



Wing Chun Vs Mixed Martial Arts & Thai Boxing???

By SiFu Alfredo Del-Brocco 24/10/08

I often get asked this question from new students & while I may be biased from my own opinion & experience, I will endeavor to look at both sides of the perspective & ask the reader to logically use their own understanding to deduce the facts that I will present in order to view this, in my opinion, mute argument. While the argument may be mute, I hope to still present a compelling analogy from both perspectives.

Firstly, we are talking Self-defense training Vs Competition or Sport training. Apples to Oranges. While a competition fighter has the luxury to prepare himself / herself for an event 4, 6, 8 or 12 weeks out from a specific date & time, & in the case of an Olympic athlete, up to 4 years or more out from a specific event, place & time, a self-defense exponent is preparing himself / herself for an event that may never eventuate any time, any place or anywhere.

This then becomes the immediate difference in the type of training and the intensity of training from both analogies.

Having trained in boxing & Thai boxing based schools & having the privilege, as a coach, to prepare fighters for a specific time, date, place & event, it becomes immediately apparent that in competition preparation, a competitor will train at a moderately medium to high intensity, maintaining his / her aerobic & anaerobic fitness levels while also honing the strikes & combinations that will be limited to the rules & regulations of that event. The competition fighter will also know that he will be pitting his fitness & skill level against another competitor of the same or similar fitness & skill level. By this I mean a Thai Boxer trains to fight another Thai Boxer, a MMA exponent trains to fight another MMA exponent, a boxer trains to fight another boxer. Rarely do competition style or MMA fighters empathize with another form of training & try to evaluate it's strengths & or weaknesses.

While also having trained, & continuing to train & coach students from a self-defense perspective, the immediate 'dilemma', for want of a better word, is covering all the hypothetical, scenarios & probabilities that could or could not unfold in a street fight. Things like one-on-one or two, three or more opponents. The clothing & footwear of both the defender & the attacker(s). The immediate 'environmental' location, time & place of the hypothetical scenario including the lighting, surface & obstacles i.e. chairs, tables, gutters, surface (tiles, bitumen, stones, grass) of the event (?). Could weapons be involved???

Could the self-defense student also have a friend or friends or family member(s), who may or may not, have done any or the equivalent self-defense training. Will the self-defense exponent's adversary be well versed in the

pugilistic pursuits of 'street-fighting'; martial arts training or competition based martial arts training? Will the adversary have his 'big-hairy mate' with him or be concealing a weapon such as a knife, knuckle-dusters, kubotan, keys or utilize any other weapon or implement? etc.

So, if we start to analyze the above presented hypothetical scenarios, while the common underlying denominator will be the fact that a kick is a kick & a punch is a punch, from a competition perspective, the strikes will be executed in a one-on-one scenario with protective equipment on i.e. 10 oz gloves, MMA gloves, mouth guard etc. & delivered over a set agreed upon time over a set agreed upon number of rounds in a controlled & regulated environment & surface.

From a self-defense perspective, there will not be any personal protective equipment save ones clothing & footwear i.e. sandals, work boots, dress shoes, thongs or sandals. Now, the clothing of a self-defense exponent, albeit street clothing, may hinder or assist the hypothetical scenario i.e. leather jacket, singlet, shirt & tie, suit, t-shirt etc. Now, while all this is obvious & by no means exhaustive, we can now see the angle or perspective that I am endeavoring to explain from the question that I have been asked by many a novice student & read, 'amusingly', on several internet forums & chat lines. Now, there is nothing wrong with posing the question. However, often the Internet threads become a "my dads better than your dad" debate & all continuity & common sense, needless to say emotion, is lost or misunderstood.

Taking nothing away from the devastating strikes of a well-trained competition fighter, from a ring perspective, the fighters strikes will be limited to the target areas as dictated by the rules & regulations set to protect the interest & safety of the contestants. Strikes in a competition style scenario may exclude attacks to the throat, side of the neck, back of the head, knee joint, groin, digit (finger) manipulation or fingers to the eyes. From a self-defense perspective the 'prohibited' strikes just listed become a Wing Chun exponents primary target areas including forearm strikes to the neck, back of neck, arms of the opponent & elbow strikes. While there would be an obvious 'overlap' of common type strikes from both a competition & self-defense scenario i.e. right-cross, low round kick, to name just a few & elbows in MMA & Thai boxing, without looking at the exact type of competition, we can now start to see the "apples Vs oranges" scenario.

