

# FMA

# Informative

Propagating the Filipino Martial Arts and the Culture of the Philippines

Informative Issue No. 146

2014

## AGPS

# Anjing Gembala Pencak Silat



*Guru Mike Casto*

**The Basics and Concepts Behind AGPS**  
**Guru Mike “The Wandering Guru”**



**AGPS Main Website:**  
[trainagps.com](http://trainagps.com)

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The FMA Informative was fortunate to be able to get together with Guru Mike Casto known as the “The Wandering Guru,” an exceptional teacher. In this issue you will learn some of the basic concepts of AGPS. Which the FMA Informative thinks that practitioners will find very interesting.

The FMA Informative also asked Guru Casto to give just a sample of what and how he teaches when on the road, so it was fortunate at the time of this request Guru Casto had some seminars and private engagements that he could share what he taught, in Cincinnati, OH. Classes were focused on foundational components of AGPS which would help students develop a good understanding of how to get to the close range and how to keep the opponent in pain and off balance during the encounter. The training also provided useful tools for developing this understanding in solo training.

Guru Casto has traveled the nation and occasionally abroad to teach. He has taught all over the United States and in Canada, Denmark, Britain, China, and the Philippines

### **AGPS System**

AGPS is a Silat system developed by Guru Mike Casto based on 20 years of training in various Silat systems. The primary influence is from Serak and, more specifically, from the de Thouars lineage of Serak. Guru Mike’s primary training was in a system called Sikal, developed by Guru Ken Pannell.

AGPS is a system of martial arts, primarily drawing from Indonesian Pencak Silat, intended to quickly provide students with physical tools to protect themselves and others and to provide a deep understanding of the principles that make those tools functional.

It focuses on close range combatives with and without weapons. It was developed by Guru Mike Casto based on over thirty-five years of martial arts training and his experiences with protecting people in his personal life and as a security professional.

Each issue features practitioners of martial arts and other internal arts, other features include historical, theoretical and technical articles; reflections, Filipino martial arts, healing arts, the culture of the Philippines and other related subjects.

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## The Basics and Concepts Behind Anjing Gembala Pencak Silat (AGPS)

**AGPS** is a Silat system developed by Guru Mike Casto based on 20 years of training in various Silat systems. The primary influence is from Serak and, more specifically, from the de Thouars lineage of Serak. Guru Mike's primary training was in a system called Sikal, developed by Guru Ken Pannell.

At the core of the Silat in Sikal was the influence Guru Ken had from eight years of training in *Bukti Negara* with Pendekar Paul de Thouars. The focus on finesse and very precise leverage has carried through Sikal and into AGPS as the primary expression. Guru Mike also trained in Serak with Maha Guru Victor de Thouars for a couple of years and in Kuntao Silat de Thouars with Bapak Willem "Uncle Bill" de Thouars for eight years. While the Kuntao Silat de Thouars is mostly Kuntao there is a strong thread of Serak running through it and Uncle Bill shared some of this influence with Guru Mike in private training.

Another strong influence in Sikal was Mande Muda and Guru Mike also drew from it in the development of AGPS. Primarily he drew from the Serak expression in Mande Muda but also from the Harimau, Cipecut, and Cimande aspects of Mande Muda. Guru Mike has also trained and worked out with various other folks from the de Thouars lineage and been influenced by them. Most notably, Guru Stevan Plinck, Dr. Andre Knutsgraichen, and Guru Andrew Beck.

So, because of its strong Serak influence, AGPS is, at its core, a pukulan (striking) system and uses strikes to disrupt the opponent's balance and set up brutal sweeps and takedowns.

The name, AGPS, is an acronym for Anjing Gembala Pencak Silat which translates as "sheepdog martial arts." Guru Mike chose the name based on an essay, titled *On Sheep, Wolves, and Sheepdogs*, written by David Grossman. In the essay, Grossman uses the archetypes of sheep, wolves, and sheepdogs to describe the elements of society. Most people are sheep, incapable of hurting each other except by accident. The wolves in society prey on the sheep. Sheepdogs protect the sheep from the wolf. Obviously, law enforcement and military are the official sheepdogs but a mother protecting her child is also a sheepdog. This idea of protection appealed to Guru Mike so he applied the concept to the name and development of AGPS, whose motto is Training for protection of self and others.

