

# FMA

# Informative

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## Muay Thai and Balintawak - My Personal Blend

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*Guro Joel Huncar*

## **Muay Thai and Balintawak - My Personal Blend**

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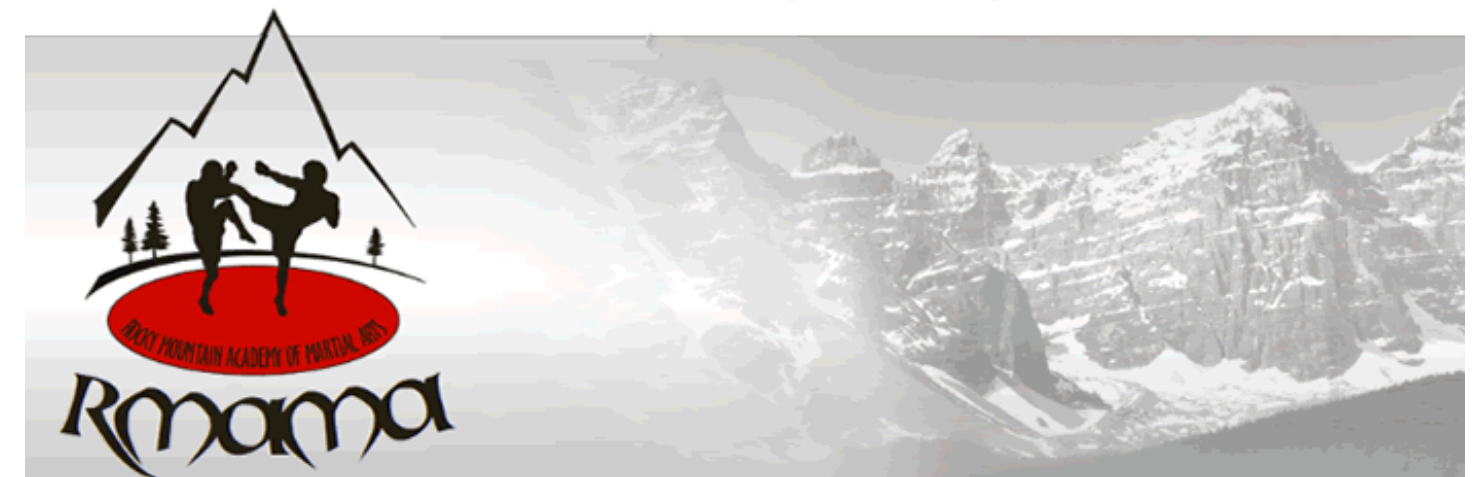
The FMA Informative in talking with Guro Joel Huncar, got on the subject about mixing styles. As I understand from Guro Hungar, he does not teach his arts as a Mixed martial art, but has found in his own experience the benefits of each art that he knows and how some of the aspects will enhance his physical attributes, plus his defensive techniques.

### **Joel Huncar**

This issue is about my personal blend of Balintawak Eskrima and Muay Thai. However I want to let the reader know that I do not teach a blended system. In my opinion to take two incredible martial arts and try to make one art out of them would be a mistake. Each is unique and each has amazing skills and attributes to offer students. That is why I teach each separate. However when I practice each art my expression of it is influenced by the other (and by other martial arts I have studied over the years).

Also I am not yet a full instructor in Balintawak, so I have to make sure I teach what I am allowed to teach properly and with absolute care and respect. I have earned the rank of Kru in Muay Thai under Master Songlith Singthong though, and the rank of Guro in Mati Arnis under Guro Norm Stackhouse and Guro Ross Doromal. I have trained a bit in Silat, Jiu Jitsu, Kung Fu, Aiki Jiu Jitsu, and have been around many other martial arts as well.

The South East Asian systems have captured my heart and I will practice them as long as I am able. I hope you enjoy this issue and feel free to contact me with any questions or comments.



## Muay Thai and Balintawak: My Personal Blend

Even though I studied martial arts for a couple of years before I started training in Muay Thai, I consider my real journey in martial arts to have started the day I walked into Ajarn Songlith Singthong's gym. The day I saw Muay Thai and the fighters training I knew I had found a real den of warriors.