Fitness, both anaerobic & aerobic, is a huge determinant in deciding the result in competition style training. From my perspective & having had the privilege of watching guys like Maurice Smith, Stan the Man Longinidis, Jeff Fenech, Kostya Tzyu, & meeting & talking to these gentleman, the question asked was "what would be the advice you would give to a novice contemplating competing down the track?" And the immediate response was "get super fit, fitter than the guy you will face in the ring" & "find a great coach".

From a self-defense perspective, getting & maintaining a level of fitness is paramount & important. Needless to say, it would be great if a self-defense exponent could maintain the intensity & duration of ones aerobic & anaerobic fitness for an indefinite period of time, or at least until the hypothetical event that may never happen does occur. From a competition perspective, maintaining & increasing ones level of aerobic & anaerobic fitness is only a training session away or a set time, place & date

away. From a self-defense perspective, while fitness training is important, it can become 'at the expense' of real-life strategies & repetitive techniques & drills designed to internalize the material & thus make a reaction-response instinctive instead of slowly & systematically 'undoing' an opponent over the period of a set time limit or too score the most points.

Now, in a self-defense scenario, albeit, hypothetical. A student will be endeavoring to finish or avoid or stop the confrontation in as little time as possible. By this I mean most self-defense scenarios can be won or lost within the first 3 to 10 seconds. Who hits whom first, or who avoids getting hit first as diligently practiced in Wing Chun training. That's if anyone really does win or loose in this scenario. However, I am not saying that a Competition fighter is also not trying to finish the fight as quick as possible also. So the skills trained from a self-defense perspective are all designed to overcome an adversary quickly & not for an agreed amount of time, remembering there are no weight or height or skill restrictions here as opposed to the weight categories & matched fight scenarios in competitions. A fighter who gets hit in the ring sometimes has the advantage of the rest time in-between rounds, or hanging onto an opponent to recover until separated by a referee or the fight stopped by the referee or trainer if the fighter looks too hurt from a blow, but not yet knocked out. From a self-defense perspective, it does not stop until it is over or intervened by security personnel or law enforcement officers & in many instances can be fatally over from one punch & the victim hitting his head on the pavement.

Now, from a competition perspective, practitioners can don their protective equipment & proceed to, for want of a better description, "punch the daylights" out of each other only to carry 'niggling' injuries & superficial bruising & to come back to the next training session & do it all over again! Often the gloves, mouth guards, head guards etc. serve to limit the impact of the strikes to the head & torso of the exponents. Often an argument put forward by the medical profession to try & stop these sorts of 'entertainment'. Gloves & a high level of fitness tend to 'prevent' (not always) the fighter from getting knocked out immediately.

From a self-defense perspective, yes, we can also don the protective equipment & proceed to also "punch the daylights" out of each other. From my perspective over 24+ years of teaching & training, when 'bare-knuckle' self-defense practitioners wear MMA gloves or boxing gloves or any type of protective equipment, it seems, from my perspective, to give the student a 'false sense of security' & to take away the risks of getting hit in the mouth or head. Now, while we can say that this is 'conditioning' or 'character building' the student, often the strikes or target areas being hit are not the exact same target areas that we may have to use in a 'life-threatening' scenario. To train bare knuckle & go for the exact 'dangerous' & in some instances 'lethal' target areas without 'controlling' or 'pulling' the strike, needs no explanation, other than to say that this type of training will eventually leave one without training partners. Thus the development of Wing Chun's Wooden Dummy & boxing style Heavy Bags.

From a Wing Chun perspective, if I was to 'shut down' my opponent quickly & effectively, I am going to use strikes to the throat, I am going to grab the throat, I am going to hit the side & back of the neck, I am going to 'blast' a kick i.e. stomp, front heel kick, low round kick, low side kick to the actual knee joint & not 3 to 4 inches above the knee as in kickboxing & MMA events. My thumb(s) are going into my

opponents eye(s), my fingers are going to graze or rake his face, my shin may meet his groin, my kicks to his head will be done, not standing up as in Taekwondo, but when my adversary is lying on the ground. My knees may also meet my adversary's ribs, sternum, and face while he is lying on the ground.

