

Getting to the point, Before it gets to you

By Ron Balicki
www.ronbalicki.com

"Knife self-defense is the hardest area for the martial arts instructor to look at honestly. In Knife fighting the odds can be at their worst, and the margin for error essentially non-existent. However, I have found that compositions of the right techniques from a variety of Filipino martial arts that I have studied can substantially push things towards your favor. If you are honest and diligent in your art, work different ranges, test different arts and drills, and train for every situation, you can significantly increase your chance for surviving a knife confrontation".

Have you ever honestly asked yourself, What you would do if confronted by a knife-wielding attacker? Should you grab something and defend yourself, run, or start begging for and pleading for your life? To be brutally honest, my first inclination is to run. In a knife fight there is near absolute certainty that you will be cut, and likely cut fatally. Why take the risk? Instructors, especially those who teach a wide variety of disarm techniques need to be honest with their students. Nothing could be worse than giving your student an inflated sense of self-confidence. There is no shame in running from a fight that you will almost certainly be seriously injured in.

Being a former law enforcement officer I have seen the bad side of knife confrontations more than I would like to remember. Defending yourself in a knife altercation should be your course of action only after escape is impossible and you can't seem to talk your way out of it. Given the danger, your students deserve at least this much honesty right from the start.

I believe an instructor should have a combative solution but I also feel the instructor owes the student an honest answer about the ramifications of a knife confrontation gone bad. Being a former law enforcement officer I have seen the bad side of knife confrontations all too often. This is why I say to my martial arts student that the odds are against you even with a strong knowledge of knife self-defense. To come out of a knife confrontation unscathed is highly unlikely. For this reason I think that you should train even harder. The odds are against you, but all hope is not lost, there is still a chance. That's the reason you need to train harder at knife self-defense. Anyone with a knife is at a monumental advantage over you. Although the odds are against you, wouldn't you still like to go out fighting? For a martial artist to be hurt or killed because they avoided this area of self-defense would be a shame.

For the martial artist who feels confident against the knife try this, put a rubber training knife in someone's hand and have a sparring session and see what happens with the techniques that you have been learning. I'll bet you get cut. Try this put on a fencing mask, a white t shirt and hand your training partner a marker and see if you can disarm the marker with out getting inked up. A marker is an excellent training tool. You can't argue with stab and slash ink marks all over you.

Many systems of the martial arts offer a small section of knife self-defense or none at all. Many instructors avoid the whole subject altogether. Worse yet, I have been in some classes where it is clear that the instructor is making up the defensive tactics as he goes along. This is a disaster waiting to happen! Never equip your students with untested opinions about the knife. Show what you know and end it there. Your unwillingness to show that there is something you don't know may lead to a situation where your student, brimming with unwarranted confidence, loses his or her life. This is too serious a matter ego and posturing. Your students deserve an honest assessment of your knowledge and limitations. This is why many instructors avoid the whole knife subject. It's very hard to go out in front of a class full of your students and get stuck on a tough "what if" question. I have been in some classes where I feel the instructor is clearly making up the defensive tactics as he goes along. Think of the ramifications that could go along with this. A student could go up against the knife and something horrible could go wrong. Although this could happen while attempting the proper techniques, but you will know that you have presented something that was formally taught to you in your martial art system. I think that you will be able to cope with it better than arming your student with your untested opinion on what you think might

work against the knife. My advice to the martial art instructor is to show what you know and end it there. What you teach might not be full proof, but interjecting what you think could work and possibly cost your student their life.

One of the other major advantages for both Kali and Lameco Eskrima is the emphasis on knife fighting at all ranges. In my experiences I have seen many who refuse to work certain ranges with the knife because they feel that they can avoid a range where they are at a disadvantage. This common mentality is patently unrealistic. Anyone can be caught at any range at any time. Those who feel that will never be forced to work close range with the knife are simply deceiving themselves. One may, for example, be falsely arrested and temporarily find oneself behind bars facing a "shank" (homemade knife) at close quarters. Similarly, a slippery or icy surface may force anyone to the ground in a knife confrontation. Can you honestly say you won't end up on the ground? I think the one with the best chance is the one who trains for all situations. Any range is possible at any time. That is why I prefer to work in the Filipino Systems, where all ranges are examined.

Another problem is, many knife system favour different ranges, some close others far. Just like a good football team you need to train your defense against a good running team as well as a good passing team. You should look at all areas (on the ground as well as standing up, left handed as well as right handed) an attacker can come from. Imagine getting cut by a left hander knowing you could have stood a chance if he had just held the knife in his right hand. If you currently train in a system that trains in one area of defense against the knife, I say stay with that system, but don't stop there. Find another system to compensate where that system lacks.

How do you know which system to train in? It's going to be different for each person. I have found tremendous success in the systems I teach. I have been studying the Filipino Martial Arts for 14 years under guro Dan Inosanto in the art of Kali and 8 years under The Late Punong Guro Edgar G. Sulite in the art of Lameco Eskrima. I have found both of these arts to have an amazing amount of wealth. They both have examined all ranges and have a very sophisticated training progression.

You as a martial artist must weigh what you are doing and see if it has value to you. There are many techniques and training drills that I have seen. At first glance I thought that many had no merit until I researched further. What looks pretty at first is not always functional. Just as what does not look aesthetic is sometimes functional. Beauty is sometimes in the eye of the beholder. Any knowledge learned is power and I believe that any martial art has something to offer you. I also believe that no martial art has the total answer to every problem. What you the reader has to do is take an honest look at what you are training and think honestly, can I execute this technique successfully. For this reason is why other martial artist's and I should continue to investigate more efficient ways to protect ourselves as well as our loved ones.