Because of this, one of Guru Mike's goals in the development of the AGPS curriculum was accessibility. He wanted students

to quickly develop tools which they could use to protect themselves and others. Silat, especially the Serak lineages, are generally taught in a way which isn't very immediately gratifying.

In Guru Mike's own experience, it took him three years of nearly daily practice before he felt he might be able to apply any of it under stress. When Guru Mike was exposed to and began training with Professor Joe Lansdale in his system of Shen Chuan, he was exposed to an interesting truth.

Shen Chuan, which specializes in striking, locking, and balance disruption, uses the same principles for balance disruption employed in Serak. The expression is very different and, one of those differences, is Shen Chuan prefers to use the upper body tools to effect the takedowns. Serak certainly has this expression but its default method is to use the lower body tools and sweep the opponent's lower base.

Training in Shen Chuan, Guru Mike realized the principles could be taught quicker by focusing on the upper body tools because most people are far more comfortable with the upper body tools and the lower body. We use our hands all the time to accomplish a wide variety of tasks. In our daily lives, though, our feet tend to function in a very narrow scope of standing and walking. The idea of kicking with them can be difficult and, for some reason, using the legs to sweep seems even more difficult for a lot of people even though a sweep uses the same basic motion as a kick.

So when Guru Mike began developing the AGPS curriculum he decided to teach the principles primarily through the upper body tools early in the curriculum. This way the student develops an understanding of the principles in a much more accessible format which tends to be far less frustrating and provide quicker results



which are effective.

Sweeps, though, where the opponent's lower base is pulled from beneath them can be incredibly disorienting and effective. As the old saying from Judo goes, "Why hit with my fist when I can hit with the whole planet?" Once the principles of balance are taught and developed then the curriculum moves into sweeps using the lower base.

The actual structure of the curriculum is in line with the traditional Javanese Pencak Silat from which it draws most of its expression. This means there are jurus and langkah.

The jurus are short hand forms which help the student develop a strong understanding of the upper body tools. There are seven jurus in AGPS. Each has a specific intention. The first four jurus are taught in a specific order because they build on each other.

Since AGPS is a close range system we believe it's paramount to be able to get into the close range. If you can't get to the range where your tools are effective then it doesn't matter how good your tools are. While there are some mid and long range tools in AGPS they are primarily used



to close the distance into the close range.

So the first juru taught is the Entry Juru. The Entry Juru is, as the name implies, focused on entering into the close range. The default applications for this juru illustrate how each motion within the juru can be used, on its own, as an entry.

The only guarantee in a physical confrontation is that you will have the opportunity to strike. Whether you actually throw or land any strikes is a whole different matter. The opportunity will be there. Any of the other tools - locks, disarms, sweeps, chokes, etc. - may or may not be available in a given situation; the opportunity may not arise.

Since the opportunity to strike is always there the second juru taught, the Striking Juru, focuses on striking. It encapsulates all the hand strikes used in the system in a fluid sequence which, along with teaching the basic strikes themselves, starts teaching the student about flowing from one to the next.

Next is the Mass in Motion Juru. We never want to use just our arms to try to affect our opponent. We want to use "mass in motion." We want to move our body as a cohesive unit so quite a bit of our body mass is actually driving the motions. This concept is a vital tool to finding functionality in the material.

The fourth juru taught is the Controlling Juru. This juru focuses on controlling the opponent's tools. It ties directly into the hubud



family of drills from the Filipino martial arts which are also incorporated into the curriculum at this point.

These four jurus are the core of the material. The other three jurus - Level Change, Shearing and Framing, and Sweeping - focus on other very useful principles but they are like icing on the cake. The cake is found in those first four jurus and gives the student a solid foundation for functional usage of the material. The final three jurus are built on that foundation and enhance it.