Now, from a Wing Chun perspective, my aim is to avoid going to the ground, & in the event that I 'make an error' & end up on the ground, I will get back up as quickly as possible in order to avoid my adversary & his 'big hairy' mate(s) shoes, stomps & kicks while on the ground. If the opportunity presents itself, a Wing Chun fighter will still 'ground pound' from this position. A Wing Chun fighter will clinch standing up from his Chi Sao training & drills. A Wing Chun fighter from the standing clinching position will use his low sweeps & kicks to upset the balance of his adversary while setting about striking the throat & neck of the same person.

I recall a fight that happened with a MMA exponent in a security nightclub scenario, who through no fault of his own because that is how he had trained all of his 'competition' style life, took an aggressive patron to the floor, proceeded to sit in the mount position & ground pound his aggressor only to have this guys 'big hairy mate's' (yes! There was more than one) proceed to kick him from the side & hit him in the back of the head. In order to protect himself, he 'stacked' up & found his head now close to the side of the guy he was on top. The guy underneath him bit his ear off, which pretty much ended the fight & his career as a MMA exponent. Was it his fault or was it his coaches? Well, we are all responsible for our own choices & decisions & in the immortal words of Bruce Lee, "The way we train is the way we react". Often it is not the fault of the system, although this can be debatable, but the fault of the person trying to use the system & not completely understanding it's strengths & avoiding it's flaws at different ranges.

So, getting back to the often asked question "Who would win between a Wing Chun exponent or a MMA / Thai Boxer". In my humble opinion it is "horses for courses". If a diligent Wing Chun practitioner trained with the same intensity & prepared himself the same way as a MMA guy or Thai Boxer & all things being equal i.e. same length of time training & experience & height & weight & the Wing Chun guy was 'allowed' to execute his strikes to the knee joint, throat, eyes, neck etc. & he also only diligently trained & practiced his most 'liked' half dozen proven strikes, keeping it a 'little fair' since the Thai Boxer's arsenal may only include half dozen strikes (jab, cross, uppercut, hook, elbows, knees, low round kick to thigh, front kick) & the scenario took place in an uncontrolled environment, then I would not hesitate in placing a hypothetical bet on the Wing Chun exponent.

However, If the scenario took place in a controlled environment with the rules, referees & judges & the Wing Chun guy had still diligently prepared himself, albeit not training strikes to the target areas that he would normally advocate, then all things being equal, I would have to say that the Wing Chun guy has not trained in Wing Chun & probably would emulate the strikes, stance & fighting posture of the Thai Boxer according to the rules & regulations & also don a pair of gloves. Then it would be a 50 / 50 bet. The determining factor being "who is the fitter fighter?"

However, if the scenario took place in a controlled environment with no rules & all other things being equal including the Wing Chun practitioners 'low intensity style'

training for a 'hypothetical' scenario that may never eventuate, but under these circumstances has. Then I would not hesitate to place my bet on the MMA or Thai fighter, assuming that these guys have been training fairly diligently, waiting for the next event / competition just around the corner or a phone call to their manager / promoter away.

However, if the scenario took place in an uncontrolled environment with no rules & the Thai fighter or MMA guy just being a practitioner of this style of training, not overly concerned with competing in as many competitions as physically possible, but just enjoying training one on one in a MMA or Thai boxing style environment against other exponents of the same discipline, & the Wing Chun guy training diligently against several hypothetical one on one & multiple opponent scenarios encompassing all or as many finishing strikes as conceivably possible i.e. Simultaneous block & strike, one deflection three strikes to the throat or side of the neck or back of the neck, or a quick simultaneous intercept / deflection executed with a groin or knee strike delivered with intensity & precision & fitness being equal, I would have to hedge my bet with the Wing Chun exponent, while this may seem biased. Obviously it would also be who has more mongrel in him!

Nevertheless, in summary, it is "horses for courses". It is fitness Vs strategy / principles. It is experience Vs conditioning. It is "who has the biggest heart or mongrel" in him / her. It is whose mates are going to step in & back whom up. It is environmental Vs controlled environment. It is height & weight Vs no height & no weight division. It is "the way you train & the way you are taught to react". Vs training to fight an identical 'thinker'. It is who has the hardest hand & head Vs who has the softest hand & head. It is Iron Palm, iron shin conditioning & Wooden Dummy forearm conditioning Vs using protective equipment over my knuckles, head & mouth. It is Competition style training Vs Self-Defense training.

