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MORE SECRETS OF THE



Mention the term “Russian martial arts,” and it will probably conjure up images of bloody hand-to-hand battles between Russian soldiers and their adversaries throughout Eastern Europe and the western Asian steppe. But if you envision only ruthless warriors vanquishing their foes through treachery and brutality, you need to take a closer look at ROSS, the modern-day training system that embodies all the advanced self-defense secrets of those warriors of the past—and then some.

Scott Sonnon, America’s head trainer for Rossijskaya Otechestvennaya Sistema Samozashchity (or “Russian native system of self-defense”),

7 UNIVERSAL FIGHTING PRINCIPLES PROMISE BETTER SELF-DEFENSE FOR ALL STYLISTS

Instead of blocking, you should allow the attack to continue along its intended path. That causes the opponent to overextend himself, thus putting him in a vulnerable position. ROSS calls this action “creating a plane” adjacent to the attack.

Since the part of your body the opponent intended to strike “disappears” and the strike is allowed to continue uninterrupted, he cannot easily create a follow-up attack.

Continuous Motion

In combat, you should chain together variations of your art’s basic motions in such a way that the end of

RUSSIAN MARTIAL ARTS

says the Russian martial arts tradition has evolved steadily since the 10th century through constant usage in combat and exposure to various hostile cultures. It is currently contained within the ROSS training system, which Gen. Alexander Ivanovich Retuinskih founded in 1991 after decades of research into *sambo* and numerous ancient Slavic and Cossack martial traditions. Retuinskih combined his knowledge of those combative systems with the study of physiology, biomechanics, human behavior and combat psychology to create the ultimate in scientific self-defense and combat sport.

Students of the ROSS system must master the following seven principles of combat. The universal nature of

BY SHAWN MENARD

those principles ensures that no matter which art you practice, you too can use them to boost your fighting skill.

Creating a Plane

A popular martial arts maxim holds that you should strive to use your opponent’s strength against him. To do that most efficiently and safely, ROSS teaches you to avoid blocking his strikes because blocking requires you to meet his force with yours. If your force or speed is greater, you win; if his is, you lose.

one movement becomes the beginning of the next. You must follow that course of action until you have neutralized the threat.

To be able to do that smoothly, you need to train your body to continue its flow even when mistakes occur or when maneuvers fail to bring about the desired effect. The ROSS system helps you develop your ability to act “between” techniques. By learning how to problem-solve and improvise in training, you will be able to recognize all the new opportunities that pop up in battle instead of fixating on the ones that have passed.

Plasticity

If you’re like most martial artists,

RECENT EXPOSURE

If the Russian martial arts have existed since the 10th century, why is the West hearing about them only now? The answer is twofold: First, until quite recently the Russian people did not seek to expose outsiders to the attributes of their cultural heritage, especially those that involve self-defense skills.

Second, during the Stalinist era, Soviet isolationism was the norm. Ideas and resources could get in, but they seldom got out. The martial sport of *sambo* was one exception to the rule, and for many years it was all that Westerners knew of the Russian fighting arts. Now they are beginning to discover ROSS, which includes all that *sambo* is renowned for, and more.

In 1995 the Russian martial arts—in the form of ROSS—were brought to the United States by a world-class sambo player and national-level coach named Scott Sonnon. He is the first foreigner to be allowed to train in the once closely guarded system and the first non-Russian ever certified to teach the art. —S.M.



Scott Sonnon (left) is held at gunpoint (1). To avoid responding with a large movement, which might cause the attacker to shoot, Sonnon uses the “plasticity” of his shoulders to move them out of the line of fire, thus “creating a plane” of safety (2). Using continuous motion, he then entangles the attacker’s arms so he cannot re-aim the weapon (3). Next, Sonnon moves his leg so his attacker’s “triangle point” is exposed (4) and uses the same leg to sweep the other man’s leg (5). Stepping over the downed attacker’s head, the ROSS expert secures the weapon hand (6). Using the “side-side-hypotenuse” principle, Sonnon takes away the weapon (7), then uses it to strike the attacker’s head (8).

you don’t use your entire body efficiently—especially during times of stress. To correct that shortcoming, you must strive to utilize the full range of motion of each joint in your body so you can coordinate your limbs to maximize your power. In the end, you will have refined your movements until your reaction to an attack becomes effortless. This developmental process is called “plasticity” in ROSS because your goal is to make your body as supple and malleable as a soft plastic.

