

Antique wrestling is the prototype of a relatively gentle and honourable self-defence

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Abstract

There is no evidence of self-defence schools in ancient Greece, but there are many historical accounts indicating the military references of the wrestling tradition. The primary place for wrestling training in the Greek system was the Palestras. Nowadays, however, numerous methods of self-defence derived from martial arts of various cultures are promoted, and a significant increase in interest in this type of physical activity has to do with the emergence of so-called action cinema.

Wrestling combat techniques (especially throws, i.e. those used in a vertical stance) qualify as relatively benign forms of self-defence if they are used precisely in circumstances of necessary defence (abstracting from the use of wrestling as a means of aggression). Wrestling fighting techniques used in a horizontal stance are definitely safer. A denial of the ancient form of wrestling and the continuation of this tradition especially by the Greco-Roman style (also as an alternative self-defence option) is professional American pro-wrestling. At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the show was advertised as an essential service alongside hospitals, law enforcement and grocery shops (State of Florida, April 2020). One of the first public presentations took place in May 2021 (Stadium Stampede) as a combination of film footage and live wrestling.

In extreme circumstances, the inadequate motor response of the attacked subject (or those standing in defence of him or her) to an attack by the aggressor ends either in the loss of life of those who have the right to defend themselves or of the aggressor. In the second case, there are two possible interpretations: it is the defending party who either exceeded the legal criteria of necessary defence (the counteraction was inadequate to the threat), or who was competent and determined enough to thwart an unauthorised direct attack, the evident purpose of which was to deprive the life of the attacked subject. Therefore, the simplest method of preparing a person from an early age for relatively gentle and honourable self-defence is for physical education teachers to use, among other things, fun forms of wrestling. The methodological template is the offer of innovative agonology based on the fun forms of fighting in the vertical posture and fun forms of fighting in the horizontal posture.

Keywords: horizontal fun forms of martial arts • innovative agonology • neo-gladiatorship • Palestra • vertical fun forms of martial arts

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Innovative self-defence

involves using verbal and/or behavioural methods and means along with available items in counteracting each attack on any good of an individual (honour, dignity, life, health, property, etc.), whereas a defender submits his/her actions to the criteria of prophylactic and therapeutic agonology, considering the most general directive of efficient leading of any struggles and also universal assumption of self-defence training as absolutely paramount [33].

Neo-gladiator – a person who trains mix martial arts (MMA) and similar forms of hand-to-hand fighting that do not meet the definition of sport according to the Olympic Charter [34].

Brazilian Jiu Jitsu – is a type of fight in which a uniform or gi is used; its main purpose is to project or take your opponent down. Once on the ground, you must seek to control your adversary with different techniques (immobilizations, chokes, joints locks). In the absence of submission at the end of the fight, the winner is declared by the number of points won [35].

Violence (in the praxeological sense) – physical pressure (physical force) or the application of chemical, electrical stimuli, etc., which causes the subject of action to be flung into a situation undesirable by him and becomes the object of someone's action [36].

Performance – *noun* the level at which a player or athlete is carrying out their activity, either in relation to others or in relation to personal goals or standards [37].

INTRODUCTION

Self-defence – physical defence meaning actions taken to defend oneself or others against physical attack or violence. This can include self-defence techniques like martial arts or other physical forms. The use of force that may lead to bodily harm or even death of the aggressor is considered an acceptable action in this case, as it can be seen as a natural reaction to a threat or attack. However, the ethics of self-defence must be taken into account in undertaking this type of action, which can be judged on the basis of principles such as proportionality, necessity and avoidance of excessive use of force [1].

The teaching of self-defence skills can be included in an educational programme, but to be effective, such training should be given by qualified instructors and should be based on the principles of safety and balance of technique [2].

Plato describes wrestling as ‘the most technical and cunning sport of all’. Since antiquity, many eminent philosophers, writers, scientists, painters, etc. have practised various forms of wrestling to improve health and develop willpower, while also suggesting that it is an activity of great educational importance for children [3].

