifestation of a higher level of "opponent feeling" and of the technique.

It also depends on the psychical state of the athlete. Excessive emotions may affect it in an adverse way, while optimum ones – in a stimulating way.

Presented results cover a fragment of the penetrated research field. Opinions expressed by the surveyed athletes were formulated in a synthetic way with respect to 12 issues. A lot of them have not been analysed here for lack of available space, even though they present a highly interesting material. Of exceptional value are statements of highly experienced athletes, particularly classical style wrestlers, many of whom belonged to the world elite.

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