Once you are able to move your body just enough to avoid an attack, you can conserve energy. Furthermore, because you do not feel compelled to over-commit to your defense against

your opponent’s attack, you will not inadvertently put yourself in a vulnerable position. ROSS practitioners are firm believers in the old saying, “Missed by an inch, missed by a mile.”

Triangle Point

This principle is based on the ROSS

concept of the “flying center of gravity.” Your balance depends on the relationship between your solar (anatomical) plexus and your lunar plexus (known as the *tan tien* in the Chinese arts), and that determines your center of gravity. If your opponent were to stand in a fixed stance and you were to draw an imaginary line between his heels, you would find that his center of gravity would be positioned above it. As he moves during the fight, his center of gravity changes, which is why conventional throws can be difficult to execute. If you attempt to force a throw, you may find that he has already

When attacked with a training rifle and fixed bayonet, Scott Sonnon (right) “creates a plane” around the end of the weapon (1). He then uses the side of his knife to parry the attack (2) and cut the opponent’s fingers (3). Plasticity allows Sonnon to manipulate the knife around the opponent’s lead hand and employ the “side-side-hypotenuse” principle on his rear arm (4). Because the opponent’s balance is broken using the “triangle point” principle, Sonnon can fluidly switch directions and reposition the other man’s arms and weapon while using the barrel of the rifle to strike his head (5). Sonnon punches the opponent’s shoulder, thereby using shock engineering to begin a takedown. Continuous motion enables Sonnon to flow into a pulling action that moves the opponent toward the triangle point (6). Using the “question mark” principle, Sonnon transitions into an arm lock that drops the opponent (7). Once he’s on the ground, Sonnon immobilizes him with a shoulder lock (8).





changed his balance relationship.

However, if you were to draw another line from his two feet to a third corner of an imaginary isosceles triangle on the ground (the "triangle point") and you moved his center of gravity to that point, it would be impossible for him to remain standing.

ROSS teaches that four elements can help you exploit the triangle point:

locking arm, power-transfer arm, mobile leg and supporting leg. Locking arm refers to your action of pulling your opponent's body in one direction while your power-transfer arm applies a striking, pushing or dropping force in the opposite direction. This upper-body "coupling of force" manipulates his solar plexus to expose his flying center of gravity to the triangle point.

Mobile leg acts to sweep, reap, post, hook or trip your opponent in one direction, while the supporting leg simultaneously acts as your base to drive or pivot in the opposite direction. This lower-body coupling of force manipulates his lunar plexus to expose his flying center of gravity to the triangle point. Taken together, these four elements make it impossible for him to

A LESSON FROM THE FOUNDER

The gray light of a St. Petersburg, Russia, afternoon spills through the windows of the training hall, cutting long rectangles across the marble floor. Some men sit in a loose circle at the center of the room. They listen intently, their perspiration soaking their *kurtka* grappling jackets and camouflaged training uniforms. Their attention is focused on a stalwart man in his late 40s.

The powerfully built warrior is discussing the finer points of using a knife to overcome a bayonet-wielding attacker. He summons an assistant from the group. A wiry young commando hops to his feet and grabs a replica of an AK-47 rifle replete with a training bayonet. He lunges for the instructor's exposed abdomen, but the older man moves with surprising grace. Flowing like water over rocks, he evades the blade, then with all the power of a wave crashing into the beach, he strips away the gun. Washing over his opponent, his knife seemingly everywhere at once, he attacks the hands, the throat and the kidneys, and effortlessly reduces his attacker to a ruined heap. He turns to his audience, his face bearing a broad, friendly grin. He lifts his hands and shrugs as if to say, "Nothing to it."

The man is Gen. Alexander Ivanovich Retuinskih, the founder of the ROSS training system.