The gym itself was located in the basement of a commercial building in Abbotsford BC and you had to enter from the back alley. It was dark, dank and cramped. The gym smelled of sweat and boxer's liniment. The heavy bags were well worn and the equipment was very used and looked a little battle worn.

It was more than a little intimidating to even speak up and ask about taking a class. The fighters were working harder than I had ever seen fighters work, they were in peak physical condition and every punch and kick was thrown with full power, there was no holding back. Elbows, knees, shins, feet and fists were all used by these fighters. I had never seen anything like this before, and I knew right away, as intimidated as I was; I wanted to learn this art.

In the weeks and months that followed I became very much

a Muay Thai fighter. Although I still looked at other arts, I never lost sight of just how effective the simple brutality that Master Song taught us was. I was also amazed at how quickly people could learn to be effective Muay Thai fighters, yet you could dedicate a life time to truly mastering this art.

However after a few years of training I began to feel the pull of another influence, the art of Arnis began to pull me away from Muay Thai. When I first saw Arnis I was totally captivated by the beauty and lethality of that art. I began to cross train in both Arnis and Muay Thai. Eventually Arnis became my main focus and Muay Thai took a back seat. Eventually my focus on Arnis and Filipino martial arts lead me to Balintawak and I found the perfect complement to my Muay Thai training.

The thing I loved about Balintawak Cuentada Eskrima was that it focussed on building good body mechanics and power. The art focussed a lot on close range fighting tactics and not a lot of long range and medio range tactics. Also the art did not do a lot of sumbrada or shadowing type drilling but focussed more on agak, or guided training.

## Guided Training

Guided training is similar to how a coach trains a boxer on the pads. It is the coach who runs the drill and the fighter who follows the coach's instruction. This is a very good way to build functional fighting skill. As the experience of both the coach and

the fighter increase the drills become more and more intense and complicated. Good pad holding will work a fighter harder than an actual sparring match as will good agak stick training.

When training pads the fighter starts with simple combi-



*Although kneeing is a common attack in Balintawak Eskrima as well as Muay Thai. Training them under pressure while sparring in Muay Thai makes it very natural to do when you are tied up in the clinch in Balintawak Eskrima.*

nations and routines. Then as the fighter develops the coach will make the routines more complicated, faster and harder. He will force the fighter to both attack and defend. Pad training will challenge every aspect of fighting from offensive skills to defensive skills. You should feel like you are in battle if you have a good pad

holder pushing you.

Agak training in Balintawak Cuentada Eskrima starts with choreographed routines that will take a bit of time to learn but once the fighter has a handle on these skills the coach will break the pattern and really challenge the fighter. This random play is the core of Balintawak training and

is one of the reasons Balintawak is considered one of the deadliest Filipino martial arts systems. When done right the fighter will be worked to the very limit of his or her ability and like the fighter working pads will feel like he or she has been through a major battle.

## Both Muay Thai and Balintawak Teach Fighters

Both Muay Thai and Balintawak teach fighters to be able to work with other fighters and coach each other right from the beginning. You will not find Eskrimadors or Thai Boxers spending entire classes working on choreographed fighting routines in the air. Instead the classes may start with some basic combinations in the air along with some warm up drills but the core of the art is taught with one person coaching the other.

Both Balintawak (and Eskrima in general) and Muay Thai teach only things that are directly applicable to real fighting. Much like Boxing and other styles of Eskrima and Arnis what you practice is exactly what you will do when

you fight.

In Muay Thai the only exception to this is the Wai Kru or Ram Muay. The Wai Kru/Ram Muay is practiced out of respect for the culture and as part of your pre fight ritual but it is not a fighting form at all, it is a ritualistic dance that is done to show respect to your art, your coach and your gym. It is not a collection of fighting moves that may or may not have any value when it comes to actual fighting, it is a sacred meditative dance that is supposed to have deep spiritual and mystical meaning.

## In Many Martial Arts

In many martial arts there are forms practiced that does not reflect at all on how a fighter moves or fights in real time. If you watch many martial artists doing forms and then watch the same martial artist fight or spar you will quite often see a completely different fighter. It may even seem that the same fighter is doing two completely different arts. A Muay Thai fighter or a Balintawak Eskrimador on the other hand doing shadow

boxing or practicing strike combinations will look pretty much the same doing solo training as they will when they spar or fight. That is because they are training to fight not simply following a cultural tradition.

