



“COMBATIVES”

WHICH CAGE DO YOU FIGHT IN?

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I would like to address an assumption or core principle that is gaining popularity. That is using the idea that using the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), Octagon, K1, so called “no-holds barred” competitions as a measuring stick for “Combatives” in Law Enforcement and/or Military work is useful.

With the exception of the never-ending debate of sighted fire, versus other types of fire, combatives in general seems to draw the most fire in terms of passionate reactions from those that have an opinion on the topic one way or another. I do not mind stirring up the pot, so here we go....

It seems to me, that it would be difficult at best to fully prepare for the ring and be fully prepared for armed confrontations in the modern environment as there are many, many skill sets that need to be honed for armed combat.

To lay the Foundation:

- I have little interest in unarmed, self-defense, personal self-improvement, or personal self-enlightenment work
- I have little interest in sport applications where there are a plethora of rules
- I have little interest in sport applications where there is only one adversary
- I have little interest in sport applications where opponents are unarmed



Do I get excited or an adrenaline rush just watching a UFC type event with good competitors? Absolutely. These guys are awesome!

Would I want to meet any of these guys in a dark alley without some additional toys? No way!

What highly interests me is professional work where I and/or my teammates are armed and where individuals and teams face multiple adversaries that may or may not be armed. To compound the problem, there is an overarching constraint. The appropriate level of force must be applied within any particular set of rules of engagement. For instance, it is a whole lot easier to hit somebody in the back of the head with a baseball bat to get them to sit down (works pretty well most of the time) after they spit on me, but most law enforcement departments would generally frown on this as an appropriate response to the offender. I doubt a military commander would accept the solution as a viable one for his peacekeeping forces.

Taking them to the ground with a committed double leg takedown, mounting them, slapping/punching them in the face until an arm appears so that one could throw an arm bar on them to dislocate the elbow is probably not the soundest doctrine either. Try that with full kit on, needlessly exposing some of your secondary and tertiary weapons in the process to the individual you are dealing with or his friends. Not to mention a good face stomp or knife attack from his buddies as well.

So what do we look for?

Look for an approach that fundamentally keeps several things in mind.

1. **We operate with weapons (lethal and non-lethal) and equipment loadout**

The more stuff you strap on your body, the better you need to be. It is referred to as Hick's Law. More decisions means greater decision-making time (something you generally do not have too much of). If you pick the "wrong" tool, you could face civil and criminal liabilities after winning the initial encounter. I was on the border tracking down drug smugglers with a team of Border Patrol Agents. One guy was traveling very light in terms of less-lethal options. He did not want to have the mental baggage of going through the mental Rolodex of options under duress.

Additionally, many techniques that work well in the comfort of the mat room are completely untenable when you factor in the actual environment you are working in and the equipment you are wearing.

2. **You are in a multiple adversary environment**

Think back to your academy days, even most of your "advanced" training. How much of that "defensive tactics" time was spent dealing with multiple adversaries. Or like most folks that I interact with, the time spent was virtually nil. Contrast that with your actual street encounters where you are regularly facing multiple potential threats on any given day. Ask yourself the question; do I have the strategy, the principles and the technical expertise to address this reality? When is the last time you specifically addressed this in training?

3. **Your adversaries may be armed**

I have the privilege of interacting with a wide cross-section of street officers. One in particular was telling me about their "customers". They did a formalized study on how many edged weapons per capita were in the environment they regularly stepped into while part of a street crime suppression crew. Bottom line, in virtually every encounter, there was an edged weapon in the direct control of somebody within 20'.

4. **Your adversaries could care less about force continuums (rules)**

Hopefully this should be self-evident. Although I am afraid that many people just don't get it. The brutality of somebody who simply does not care escapes them. I am not referring to the ones who are diligently training, but the ones that are cruising on the job playing the odds.

5. **The principles in your combatives program should mirror and apply to confrontations other than "hands-on" situations**

We call this continuity of principle. For example: The best ground grapplers in the world are calm and relatively relaxed. The best snipers in the world are calm and relatively relaxed. The best racecar drivers are calm and relatively relaxed. The best combat pistol shooters in the world are calm and relatively relaxed. In a verbal joust...remain relatively calm and relaxed...There is a theme here. Why do some folks that teach combatives encourage stiff, ballistic movements and hyper aggressive mind-sets when all these other ranges require a different approach/human operating system to function at an optimal level?

Pretty simple huh? Yet when I boil down many approaches, they are in conflict with one more of the ideas listed above. It turns out; when these requirements are combined, you need a sound strategic approach to cover the bases.

Physical Conflict Resolution (PCR)

This is what I consider a politically correct phrase for those that are armed must do with non-compliant individuals they encounter that they currently cannot shoot to gain compliance.

It is not defensive in nature (i.e. defensive tactics) when you tell somebody to get down on the ground and they elect not to do so. You must step across the gap and make them do what you need them to do in an efficient manner. Struggling with an actively defensive or actively combative person on the ground when trying to put on handcuffs is not defensive in nature. Nor is wading through a crowd of panicked people in an active-shooter situation.

