

Back to Basics

(And I Don't Mean *Kihon Waza*)

In my last article, I advocated, “If you are as tired of political extremism as I am, just try to stay open-minded and vote with your own time and money, while trusting in the process. It will all work out...in a decade or two.” In a way, I was suggesting that we go back to what we have always fallen back on: the eventual wisdom of representative democracy and free enterprise. People’s tastes in martial arts go through popular phases that frustrate the traditionalist in us, but ultimately we would rather have a society in which people are free to choose what they *think* they like rather than one in which those who “know” what’s best choose for them. So if Percy McPitstop gives up his Stock Car addiction for the Down-and-dirty Academy of Martial No-nonsensenesshood rather than your traditional TKD school, tough noogie! Such is life. You didn’t need someone who’d rather learn modified head butting than kicking, anyway.

Of course, the rubber really meets the road when Percy is one of only seven inquiries who have even driven by, let alone walked into your school since Darrell Waltrip’s last birthday. You don’t have a decade or two to wait for your art to be popular again and you have a lease to pay. If you don’t, you’ll be teaching TKD in some pit or you’ll stop altogether. It is not surprising that you get very angry at how today’s wage- and salary-earner is spending his/her excess income. Your extreme emotions reinforce your extreme opinions and right now you are of the opinion that the Down-and-dirty Academy of Martial No-nonsensenesshood should be shut down for reasons of either unsafe martial practices (after all, sometimes their head butts actually make contact) or unfair business practices (i.e., they have more students than you and that doesn’t seem fair).

Percy McPitstop may be making an unhealthy choice for himself not giving a D.A.M.N. dollar to your dojang, but that is his problem, not yours. Yours is either getting dollars from more worthy prospects or spending fewer dollars on heat, advertising, rent, and maintenance. It seems to me that we traditional martial artists are starving in a cornucopia of fruit because either we’re allergic to pectin or, during these leaner times, there is less fruit flowing from the horn.

What did the Western pioneers of Asian martial arts do? They were introducing strange arts and practices into a society that would rather watch reruns of Warner Olin playing Charlie Chan or Christopher Lee playing Fu-Manchu than practice pajama-ed postures in a very honorable pseudo-military protocol. Those early instructors taught selected friends out of their garages, taught classes at the Y, or opened quiet schools in the not-so-seedy, but no-so-elegant sections of town. Of course, in those days, they had no competition. Today, even the seedy side of town has Ted’s TKD or a Teresa’s Tango Palace (with Tang Soo Do & cha-cha lessons on Tuesdays and Thursdays). What can we do for a twenty-first century version of getting ourselves re-established? It’s not business basics we need since a *budo* bloated with business is blotching out both the bad *budo* and the good. We need a back-to-basics without the emphasis on business, not because business is bad per se, but because it is not basic enough to help *budo* survive. Business sells what people want to buy. If they are

not in the market for grapes (also pronounced budo in Japanese), offering budo bunches for chump change will not send people to our dojo doors. We need to build a following slowly, allowing others of perhaps a dissident ilk to do the same. That means, like it or not, Aikido may have to share a dojo with Karate, and TKD may have to share a facility with dance, aerobics, and MMA. So what? Maybe it will bring us all together long enough to sort out the unpopular, emphasize the similarities, and give a shrinking market a greater choice. That's what happens in political primaries and, as long as our checkbooks balance, we do all right in the long run.

The downest part of the downside is that it will, I suspect, be a long run.

Next week, a different kind of back to basics.