This is not to say that Muay Thai and Balintawak lack deep cultural value; both these arts are cultural treasures but they are still arts



*Training in Balintawak makes it natural to do unorthodox moves like pulling an opponent's guard down and throwing a back fist or a hammer fist, which can open up an opponent for follow up strikes.*

that are focussed on fighting more than maintaining a cultural treasure.

Many martial arts spend a few years teaching discipline and patience before they start to get to the “good stuff”. In Fili-

pino martial arts and Muay Thai practitioners get the good stuff right from the beginning. This is partially because some martial traditions spend the first couple of years building character and pushing out the unworthy and undis-

ciplined. Muay Thai on the other hand separates the wheat from the chaff simply by working students so hard that the unworthy simply can't take the punishment.

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## Balintawak on the Other Hand

Balintawak on the other hand like most Filipino martial arts grew out of family systems of fighting that were taught usually father to son or taught by an honored uncle or other family member. These were survival arts not arts simply focussed on character development. Arnisadors did not have the option to spend a few years developing a fighter's character first, because he needed to be able to protect himself and his family now, not in a few years.

When the first Eskrima schools opened up in Cebu, they were not truly open door schools; students had to be accepted by the masters, not just anyone could walk in and start training and only the strongest kept training, because the training was hard. It was full contact and the only safety equipment used in those days was the rattan stick. Training had to be hard because the early days of public arnis training were very hard time.

The early history of Eskrima was violent and bloody. Rivalry, challenge matches and violent street crime were all part of that history. Many masters were murdered or survived assassination attempts. The history of rivalry between the Doce Pares club and the Balintawak Self Defence Club in Cebu is part of Filipino martial arts legend. The founder of Balintawak, Venancio Bacon, even spent over a decade in prison due to killing a knife wielding assassin.

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## Differences

Because of different reasons, but due to the historical traditions of both Muay Thai and Filipino martial arts both arts are focussed on practical fight training. This is the main reason both have been my passion for the past two decades. Even though they evolved out of completely different reasons they came to have the same focus; effective fighting techniques.

The difference between the two is the environment they are meant to be used in. Muay Thai came from the battlefield and became a ring sport. Eskrima came from the battlefield and became a street fighting art. Because of this there are some interesting contradictions between the two arts.

Muay Thai ring focus has

made it a little over-daring when it comes to dealing with things like knives and multiple opponents. The commitment used to kick through a target could be very detrimental when it comes to dealing with a knife or bladed weapon. The focus of clinching and trading knees and elbows for the entertainment of the audience could be a death sentence when it comes to dealing with edged weapons and multiple opponents.

Also because in Muay Thai you use gloves and wraps your striking can become dependent on this protection and lose the ability to strike without injuring your hand in a fight outside of the ring. Muay Thai does not focus on cheating by using improvised weapons, eye gouges, groin strikes

whereas Filipino martial arts embraces this kind of dirty fighting.

Also because of the focus on bladed weapons, trapping, tripping and throwing in Filipino martial arts and Balintawak you will not find an Eskrimador over committing to a strike. The focus is more on not letting the shoulders come across centre line because if you over commit on a strike you can be taken off balance and fed multiple strikes or stabs before you can recover. This is why when a Thai Boxer looks at an Eskrimador training Mano Mano techniques he may feel the Eskrimador is striking ineffectually from a Muay Thai or boxing mindset. However from an Filipino martial arts mindset the Thai Boxer is a little over daring.