The skills needed to prevail in hands-on encounters should not be encased in the idea of offensive or defensive in terms of categories. You simply must move in a manner consistent to any given situation. You must be able to justify your actions following the encounters.

Any individual delivering instruction in this area is going to be regularly challenged by those that disagree with the approach in general. They have variety of motivations for doing so.

1. A previous framework / experience base that conflicts with the one being presented
2. Legitimate concerns, objections, questions
3. Ignorance or lack of understanding because of mental or physical laziness
4. Protection of existing turf or established namesake
5. Ego and Pride

I have tremendous respect for the first two, little tolerance for the rest.

Ego is a powerful inhibitor to truly gaining new insights to problems faced by those that really go in harms way. I know from firsthand experience how much my own ego thwarted my own personal development. Things that I regularly do now were some of the things that were previously ridiculed by myself. It is my personal observation that humans that have insecurity, end up trash-talking others. It is a manifestation of their personal shortcomings. They are wrestling with their own demons so to speak. Anybody who is a trainer either responds in kind or accepts this as the cost of doing business. Learning to take legitimate criticism is part of the job description and should lead you to refinement not bitterness and rancor.

I train others, knowing that X amount of folks will simply dislike, discount, and disagree with what we do. No matter what we present, somebody is going to have a problem with it. Understood loud and clear!

Verification is always a Good Thing!

We regularly deal with folks that go into harms way and have done so for over 25 years. (SpecOps, SWAT, patrol etc). This constant interaction has shown us the error of our ways on more than one occasion.

Unlike the sport cage fighter, these people cannot choose the environment that the fight will take place in or when it will happen so they have a vested interest in making sure the concepts being presented to them will stand up when it is crunch time. So they want to test it a bit during training and we encourage it as long as they are willing to accept the commensurate pain consequences that comes from defending oneself.

I regularly have X amount of these folks unsuccessfully attempt to take my weapons away from me at speed during demonstrations and teaching sessions even after it is presented to them in manner inconsistent with the best weapon retention protocols. In others words, I “give” it to them. Many of the people we interact with have extensive martial arts backgrounds and MMA experience. They are surprised I am not “fighting” them in the traditional sense. When we apply one of our principles, that is “don’t be too selfish”, all kinds of easy to exploit opportunities become manifest.

Many of our PCR courses are held in the Iowa/Nebraska area where there is a wealth of serious wrestling experience. Folks that are strong, balanced, and present excellent takedown skills.

That being said, it does not matter what I can do. It matters what THEY (people who train with us) can do following the training sessions. We are coaches not players in this regard.

We regularly teach a wide variety of people with varying degrees of experience to employ critical skills in order to maintain control of their own weapons, which in my book is of paramount concern. Quite a few of the clients we serve have been in gunfights and know B.S. when they see it. If we cannot provide them a reasonable and repeatable set of solutions, then our approach is relegated to the useless pile. So far, this has not been the case. That being said, we are constantly adapting to the requirements of these individuals.

We regularly get phone calls, emails and video from officers and soldiers who have used the PCR approach on the street and in combat. (You can categorize their opponents as the resisting kind) The people we serve are not world-champions. They are regular individuals whose life was threatened and prevailed in their encounters.

We also regularly have a small percentage of people that simply do not like the approach. Those who are well skilled in alternative approaches often react stronger in the positive or the negative direction. That is what the makes the world go around. There are plenty of programs to immerse oneself into, many of them quite excellent. Every personality, body type and experience level is different and we recognize that.

I like to say there are several parallel universes out there in terms of approach and effectiveness. Find one and study. Work and refine your personal skillset.



But there is a cry out there that goes something like this:

“If it doesn’t Work in the Cage, I don’t want to Hear about it!”

Fair enough. However let us look at the “cages” themselves.

From my limited viewpoint, sport cage fighting is a challenging endeavor. It takes discipline, courage, specific conditioning routines, dedication, and heart. It takes a willingness to reform and rethink your approach as required. Strategies and techniques for this type of encounter have improved dramatically over the years that I have observed it. It is awesome to see the transformation based on lessons learned. A test in this cage results in a winner and loser usually patting each other on the back saying “good fight” based on mutual respect. If not, they pass on their verbal jabs and leave it at that.



The cage is known quantity with clearly defined rules of engagement. Therefore specialized training routines, strategies, techniques are developed and deployed with varying degrees of success. In fact in many cases, you can specifically study/train for a particular opponent. If you lose, you get to prepare for the next individual. No big deal in the grand scheme of things.