Langkah are patterns on the floor which are used to teach principles related to the lower body tools. Since our lower body tools are also our platform for mobility, the langkah work is really about learning to use the whole body so the various parts work in harmony with each other to produce powerful results. There are five langkah in AGPS.

The first langkah taught is the Walking Langkah. This langkah is used to help the student develop the basic structure used for sweeps and takedowns and learn to move while maintaining this structure. It's a deceptively simple langkah, comprised of a straight line with hash marks every two feet. The walking of the langkah



is also simple but contains a lot of nuances which help build a strong foundation. This langkah is, in Serak, called Langkah Lurus and in AGPS it is taught just as Guru Mike learned it from Guru Ken and others.

The Bridging Langkah is related to the Langkah Lima from Serak and it, in conjunction with the Entry Juru, focuses on bridging the gap and getting you to the

range in which you want to work.

The Foundation Langkah is two diamonds side by side with a line connecting them horizontally through their centers. It's an expansion of the Langkah Tiga used in the root systems of AGPS. It teaches the basic sweeps and how to perform them with good structure. It teaches an awareness of the space we seek to control.

As with the jurus, those

three langkah - Walking, Bridging, and Foundation - are the elements taught first in the curriculum and provide the solid foundation on which the last two langkah - Mapping and Combat - expand.

The most important elements from the curriculum for the early student are the Entry Juru, Striking Juru, and Bridging Langkah. The Walking Langkah is taught early on to lay groundwork for later development but the Bridging Langkah is the key langkah for rapidly getting a student to a place where they can use the material to protect themselves and others.

Currently, weapons are taught at the advanced stages of the curriculum. The weapons training currently in the curriculum comes primarily from Sikal and focuses on blade usage. Over time Guru Mike intends to incorporate stick usage into the curriculum at earlier stages but he's still working on integrating it.

## Guru Mike "The Wandering Guru"

*From June 3 - June 17, 2014 Guru Mike Casto taught a couple of classes a week in Cincinnati, OH. Classes were focused on foundational components of AGPS which would help students develop a good understanding of how to get to the close range and how to keep the opponent in pain and off balance during the encounter. The training also provide useful tools for developing this understanding in solo training. A good training partner is, of course, invaluable but having material which is designed to develop particular attributes and understanding without a partner is very useful.*

*Due to the limited time during this visit each class had a targeted focus. Of course practitioners that attended multiple classes gained more benefit but each class contained useful information for improving understanding regardless of the current level the practitioner held.*

Guru Mike taught a series of classes in Cincinnati, Ohio on Tuesday and Thursday nights from June 3, 2014 through June 17, 2014. These classes were held at Sacan Martial Arts in Westchester. This enabled him to spend some time with students that Guru Mike

has in the area and to expose new people in the area to AGPS.

Guru Mike focused on the Entry Juru and applications from the juru. Obviously, text isn't the best medium for such things but here is a basic explanation of the juru's motions. Start with your

hands held at your chest, palm to palm. Step out with your right foot and extend your arms. Don't straighten them, just extend them slightly, elbows flared out a bit.

This motion has many names. In the Silat community it's commonly called "the dive." Some



people call it "the spear." The principle behind the motion is to cover high center line. Anything this structure contacts will more than likely get shunted off to one side of the structure or the other. Combined with the forward motion which tends to either evade or jam low line attacks this motion is a very useful entry method.

It's not really intended to deal with a particular attack. It's designed, rather, to neutralize or, at least, to minimize many likely attacks. If you get hit it will most likely be a glancing blow which slides off the structure or, in the case of a low line attack, it will either miss, get jammed, or connect without serious power.

This method of setting up a structure then moving the whole

structure is very common in AGPS and Silat in general, as well as other martial arts such as Tai Chi Chuan. You don't try to affect your opponent by moving a single limb, you move your whole body, get your mass moving behind the motion.

From the dive, drive your right hip forward. Focus on the right hip moving forward. Your left hip will automatically move backward, your right arm will automatically extend forward and your left arm will automatically draw back. All these things happen because you drive your right hip forward. This particular nuance is critical and becomes obvious in application which I'll

discuss in a moment.