There is no evidence of self-defence schools in ancient Greece, but there are many historical accounts indicating the military references of the wrestling education tradition. The primary element associated with wrestling training in the Greek education system was the Palaestra. The name palaestra itself comes from the verb *palaiein*, meaning ‘to wrestle’. The palaestra had three main functions: a training place for combat sports such as wrestling and boxing, a place for cultic activities and a place for discussion, philosophy and other meetings. Plato’s description of Socrates engaging in philosophical discourse provides a picture of life in the classical Athenian palaestras. Wrestling metaphors recur in Platonic dialogues. The use of wrestling metaphors may be an autobiographical touch on Plato’s part; after all, he himself was a successful young wrestler at the Nemean Games [4-6].

In ancient Greece, the most highly regarded competition was the pentathlon, which was introduced into the Olympic Games programme in 708 BC. The most important element of the pentathlon was wrestling. Greek wrestling was called

pankration ‘all power’, combining boxing and wrestling techniques, and pankrats trained to perform throws, lunges, joint locks and choke holds using specialised techniques. In modern wrestling, these activities are forbidden in Olympic freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling, but allowed in judo or Brazilian JuJitsu, for example. Thus, pankration was used on the battlefield by the Spartan hoplites and the Macedonian phalanx in the army commanded by Alexander the Great. It is precisely the possibility of the utilitarian application of practice wrestling forms of combat that points to their close connection with elements of self-defence, also in relation to the principles of warrior formation in ancient Greece [7-9].

The winner of the pentathlon was likely to be determined by multiple eliminations – to win, one of the participants had to win at least three of the five competitions, including wrestling [10].

The winners of the wrestling competition at the Olympic Games, like their mythological idols, set the best example for the younger generation to shape a beautiful body and to do good, also with regard to respect for elders, teachers. The competition was so concentrated that winning once was very difficult, and winning repeatedly was extraordinary. The most famous wrestler from the Olympic Games was Milon of Croton, who is said to have lifted a 4-year-old bull, killed it with one blow, and then ate it in one day [11, 6, 12].

A great achievement of ancient society was the formation of ethical principles. The great philosophers and physicians of that era: Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle, expressing their views on sport, pointed out the need for moderation, also in their approach to training. They argued that any exaggeration could turn against nature and pointed out that excessive training was always bad. They recognised the dangers of excessive participation in sports training. The ancient doctrine of ‘metron ariston’ and ‘meden agan’ – i.e. not to do something beyond measure, not to overstep the bounds, show the Greeks’ appreciation of moderation and avoidance of excesses. This golden mean in antiquity was the desirable middle ground between the two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency, and was widely known in Aristotle’s philosophy. He introduced this doctrine of the mean as a way of thinking into his account of ethical excellence or perfection of character [13, 14].

Following the principle of balance and moderation in all actions, in terms of goodness, is also known in the Far Eastern martial arts.

Nowadays, numerous self-defence methods derived from martial arts of various cultures are promoted and the significant increase in interest in this type of physical activity is linked to the emergence of so-called action cinema. The financial success of films starring Bruce Lee gave rise to the establishment of numerous martial arts schools around the world. The fighting techniques taught there promote various forms of response to an attack from an aggressor, from gentle actions leading to the overpowering of an attacker to very drastic forms such as a “kick in the crotch”. The concept of self-defence is clearly associated, in Western culture, with the Far Eastern martial arts [15, 16].

However, the modern, sporting form of wrestling comes in many propositions, and the uniqueness of wrestling itself lies in combining its ancient origins with the modern demands of contemporary culture.

Modern forms of wrestling sport are to some extent doomed to a one-sided development geared solely towards sporting success. The essence of competition in sport lies in the direct confrontation between two athletes, and this applies to disciplines organised by individual national federations and international sports organisations, which run tournaments and classify competitors, relegating the problem of raising and shaping a young athlete to the background [17].