Those that prevail in sport cage do so under the following conditions:

- One opponent (usually pre-defined)
- Fighters are generally injury free in terms of major function
- Pre-defined time of engagement
- Warm-up period of time
- Normally a pre-defined time limit for the fight itself
- There is a referee
- Oftentimes outside judges are employed to determine winners
- Gloves to prevent serious injury to that one opponent
- If a serious injury is incurred, fights are stopped by any number of people and immediate medical attention is given
- Minimal Clothing
- Well-lit conditions
- No weapons
- A relatively safe environment in terms of glass, concrete, sharp metal protrusions, moving vehicles, holes, wires, etc. etc.
- Glory or money to the individual winner

The “cage” that Law Enforcement and Military Personnel find themselves includes but not limited to:

- Multiple potential threats and adversaries as well as other friendly forces
- Sudden encounters that take place with little or no warning
- Therefore no warm-ups to the engagement
- No referees
- Officers will be judged often long after a violent encounter by folks that may or may not have been involved in the actual engagement in light of stringent policies and procedures. Therefore they cannot “unload” with everything they have. They must employ the appropriate level of force.
- Opponents do not wear safety equipment or minimize damage to the personnel in question
- Personnel can be wearing up to 80 lbs of additional equipment
- If you receive a serious or life-threatening injury to yourself in a deadly force encounter..... Too bad, you better keep going
- Most felonious deaths occur during low-light conditions
- The environment itself is highly diverse and often geographically threatening (heights, hard surfaces, sharp objects, biting animals, booby traps, etc)

Weapons galore including:

- Knives, swords, arrows, sticks, rifles, sub-guns, pistols, grenades, explosives, gas, armor, shields, helmets, boots, improvised weapons (bricks, bottles, fire, flammable liquids, acid and other chemicals)
- No particular glory or extra pay for winning.

Strategies and techniques for these encounters are not even in the same strata as sport cage fighting.

Drawing a direct line between them is highly problematic. If one cannot appreciate this, then I believe one needs to reevaluate and revisit their overall perspective of personal confrontation with respect to armed combat.

Let's put this in perspective:

Ken Good challenges *Fill in the blank* cage fighter, to a sport cage fight. I will call him Mr. X. Mr. X immediately commences to kicking Ken's ass in this fun-filled encounter. Great, Mr. X is undoubtedly proven a fantastic unarmed practitioner. Give Mr. X the praise and glory due him. Ken goes home licking his wounds and his pride. The world should rightly conclude that Ken is an idiot for playing this type of game with Mr. X as Ken is clearly not prepared or adequately trains for its realities.

After the encounter, the world then goes to Mr. X's website.

What do they initially see?

- A website named after himself and essentially glorifying an individual and his achievements or who he trained with. As so goes the saying, "There is no "I" in team".
- Guys wearing gloves and sport based clothing, competing in sport-based activities
- Logo with somebody kicking over his head or in some type of cool submission/finishing hold.

If you desire to enter and compete in the ring, this might be a great place to start.

Mr. X feeling pretty good about himself now elects to attack Ken when Ken is wearing what he wears in his "cage". Mr. X ends up eating the muzzle of Ken's M4 carbine and his now dislodged teeth followed shortly thereafter by multiple high-speed projectiles from Ken's partners along with 7" knife buried in and about his torso in various locations.

Mr. X was clearly misguided for believing his sport/self-defense experience had anything to do with the realities of actual armed combat in a team-based situation. Test over in less than 2 seconds.

I normally have weapons on my person at all times to deal with stronger, faster, younger, committed individuals. I plan on continuing to train to deploy them in the most efficient manner possible.

I constantly hear the mantra of "try what you do against resisting opponents". A real "test" in our "cage" results in the death or serious bodily harm of one or more persons. Combatants generally do not pat each other on the back asking for a rematch when it is over.

- A. The person complies verbally with what we want them to do.
- B. The person is forced through a variety of methodologies to comply
- C. The person resists X amount, Y amount of counter is applied. If X is a serious amount of offensive movements, the resistor is normally hospitalized or pronounced dead on the scene.

Therefore all training for these actual encounters is merely a shadow or facsimile of any given deadly force encounter. Drills\training methodologies and testing criteria reflect this.

In juxtaposition, sport cage fighting is NOT designed to be deadly force encounter per se, therefore training methodologies and testing criteria reflect this.

As much as I would like to test my theories (believe me I am willing), the constraints of this society do not currently allow me to test my theories on Mr. X on a regular basis.

In conclusion, MMA does not in any way, shape or form represent the totality of what the modern soldier/officer faces in the real world. In fact in some cases it can prove to be detrimental. Choosing to quickly close the gap, effecting a take down, putting someone in the guard, and attempting to submit is fantastic until somebody in the dark pulls a knife (the individual you are dealing with or his buddies) and starts carving your legs and kidneys up like sushi.

In the sport-cage, generally strength and speed based with approaches are advocated and prove to be optimal. The competing population is relatively young. Younger people can take and deliver the punishment required for this type of activity.

I do have news though. I sincerely believe, young or old, the optimal approach in a multiple adversary, weapons-based, deadly force environment is not one that advocates strength per se or standing your ground in X amount of space and "taking it". As a very experienced Viet Nam veteran point man once told me, "I don't give a fuck who you are, when those bullets are in the air they are fucking King!"

Those successful in the cage are not necessarily qualified to speak on matters they have little practical experience such as team tactics, use of force policies, rules of engagement, civil and criminal liability issues, standard operating procedures, equipment selection, communication issues, threat assessment, threat prioritization, and the list goes on. Within this larger sphere of skills, "counter-measures" are encased.