Now think of compressing something between your right hand and your left elbow, fired horizontally. Like driving your right hip forward did in the previous motion, this compression will cause a lot of things to happen in your body: your left hip will drive forward, your left elbow will drive forward, your right arm will draw back slightly. Again, focus on the compression, the core, not the individual elements. Let them be driven by the core motion.

From the elbow, we go into a very complex motion - especially when written in text. You will pivot toward your right, corkscrewing into your base. In the Silat terminology I was taught this is a Siloh motion, though it

doesn't go all the way to the seated posture. I've heard some Chinese martial arts practitioners call it a "twisted dragon stance" or a "twisted stance." As you pivot, your right hand will drop low and move with your body, sweeping back then rising. Your left arm will extend forward then drop. Your right hand fires a forward palm smash while your left comes in palm down below the right elbow.

Pivot back toward the front, moving from your core or, as the Chinese say, your tan tien. This will bring your arms in front of you but, as before, you're not moving your arms. They're moving because they're part of the structure and you're moving the entire structure. Your right hand will be high and your left will be under it.

Grind your right hand - move it from palm away from you to palm toward you as you bring your forearm to your chest - and pivot to your left into a shallow horse stance.

Grind out with your right hand - move it from palm toward you to palm down as you extend it - and pivot back to center. Your right hand in this motion is effectively firing a knife hand, shuto, in Karate terms. You also want your left hand to slap the right forearm as it passes or, more precisely, you want your right forearm to shear past the left palm.

That is the best textual explanation for the juru Guru Mike can put into words so to be written. It's far from ideal but hopefully it gives you some idea of the motions involved. Now we'll consider some applications.

Guru Mike uses this juru to teach a variety of entry methods so he takes each motion and isolates it as an entry. The purpose isn't

actually to teach a handful of entries but, instead, to get the student to see the possibilities and, ideally, to think beyond the techniques. This is where I start teaching a student the meaning of my one of my core philosophies, “Motion is motion.”

Just because you’re taught a particular technique for a given motion doesn’t mean that’s the only technique which can be done from that motion. Within a juru - or kata, form, poomse, whatever - motion is motion. Each motion can be a strike, lock, disarm, throw, choke, or takedown. Each motion can be anything.

The application Guru Mike covered from this juru was to use the dive against a hook. The opponent throws a right hook and you step into it with a left lead and the dive structure. The diving hands impact your opponent’s shoulder or bicep, short circuiting the power of the hook. Your right forearm strikes the opponent’s neck in the area of the vagus nerve which might stun or even knock out your opponent.



Next, just as in the juru, you drive your left hip forward. This causes your left arm to extend which, in turn, disrupts the opponent’s structure and balance. Even if the opponent is firing a secondary strike this will neutralize a lot of the power in it.

Catch the back of the opponent’s head with your left hand and, with the compression motion from the juru, you jerk opponent’s head forward into your right elbow.

Then unfold your arms, again, just as in the juru, with your right arm going under the opponent’s left arm and your left hand pushing the opponent’s head down as you lift your right knee to strike opponent’s face.

This leads into a throw. In Silat they call it putar kepala, head turning. Aikido calls it kaiten nage. I’ve also heard it called a wheel throw.

After the throw you can follow up with a lock, you can exit, you can draw a weapon, or frisk opponent for weapons. If you’re in law enforcement it’s a pretty simple matter to get opponent into a cuffing position after the throw.

Next, Guru Mike brought out the concept of primary and secondary balance disruption points. These are points on the ground. If you imagine your opponent’s feet as being two points of an equilateral triangle, then the third point of the triangle is a primary balance disruption point. There is one in front of the opponent and one behind. Of course you have



these points in your own structure too.

Guru Mike calls these primary points because every martial art he has been exposed to which does anything with balance disruption - Shen Chuan, Silat, Dumog, Judo, Aikido, etc. - uses these points. They may not isolate them or illustrate them in the same way but they use them. If you move part of your opponent’s body - head, hand, elbow, shoulder, knee, etc. - toward one of these points then it will disrupt their balance. They may take a step to retain their balance but, during the step, their balance will still be vulnerable.

