

Filipino Martial Arts and Physical Fitness

By: Lakan Guro Rene L. Castro

Global Executive Secretary of the World BaisTresManos/Kali's Silat Kun-Tao FMA Heritage Network



To practice Filipino martial arts, as in any other martial arts, one must demonstrate control and self-awareness of one's own mental and physical state. While both the mind and body equally contribute to the successful practice of Filipino Martial Arts, this article aims to outline the physical aspect of this unique and ancient form of self-defense.

When engaging in combat, Filipino martial arts recognizes three basic tactical ranges - close, medium, and long. Each style varies in terms of physical demands required from the body. For instance, the close combat range requires quick short movements keeping extremities close to the body whereas long range requires full extension of all extremities promoting flexibility of muscles and full mobility of joints.

The use of weapons is another cornerstone in the practice of Filipino martial arts. Such weapons include the use of various knives and fighting sticks. The proper manipulation of such weapons requires a sense of fine motor control and dexterity. Traditional weaponry varies in terms of size, weight and design so one must learn to accommodate to such nuances. The physical training in weaponry helps to develop strength in all the muscle groups of the upper extremities to manipulate such devices.

The various breathing techniques involved with warm-up meditations not only ease the mind but it also trains the cardio-pulmonary system. Proper breathing methods can nourish organs, supply oxygen for muscle function and also calm the mind. Having a healthy heart and lung system provides the foundation for the practice of Filipino Martial Arts.

Balance plays another essential role in all physical aspects of Filipino martial arts – from slow warm up movements to quick sparring sessions. Balance reactions require full body control and engage the ankles, hips, and core musculature. This sense of balance is crucial as it provides the foundation and stability upon which various combat sequences are performed.

Another fundamental aspect of Filipino martial arts training is agility. Filipino footwork patterns require a certain level of lightness on one's feet and a good sense of body awareness. Practicing the various footwork sequences trains individuals to become quick when it comes to evading danger or confronting it head on when the situation arises.

Along the same lines as agility comes the concept of pace. When practicing various warm-up meditations and sequences at a slow pace, an individual develops muscle strength and control by performing movements deliberately and accurately regulating body form. On the other hand, while practicing combat sequences fast, an individual develops explosive power when disengaging enemies.

Physical strength is yet another aspect in the art of Filipino self-defense. While brute force is not the sole determinant of success in combat, it does contribute to the effectiveness and impact of any strike applied to one's enemy. Filipino martial arts

training teaches efficiency of battle and promotes the least amount of time spent in physical combat as possible. Higher levels of physical strength can certainly improve the efficiency and limit the need for prolonged battle by more effectively taking out the enemy.

Agility, strength, balance, pace, fine and gross motor control, and cardiovascular regulation are all critical components of physical fitness. Filipino martial arts combines all of these elements in a method founded upon ancient principles to successfully overcome combat in modern times.

One important aspect also is, while I am developing and improving my physical being in practicing Filipino martial arts, it gives me the privilege and gratitude to honor all the practitioners of Filipino martial arts who developed, shared and taught the Art to those who appreciate it. PUGAY!!!