The classification of combat sports, which takes into account acceptable ways of interacting with the opponent's body, places wrestling in a group of disciplines with a mild form of applied technical actions, using throws and restraining the opponent's movements. Thus, accepting the basic assumptions of modern combat sports theory and its ancient references, the sport of wrestling finds its place in the group of combat sports.

The use of wrestling as a means of self-defence is indicative of its utilitarian nature. The main use of wrestling elements as a form of self-defence, due to the way in which technical actions are performed under training conditions, consisting in grasping and restricting the opponent's movements, guarantees a relatively mild form of self-defence in out-of-sport confrontation.

A unique situation regarding the use of self-defence skills occurred during the 1984 European Wrestling Championships held in Jonkoping, Sweden. During the wrestling bouts, the coach of the Polish national team, Stanisław Krzesiński, overpowered a terrorist.

The terrorist was at the sports venue, where he threatened to use a gun in an attempt to disrupt the tournament. He also threatened to detonate a bomb he had allegedly hidden in a suitcase. The coach used his sporting skills and, by executing a swift attack on his opponent and restricting his movements, led to the arrest of the terrorist [11].

In extreme circumstances, the inadequate motor response of the attacked subject (or those standing in defence of him or her) to an attack by the aggressor ends either in the loss of life of those who have the right to defend themselves or of the aggressor. In the second case, there are two possible interpretations: it is the defending party who either exceeded the legal criteria of necessary defence (the counteraction was inadequate to the threat), or who was competent and determined enough to thwart an unauthorised direct attack, the evident purpose of which was to deprive the life of the attacked subject.

Wrestling combat techniques (especially throws, i.e. those used in a vertical stance) qualify as relatively mild forms of self-defence when used precisely in circumstances of necessary defence (leaving aside the use of wrestling as a means of aggression). The fall of an off-balance person (even if controlled by a skilled wrestler, the perpetrator of such an event) whose inexperience in hand-to-hand combat can lead to serious injury, disability and even loss of life. Wrestling techniques used in a horizontal stance are definitely safer [18, 19].

Through wrestling training, we also shape self-defence skills, developing mental resilience, improving self-esteem and self-confidence and generally influencing a change in life attitudes. Mental toughness and posture can also be improved by practising exercises with elements of sports and martial arts [20].

A denial of the ancient form of wrestling as part of self-defence is the professional form of American wrestling (pro-wrestling), which was possible at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside hospitals, law enforcement and grocery shops

as an essential service (State of Floryda, April 2020) [21]. Already Roman civilisation was dominated by gladiatorial games and reached such a level of pathology of aggression that Emperor Constantine the Great banned them by an edict in 326. The extent of *homo sapiens*' fascination with bloody spectacles where people kill each other is evidenced by the fact that the procedure to banish gladiatorial games, took more than 350 years – until 681 [22].

The creation of a specific type of wrestling bout: a confusion of real fight and film spectacle, was led by an analysis of media demand resulting from professional market assessment [23]. One of the basic tenets of producing popular series is to adapt to the desires of its consumers, which was the case when wrestling fans reacted negatively to wrestling programmes in an empty arena. In May 2021, one of the first show-within-a-show (Stadium Stampede) was produced, which combined a recorded film segment with a live wrestling performance. The cinematic segment of the match featured various stunts that could not be performed live, while the wrestling performance, live, was the centrepiece of the show prepared for an enthusiastic audience reaction [22].

By introducing high-risk situations, the shows have become increasingly diverse and attractive to the audience. Individual scenes and even scenarios have been linked to the personalities of

individual wrestlers, making violence central to both the outcome of the competition and the shows [24, 25]. This results in health risks, even in the form of concussion, for the players taking part in these shows [26].

