

MMAWW–An Abbreviation of ‘Martial Arts Without Weapons’ as an Attractive Incentive to Intensify the Promotion of Neogladiatorism

Michał Kruszewski

Jozef Pilsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw, Poland

ABSTRACT

Simply prefixing this name with the word ‘mixed’ (abbreviation: MMAWW) gives promoters of bloody hand-to-hand combat spectacles a new opportunity to dominate the social space with the message that the centuries-old tradition of martial arts in numerous cultures is nothing more than an attractive spectacle. The aim of this work is to present arguments supporting this pessimistic outlook versus the optimistic alternative. Already today, the dominance of such a message in a sense exposes scholars and educators who provide evidence of the multidimensional health and utilitarian benefits of a significant part of the movement forms of almost every more or less coherent hand-to-hand combat system to ridicule. Therefore, the position of the editorial board of the journal ‘Archives of Budo: Journal of Innovative Agonology’, as well as the Scientific Advisory Board AHFE of the ConferenceTrack ‘Preventive Medicine and Innovative Agonology’, sounds alarmist: with the current low public awareness of the health and humanistic potential of prudent hand-to-hand combat practice, science may lose its real influence in compensating for the pathology of neogladiatorism. The optimistic aspect is linked to the need for interdisciplinary research teams to address this issue in cooperation with prestigious entities and institutions with the greatest social influence. A key competence is proficiency in the use of complementary research methodology as the number of indexed publications whose authors raise issues of hand-to-hand combat in terms of health and survival is significantly lower than the number of works dedicated to medicine, the latest technologies and other fashionable areas of exploration. Two innovative reviews of scientific publications – review of residuals and omitted implications – deserve even more attention.

Keywords: Combat sports, Complementary research methodology, Mental health, Social health

INTRODUCTION

The term ‘martial arts’ itself is neither euphemism nor hyperbole. Widely available sources indicate that the term ‘martial arts’ has been used in Western literature since the 16th century, and today it is mainly associated with Asian hand-to-hand combat. A similar period corresponds to the implementation of terms euphemism (in the mid-17th century) and hyperbole (early 16th century) (Kotarska, 2023; Kazakbaeva, 2024) in Western literature. Etymology ‘euphemism’ and ‘hyperbole’ was used by the ancient Greeks:

‘euphemism’ with the meaning ‘to keep a holy silence’ (speaking well by not speaking at all); ‘hyperbole’ (derived from the Greek word ‘hyperbol’, meaning ‘exaggeration’). ‘Hyperbole manifests in various forms in literature, ranging from extravagant comparisons and embellished descriptions to overstatements and amplifications of reality’ (Kazakbaeva, 2024, p. 663).

It is only through certain word combinations that martial arts becomes a convenient euphemism. After all, ‘mixed martial arts’ (MMA) is an effective, and in a sense even elegant, camouflage for neogladiatorism. Paradoxically, the edict of Emperor Constantine the Great from 396 banning gladiatorial games was not formally revoked. The paradox is all the more striking for two reasons. Firstly, the procedure of banning the gladiatorial games, lasted for more than 350 years – until 681 (Grant, 1967). Secondly, due to the widespread availability of the Internet, the practice of bloody spectacles of people slaughtering each other in cages or in the ring will not be eradicated from the public sphere. Therefore, it is impossible to repeat the effect of eradicating the pathology of gladiatorism. And if this is the case, then today the dominance of such a message will expose scholars and educators who provide evidence of the multidimensional health and utilitarian benefits of a significant part of the movement forms of almost every more or less coherent system of hand-to-hand combat without weapons to ridicule.

The aim of this paper is to present arguments supporting this pessimistic outlook as opposed to the optimistic alternative.

Pessimistic Perspective

Even if today the term ‘martial arts’ is mainly associated with Asian hand-to-hand combat, this has little significance for influential arrangers of the phenomenon of newspeak. The appearance in scientific publications of a precise distinction between ‘hand-to-hand combat without weapons’ (Kruszewski M, 2025b) can easily be replaced with the euphemism ‘mixed martial arts without weapons’ (abbreviation: MMAWW). One does not need to be a researcher of hand-to-hand combat at the intersection of social psychology, philosophy, linguistics, political science, sociology and other specific sciences to notice that the centuries-old tradition of martial arts in numerous cultures is being reduced solely to an attractive spectacle.

A symbolic example of a pessimistic perspective is the event described by Michael Grant (1967), assuming that the story is true. A monk from Asia Minor, Telemachus (also known as Saint Almachius), threw himself into the arena to separate fighting gladiators, but was torn to pieces by the enraged crowd. Combining this event with, for example, the history of censorship of the 1953 novel ‘Fahrenheit 451’ by Ray Bradbury (Karolides et al., 1999) highlights the cyclical nature of extreme forms of destruction of interpersonal relationships. Depending on certain external circumstances, only the forms and proportions of the eliminated objects change. Internally and invariably for millennia, many people have been concerned with ensuring their comfort, at least in watching bloody, violent spectacles. In the middle of the last century, as Bradbury showed (probably remembering the burning in German universities in 1933, of works associated with Jewish thought, and in 1938,

during Kristallnacht), he presented the book as an enemy due to the fact that it is a carrier of knowledge that is uncomfortable for, among others, the arrangers and recipients of these spectacles (Kruszewski and Krzemieniecki, 2024). Perhaps the argument should be reversed – there is no shortage of arrangers due to the growing demand.

Therefore, since it is difficult to question the thesis of the indestructibility of the Internet, the position of the editorial board of the journal ‘Archives of Budo: Journal of Innovative Agonology’, as well as the Scientific Advisory Board AHFE of the Conference Track ‘Preventive Medicine and Innovative Agonology’, sounds alarmist: with the current low public awareness of the health and humanistic potential of prudent hand-to-hand combat practice, science may lose its real influence in compensating for the pathology of neogladiatorialism.