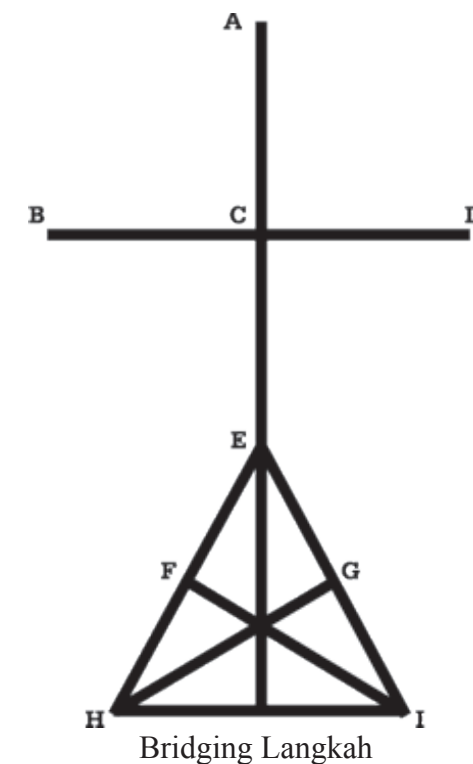
To find the secondary points, draw a line between the opponent’s feet and then extend that line out approximately the same distance from their right foot as their right foot is from their left foot and you’ll find a secondary point. There’s another on their left side. Guru Mike calls these secondary points because while many arts he has been exposed to do use these points, they are less common than the primary points. In Guru Mike Silat background, for instance, they rarely used these secondary points because using

them tends to launch the opponent away from you and we wanted to keep our opponent close.

When you strike your opponent, you can aim the strike through the opponent toward one of these points and, along with the pain and effect of the strike itself, you are likely going to knock the person off balance. When someone is off balance it’s hard for them to mount an effective attack or defense so disrupting their balance can buy you a moment to hit again or to find a lock or draw a weapon.

The same is true with locks. If for instance, you take a standard wrist lock (kote gaeshi) and, through the wrist lock, drive your opponent’s opponent toward his back primary point you can disrupt his balance and break his structure even if, for whatever reason, he doesn’t feel pain from the lock.

Then Guru Mike focused on the Bridging Langkah. In Serak this is called Langkah Lima. He use it in AGPS for the same purpose it’s used in Serak but the specific expression in AGPS was



also heavily influenced by my training in Shen Chuan.

Your training partner places his lead foot on point C and you put your feet on the base points of the triangle, H and I.

This puts you and your training partner out of immediate reach - a kick might cover the distance but, unless you or your partner has pretty long legs, the kick won’t have much power because it’s at the end of its range. This is where an altercation might begin with a verbal argument. You’re only a small step outside of effective kicking range, though, and a single normal step outside of punching range so this is a very touchy range.

If the situation is already tense and your opponent senses you make any sort of forward, potentially aggressive, motion you might inadvertently trigger a response and be fighting before you know it. The langkah helps build an awareness of this range and helps develop basic tools for getting from this range into the close range where we, in AGPS, want to be.

The basic motion of the langkah starts with a weight shift, settle all of your weight into one foot. For this example, shift your weight to your right foot. As you shift your weight to your right foot, let your left foot slide forward to point F on the triangle. If you do this well then your training partner - or, in a fight, your opponent - and any witnesses will perceive it as a giving of space because your upper body will actually shift backward slightly. This gives the impression you are giving ground. Your left foot sliding forward won’t be noticed by anyone if you do it well. The

left foot, though, just gained a couple of inches toward your partner, like leading off in baseball.

As you do this, bring your hands up in a non-threatening, non-combative motion with the palms facing your partner. When you decide to engage - whether your decision is based on some motion of your partner or simply because you decide to go - the first thing you do is shift your weight completely to your left foot. This will move your upper body. If your partner is punching at your face before you do this then this motion by itself will usually make the punch miss or, at worst, be a glancing blow. If, as you do this, you cross your hands in a scissoring motion - in Filipino martial arts we call this a “gunting” motion - then one or both of your hands act as a margin for error. If your timing is off or the guy tracks your motion or whatever then one or both of your hands will likely deflect the punch. Don’t think of it as a parry, though. Let your footwork get you off line. Move your hands with intention to attack, anything they encounter should get smacked, not shoved.