The opposite of the situations of escalating violence for entertainment described above are the unique fun forms of martial arts [27] possible for use in general physical education and should be promoted in social media. Such an example is the unique programme Combat sports propedeutics – basics of judo [28] implemented at the beginning of this century in several Polish universities. The multidimensional adaptive benefits associated with enhancing personal safety [29] relate particularly to the ability to diagnose and reduce aggressiveness [30] and diagnosing and reducing susceptibility of body injuries during a fall [31]. The most widely documented effects of safe fall teaching using a range of unique fun forms and motor simulations [2]. What is lacking, apart from a small amount of empirical evidence, is the well-documented effect of mastering the skill of avoiding collision through frequent use of the fun forms category (example Figure 1).

A methodological proposal specifically dedicated to self-defence is an electronic manual edited by Harasymowicz and Kalina 'Honourable self-defence' [32]. A unique addition to this multimedia manual (edited simultaneously in English and Polish)



Figure 1. "Mischievous fox" example, *fun forms of martial arts* of the category "comprehensive settling of close combat" [27].

are short films of exercises and tests. Thus, it fulfils the function of a methodical guide for non-expert use and can be useful in family physical activity for parents and children aimed at stimulating physical and mental development and basic self-defence competences. The methodological attractiveness is enhanced by films dedicated to joint fun forms of martial arts of minor children with a father with many years of wrestling experience (Figure 2). The promotion of neo-gladiatorism, commonly seen in the electronic media, prompts reflection on the professional competences of future personal trainers [28]. The idea of “innovative self-defence” will gain in importance [33]. Among other things, such competences should be expected from personal trainers of the future.

CONCLUSIONS

In a historical sense, it is precisely wrestling that is the first combat sport to accumulate the most important of the recommended health advantages and offers, in a utilitarian sense, gentle and relatively mild ways of restraining the movements of an opponent (including a potential aggressor), thus also fulfilling the criteria of ‘honourable self-defence’. Today, however, it is the multifaceted promotion of martial arts and sports as a means of achieving self-defence that is dedicated particularly to those of Asian origin.

Wrestling training in ancient Greece was pragmatic and utilitarian in nature. The main place for wrestling training in the Greek education system was the Palestras. Although the name Palestra means ‘to wrestle’ it had three main functions: a training place for combat sports such as wrestling and boxing, a place for cultic activities and a place for debating, philosophical meetings. It was these lines of perception that trained the body and spirit. This idea was further supported by the doctrine of moderation as a way of thinking leading to ethical perfection, perfection of character.

Wrestling – as a gentle form of combat that is also a form of self-defence – is a good way of exerting influence on a potential aggressor without the need for harsh countermeasures. The fact that the rules of this Olympic sport forbid the use of all types of strikes (as opposed to such sports as boxing, kick-boxing or karate) or the use of joint locks (as in judo or aikido) means that classes modelled on wrestling can, and should, be introduced as early as at primary school level.

By using the fun elements of wrestling duels during physical education classes, teachers still have a widely untapped educational opportunity. However, achieving such an effect is only possible if teachers also introduce the principles of fair and noble combat, respect for the moral code, and these are the basic canons of innovative agonology.

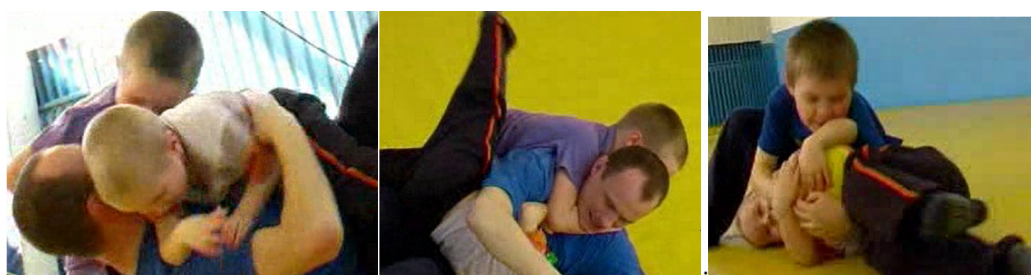


Figure 2. Author during safe fun forms of martial arts with children, which, among other things, prepare them for defensive combat in a horizontal stance by teaching them to use gentle ways of chalking up their opponent’s movements [32].

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