Optimistic Perspective

If we assume that the social mission of science will not be devalued, which means that its freedom will be guaranteed by a universally accepted social contract, then there is no reason to cease research and publication of knowledge about the humanistic, health and utilitarian values of competent hand-to-hand combat practice (Kruszewski, 2023). The issue is important because, on the one hand, it is necessary to work on clarifying the legal criteria for necessary defence, and on the other hand, to improve methods of compensating for the shortcomings of self-defence education based on hand-to-hand combat systems. The point is that in situations of extreme danger, the possibility of using verbal-motor self-defence aids should not be an opportunity for possible abuse (Kruszewski 2025b). This possibility is becoming increasingly real, as technological progress favours the production of means of incapacitating people (electric stun guns, gas sprayers, etc.). Since the media space is saturated with the neogladiator games criticised here (called sportsmen, which is a euphemism), the wide range of technical means available for self-defence is a factor discouraging training in hand-to-hand combat.

What is the Optimistic Aspect of This?

It is precisely the role of science to popularise, in the simplest possible way, knowledge about the dilemmas of self-defence. It seems that information about the motor dimension of self-defence is the most widespread. Meanwhile, the book ‘Logical Self-Defense’ (Jonson and Blair, 2006) is an example of the intellectual dimension of the phenomenon, which without the support of science in a complementary sense would mean social acceptance of the dictates of violence (figuratively speaking, after all, there is no such thing as ‘violence’ but its perpetrators, i.e. specific people) in all its possible dimensions.

Perhaps an even more important optimistic argument is the discovery by Artur Kruszewski and Bartłomiej Gašienica-Walczak (2023) of the popularity of the term ‘self-defence’ in scientific publications dedicated from 1902

to March 2023 to phenomena even extremely distant from hand-to-hand combat. Ultimately, it is not about popularity, but about the practice of using key terms in the science of combat/agonology (Kalina, 2015, 2016; Kalina and Kruszewski, 2023) – especially ‘fight’ or its synonyms, but, as it turns out, also ‘self-defence’ by researchers who deal with overcoming various threats (Kalina, 2016, 2020; Kalina and Bagińska, 2023).

Awareness of these trends is therefore an opportunity to pay closer attention to the methodological recommendations of authors writing on issues ranging from micro to macro scale. For example, the rule of controlled environment in unarmed combat formulated by Jarosław Rudniański (1983, 1989) has universal application from micro to macro scale. The specificity of self-defence at the micro level is also distinguished by the fact that an expert who opposes an armed aggressor in certain circumstances is able to defend himself and others without using any weapons or other objects (the case of self-defence without weapons). This is no longer a simple effect of respecting the rule of a controlled environment, but the result of subordinating one’s own trained motor actions to this rule, with mental self-control skills equally shaped by practice. Such an analogy would be absurd even in theoretical considerations of defending peace on a macro scale. It is difficult to imagine a lack of retaliation in circumstances where one of the parties (even if both were coalitions of several states) used nuclear warheads against the other.

This conclusion does not undermine the legitimacy of including hand-to-hand combat training in the education of potential leaders in every society, provided that the highest ethical, humanistic and health standards are respected. The results of test fights or tournaments are not the most important issue (but they are not secondary either). Competently implemented education based on elements of hand-to-hand combat should provide information about different categories of human behaviour in different circumstances: a) defeating a competitor with similar characteristics, as well as when the differences between them in terms of intellectual, somatic, motor potential, etc. are either positive or negative; b) losing to a competitor with similar characteristics, as well as when the differences in these potentials are either positive or negative. An important criterion for teacher competence is to ensure that each student has the right proportion of rivals based on the above criteria of similarities and interpersonal differences.

This argument should make it clear that recommendations by prominent athletes for important leadership positions in various social structures can be overly hasty. However, most of the main objectives of propaedeutics of combat sports are worthy of deeper reflection: ability of falling in a safe way to protect the body during falls and collisions with vertical obstacles, as well as during direct fight implemented with criteria of sport type judo, or self-defence based on relatively soft means (which among others means throws applied in judo, sambo, wrestling); ability of providing security of a falling body specially thrown off balance; feeling of self-confidence in situations of sudden loss of balance or necessity of counteracting to criminals in defence of oneself or other endangered persons; learning respect the body of one’s own and of other people, as well as soft methods of immobilisation of opponent’s body; development of self-control in situations of social approval for

application of physical force in relation to others; making the body resistant to various forms of physical pressure (including blows) (Kalina et al., 2023).

In the context of the objectives of propaedeutics of combat sports as formulated above, secondary analyses of available promotional works (most of which have not yet been published) based on experiments with variously compiled testing fights in a vertical posture – TFVP (Kalina et al., 2015, 2016; Nedomagała, 2016; Kruszewski, 2025a, 2025b). If these analyses are combined with the results of innovative reviews complementary research methodology (review of residuals and omitted implications), a new area of cognitive and application possibilities emerges for specific issues of the multi-threaded phenomenon of hand-to-hand combat (Kalina, 2024, 2025a, 2025b). Unfortunately, this phenomenon, which is attractive in many respects, is the subject of numerous manipulations burdened with extreme pathology, adroitly camouflaged, among other things, by the euphemism MMA.

CONCLUSION

The key competence of entities capable of compensating for the negative effects of promoting neo-gladiatorial combat is proficiency in the use of complementary research methodology, as the number of indexed publications whose authors raise issues of hand-to-hand combat in terms of health and survival is significantly lower than the number of works dedicated to medicine, the latest technologies and other fashionable areas of exploration. Two innovative reviews of scientific publications – review of residuals and omitted implications – deserve even more attention.

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