This weight shift is the keystone of the langkah. If you’re in a real fight or in sparring and your opponent is firing a hard, committed attack, then the weight shift can get you off line and begin closing the distance. Their own momentum will finish closing the distance.

You can also pick up your left foot as you shift your weight - this looks like a step with your left foot and, technically, it is, but the idea of “stepping” often causes a delay in the weight shift and the weight shift is the key to moving off the line of your opponent’s

attack. By doing this you cover even more distance so even if your opponent isn't firing a hard, committed attack, you can still close to the range you want. If you make this step and he is firing a hard, committed attack then you often end up behind him which is a great place to be.

If you train in Filipino martial arts you'll recognize this principle as the female triangle. This expression is slightly different than I've seen the female triangle taught in the Filipino martial arts but it's the same principle.

Once you've gotten into the range you want without getting your clock cleaned, then you can start deploying your tools - strikes, locks, chokes, sweeps, etc.

Guru Mike also discussed the principle, "*You get the one you get.*" In training our partner often throws a single, committed attack and we respond with our technique. In actuality, this rarely happens.

More commonly, several attacks are fired. Some land, some are evaded, some are parried, you may end up grappling some. Then you get the one you get. At some point your opponent throws an attack which you are able to really sink your teeth into, so to speak.

Maybe you get lucky, though relying on luck is a bad idea we should always take advantage of it when we can. Maybe you've worn them down a bit and they throw something sloppy or slow. Maybe you just nail the timing. One way or another, you get it and that's the one you get. That's when you work the options

presented to you.

In Pencak Silat there's a term, "pecahan" (pronounced pe-chah-hahn) which literally translates as "shard" and in the broader Indonesian culture refers to a form of divination where something frangible, like a glass, gets dropped and broken and the future is read in pattern of the shards.

In Pencak Silat, though, the term refers to the moment of engagement. That's the point when the metaphorical glass breaks. The shards are the options you and your opponent have within the structure immediately following the engagement. Pick a shard - act on an option - and break it, presenting new patterns, shards, options.

In the final class Guru Mike covered some more applications from the Entry Juru, incorporating principles from the Bridging Langkah.

So, for example, starting with weight on the right foot and the left foot slightly forward, when the attacker throws a right straight punch shift your weight to your left foot to get off line. Your right foot will follow as part of the same motion - once it has no weight on it then the motion of your hips will move the leg. So you shift your weight to your left foot and extend your right hand. This motion can, if you let it, bring your right foot forward and it will often find the opponent's lead foot.

The extension of your right arm cuts the line of their attack, contacting their right arm behind the elbow, and disrupts their



balance, jamming their arm. This effectively neutralizes their left punch. Then, just as in the juru, after the extension, you compress to your elbow. In this particular technique, when you compress your right hand will catch either the opponent's head or their upper arm and bring that target into your left elbow and, at that point, you can follow up with a variety of methods. The primary focus of the applications from the Entry Juru is the actual entry.

An alternative, in the same initial set up, is when you shift and extend you miss their right arm because they're throwing a jab, cross combo and their jab is already gone. Now, your motion doesn't change. Your footwork got you out of the way of the jab. Your extension intercepts their left cross and jams it, again this can disrupt the balance. Again, on your compression, you catch either their head or their arm, this time the left tricep, and pull that target into your left elbow.



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Guru Mike Casto is available for seminars on a variety of subjects, workshops on AGPS or Cacoy Doce Pares Eskrima/Eskrido, and for private lessons or as a guest instructor. To get a rate sheet and discuss these opportunities contact him at: [gurumike@trainagps.com](mailto:gurumike@trainagps.com)

You can also contact Guru Mike Casto on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/gurumike](http://www.facebook.com/gurumike)

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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.

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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.

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

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