However the fact that you

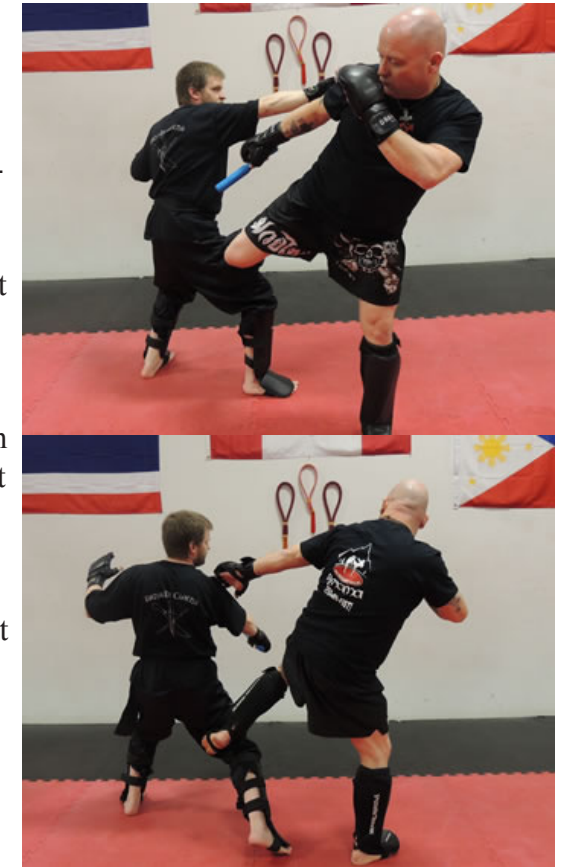


*The trapping skills of Balintawak help with things like closing the guard and throwing elbows.*

actually fight when you train in Muay Thai teaches you to overcome a truly resistant opponent. You learn some of the best body mechanics for power that are taught in martial arts. A Thai Boxer can strike with enough power to punch a hole through a group of attackers to make space and escape.

Also Muay Thai is one of the most complete pugilistic styles in the world. A Thai Boxer is trained to kick, punch, elbow and knee an opponent. Thai boxing allows a fighter to kick not only high but low kicks to the legs are allowed as well. You are allowed to sweep an opponent and to take them down in the clinch. Trapping and upright grappling are all part of a Thai Boxer's skills.

Most importantly this is all done in real contact sparring. This is something that many Filipino martial arts fighters and reality based practitioners do not do very often. Many say this is because sport fighting teaches bad habits, but the reality of this is that sport fighting was created so that warriors had a way of testing their skills without killing each other. By blending a hard sport style with a survival based martial art like Balintawak you can have the best of both worlds. If you understand what the gifts of each art is and are aware of what the pit fall of each art is then you can become a more complete fighter.



*By training in Muay Thai as well as Balintawak, low line kicking becomes very natural during knife sparring.*

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## Final Note

It does not matter what art you do, what the focus of the art is or even what culture that art comes from; by understanding what the strengths and weaknesses are of your martial art you can look for a style that will compliment it and patch the holes that may exist in your martial art. After all that is the spirit of training that gave birth to the biggest modern force in sport fighting: Mixed Martial Arts. The modern warrior should learn from this and apply this spirit of cross training to make sure that he or she gets exactly what they desire from their martial arts training.

### ***School Submission***

The schools listed teach Filipino martial arts, either as the main curriculum or an added curriculum.

If you have a school that teaches Filipino martial arts, or you are an instructor that teaches, but does not have a school, list the school or style so individuals who wish to experience, learn and gain knowledge have the opportunity.

Be Professional; keep your contact information current. - **Click Here**



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Finished manuscripts should be accompanied by color or black and white photographs. Though we take care of materials, we can not be responsible for manuscripts/photographs and accept no liability for same. Every photograph or graphic must be accompanied by a caption Carefully key photos to caption information with a letter or number.

We reserve the right to use any photo(s) as cover material or additional compensation. We also reserve the right to edit material and to crop photographs.

We reserve the right to use articles or parts of articles that are given and approved from time to time as needed to promote the Filipino martial arts and the Culture of the Philippines.

Physical manuscripts should be typed in black, double spaced, and set to 1-1/2 margins (right and left).

Emailed manuscripts should be typed in Ariel or Times Roman, on programs such as Notepad, Wordpad, Microsoft Word, Word Perfect and can be sent as an attachment. Photo(s) can be sent as a .jpg, .gif, .bmp, or .tiff - to submit material for either the FMA Informative Newspaper or an Issue **Click Here**

We welcome your article, ideas and suggestions, and look forward to working with you in the future.