—S.M.





The assailant (left) holds a knife to Scott Sonnon's neck (1). Sonnon's startle response conceals his weight transfer away from the line of attack, during which he raises his left hand to grab the assailant's knife hand (2). Using the "plasticity" of his spine, Sonnon rolls the assailant's wrist away from his neck and utilizes the "side-side-hypotenuse" principle to lift his elbow (3). Using continuous motion, Sonnon immediately chambers his arm (4) and unleashes his stored elastic energy into the assailant's chin (5). He then transitions into a joint manipulation that uses the residue of the strike to employ the "question mark" principle on the attacker's arm (6). Next, the ROSS expert wraps his arm under the assailant's arm and uses the side-side-hypotenuse principle to strip the knife from his hand (7). With the back of the knife as a lever, Sonnon applies pressure against the assailant's neck and holds him with a shoulder lock (8).

remain on his feet no matter how he moves.

Shock Engineering

Shock engineering refers to the use

of blows from your arms, legs, hips, shoulders or any other part of your body delivered in strategic succession to displace your opponent. The force of those blows enables you to manipu-

late his musculoskeletal structure and drive him to his triangle point, ultimately resulting in a takedown.

The distinction between grappling and striking begins to blur once you enter the realm of shock engineering. ROSS teaches that shock engineering is both yet neither. It is distinctly different from delivering strikes for the purpose of inflicting blunt trauma. You can't always knock your opponent out—nor is it always strategically effective to try to do so, such as in the case of multiple attackers. But you can at least knock him back, knock him into



an obstacle or knock him down.

Side-Side-Hypotenuse

The side-side-hypotenuse principle, which takes its name from the legs of a triangle, is particularly applicable to joint-manipulation methods, especially those directed at your opponent's wrist and fingers. To simplify matters, this article will discuss the principle as it applies to the wrist.

Pain in the joint does not normally occur until the angle between the hand and forearm is less than 90 degrees. The most painful configuration is in

the plane of a right triangle, with the right angle located at the wrist and the acute angle located at the elbow. The hypotenuse of the triangle is the line of power running from the fingertips or base of the fingers (depending on the position of the hand) to the elbow. Because it activates a lever rotating the wrist, it can be used as a joint lock or a lever for skeletal manipulation.

Question Mark

The name of this principle describes a movement pattern that resembles the shape of a question mark. It teaches you

to work in three directions, or planes, simultaneously. Imagine swinging a tennis ball on a rope above your head. When it is released, centrifugal force propels the ball along a tangent line. If viewed from above, the path resembles a question mark. However, if viewed from the side, it becomes apparent that there is also depth because gravity pulls the ball downward.

For instance, to effect a single-leg takedown, you might attempt to hyper-extend your opponent's knee and force him backward, but he might resist by

CONTINUED ON PAGE 118

RUSSIAN MARTIAL ARTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 71

bracing, sprawling or squatting. His body is designed to protect against this linear motion, which tries to cause dysfunction in his knee. However, if you rotate the knee away from his body along a circular path and then toward his triangle point (in the shape of a question mark), the more he resists, the faster his muscles will contract his body to the ground. The question-mark motion is a screwing motion that moves his joint (or entire body) in a circle away from his strength. Then, after his center of gravity is off-line, you can move him downward in a straight line toward the triangle point.

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This facilitates what in ROSS terminology is called “hyperfunction”: Rather than trying to work against the natural function of the body (dysfunction), you work with it, exploiting natural movement chains of the human physique and effecting takedowns without pain or injury.

You can use the question-mark principle when you are working with any of the major joints of your opponent's body and wish to disrupt his balance. And you can employ it while executing joint locks and immobilization techniques.

Conclusion

The seven combat principles of ROSS are not for beginners. They are designed to fine-tune the fighting ability you have built using the basic techniques of your art. Once you have mastered those basics and learned how to apply the wisdom of the warriors of Russia, you will find yourself standing head and shoulders above the rest. ✕

To read more about the ROSS training system, check out the September 2001 issue of Black Belt. To order, call (201) 559-0091.

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