While I have trained in Thai boxing & MMA, I have never been allowed to compete due to being an insulin dependent diabetic since the age of 11 years. The risk involved in having a hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) attack where ones nervous system, reflexes, distancing, vision are all affected & could have serious consequences over an extended duration of competition where blood sugar reserves are utilized intensely warranted me sitting on the side-lines. It didn't stop me from sparring, though, where I could inform those around me that if I started to slur my speech, look incoherent or 'drunk' or I myself recognized my physical state, then I could stop, sit down & replenish my sugar levels.

Wing Chun has allowed me to look after or better regulate my sugar levels, through a low to moderate style workout as well as keep me fit & healthy. While I truly admire those who 'torture' themselves for bruises & a plastic trophy, I do thoroughly love training Wing Chun. Having trained in Taekwondo, Brazilian Ju Jitsu, Thai Boxing & Western boxing, I am also often asked, "why do you continue to train Wing Chun". My simple answer has always been "because it works on the street".

In another event, working a nightclub as a bouncer, I had to control & finish several incidences pertaining to patrons that evening. Having skipped a meal, as I had been 'on-call' for a security company & needed the money so took almost any job anytime, anywhere, to cut a long story short, after work I found myself going home in a taxi.

The taxi driver recognized my slurred speech & 'drunken' 'drug style' behavior & drove me to the emergency ward of a nearby hospital. I was 'helped' out of the taxi & immediately was placed in a wheel chair. By this time I was very incoherent & my speech had dramatically become incomprehensible. I was repeatedly asked, "what drugs did you take" while sitting in the outside foyer outside the hospital emergency entrance. I recall the police coming along & standing near hospital staff while they were trying to work out what was wrong with me. After all, I looked like I had been in a few 'scraps' that evening & I wasn't carrying any medical alert information on my person. However, I managed to slip out the words "diabetic" & was immediately rushed into the emergency ward & given all the necessary attention to bring my sugar levels & as a result, my faculties back to normality. It was a lesson learnt from my perspective.

In another event, finishing teaching classes on a Friday evening, I proceeded to lock the building that we leased in the Brisbane CBD. While standing on the doorstep talking to two students, a very large 'skin head' attired gentleman proceeded to call abusive "racist" words to myself & my two students in relation to our discipline of Chinese martial arts. I 'sensed' that it was going to 'get ugly' & of course it started with a shove & then punches being thrown. By this stage I had positioned myself behind the 'gentleman' while he took a sincere dislike to one of the students. To cut a long story short, it took all 3 of us (not at the same time), literally 'tag-teaming' each other to 'stop' this 'gentleman's' aggressive behavior. I told my two students to leave the scene quickly as it had attracted unnecessary attention. I called the police, who attended & proceeded to look for identification on this 'gentleman'. What they found was a knife, several empty packets of different 'substances' & looked at me questioningly "how did you stop this guy?" I later learnt that the concoction of drugs that this individual had taken had made it even very, very difficult for the police to stop (& in another separate situation where the police had used their firearms to stop someone on a similar concoction of drugs, found that this person had been able to keep fighting after being shot several times to the torso. This incident made the police review their protocols & change the ammunition used in their guns). Now, it did take a strike to the side of his neck & a figure four choke to subdue this 'gentleman' in combination with several other strikes & low kicks which seemed to not phase him. The strikes varied from hooks, uppercuts, elbows, right cross, vertical fist etc. etc. One low round kick that was delivered by me spun him so hard that my foot continued to travel past him hitting & shattering the window behind him. Yes, my foot did swell & bruise up immediately. Wing Chun Iron Palm treatment healed my bruising in a couple of days.

I trust that you are better aware that it is seemingly impossible to compare which style is better or worse in comparison to the other. While I have put forward several facts & hypothetical, these are all my own opinion, right or wrong. At the end of the day, rather than ask the question "which one is better"? Wouldn't it be more conducive to just enjoy that you are able to move both your hands & feet, enjoying pushing yourself against your competitors or yourself. And just enjoy being one of the lucky individuals that has the money, time & resources to undertake martial arts or competition style training. Just enjoy what you do when you do it & don't waste your thoughts or energy on "which style is better". It really is horses for courses & who has the biggest heart & who is able to readily adapt themselves & change their strategy & technique to meet their opponents & getting the better of them.

In Competition, it is all about winning the fight either by knock out, submission or points. In self-defense it is all about being a “survivor of a violent situation & not the victim”.