

FMA

Informative

Propagating the Filipino Martial Arts and the Culture of the Philippines

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Empty Hand Paradigm II

What's Cooking?



Finding the Perfect Recipe For Pragmatic Self-Protection

Introduction
Sizzle
Steak
T-Bone
Conclusion



Face Book Group: Cadenilla Eskrima Group - [Click Here](#)
Email: cadenillaeskrima@hotmail.com

The FMA Informative is very grateful to have Mr. Daniel Murray bring forth another part of his views on Empty Hand Paradigm. In part one of “The Empty Hand Paradigm” the FMA Informative reader explored the three categories of hand to hand conflict, the “Duel, “Fight”, and “Assault”, and considered how these three points of view can have far reaching applications to the way we view self-protection.

This second installment in the series regarding empty hand fighting will address another aspect of the overarching framework used in understanding and utilizing all martial tactics and techniques. While this is part of the series of articles on empty hand, it is a conceptual basis that applies far beyond that singular paradigm.

As Mr. Murray has pointed out in the past and also in this issue; at some point, the responsible instructor, if they are claiming to teach self-defense, are they gearing the students training toward that scenario in a realistic way.



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Mr. Murray has trained in the Filipino martial arts under Timothy Kashino and has also been blessed with the opportunity to train extensively under Senior Grandmaster Vicente Sanchez in the Philippines.

Complimentary to his love of the Filipino martial arts, Mr. Murray originally earned a Blue Belt in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu in 2005 but in 2017, after realizing he had been off the mats for too long and that the sport had changed greatly in his time away, he began anew as a white belt.

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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Introduction

In part one of “The Empty Hand Paradigm” we explored the three categories of hand to hand conflict, the “Duel”, “Fight”, and “Assault”, and considered how these three points of view can have far reaching applications to the way we view self-protection.

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You may have heard the term before “That guy is all sizzle and no steak”, essentially another way of saying someone is far more flashy than practical. This is an expression I use myself quite frequently but I also add another layer to it. This article will explore the terms “sizzle”, “steak”, and “T-bone” in order to provide perspective on how all three of these concepts are necessary for a well-rounded education.

As my training partner Vlad Navasca is fond of saying, “FMA means Food and Martial Arts”. We make this joke often as sharing food and eating as a family is a big part of what brings our group together after training sessions. However, there are in fact many parallels between “food” and “martial arts”, both in preparation and what they represent on a deeper level.

On a base level, the sole purpose of food is to nourish our bodies and sustain our life. The same can be said of martial arts. On the most basic level, the martial arts are designed to sustain our life by providing us the means to prevent our enemies from harming us.

To focus only on this basic point of food or martial arts can quickly grow boring, as well as leave practitioners ignorant to just how much “flavor” and personal expression can be found in both fields. The goal becomes to find just the right balance of “Sizzle”, “Steak”, and “T-Bone” to allow for maximum nourishment and flavor.



A simple strike is often most applicable in all circumstances. Here the author demonstrates a basic thrust to his student Brenden Hiedler.

Sizzle

It has been said that we “eat first with the eyes”. Because we are predators gifted with binocular vision, we rely most strongly on our sense of sight to form our initial opinions on anything, be it food, potential threats, and potential mating partners. After this first impression, secondary senses begin to come into play. In the case of food, this will often be our sense of smell. If something looks pleasing and smells pleasing, our animal brain tends to believe it is safe to eat. In the case of a potential threat or mate, the secondary senses will be more complicated, evaluating things such as demeanor, personality, etc. However, in light of additional information, we most often stick with the first impression provided by what we see.



Stick Locks are creative and a great example of what the arts can represent but are often unrealistic for a real encounter. These are what we call “Sizzle”

The same is true in martial arts. At some point, all of us who train saw something about the art that attracted us to it. Maybe it was a jumping spinning kick or a beautiful throw, a lightning fast stick disarm or a brutal knock out. It may have been an exceptionally well performed demonstration or perhaps it was the aura of confidence presented by a Master of the art. In any case, something

about what we saw piqued our interest enough to try it out. From there, our secondary senses determined this was something we wanted to continue with.

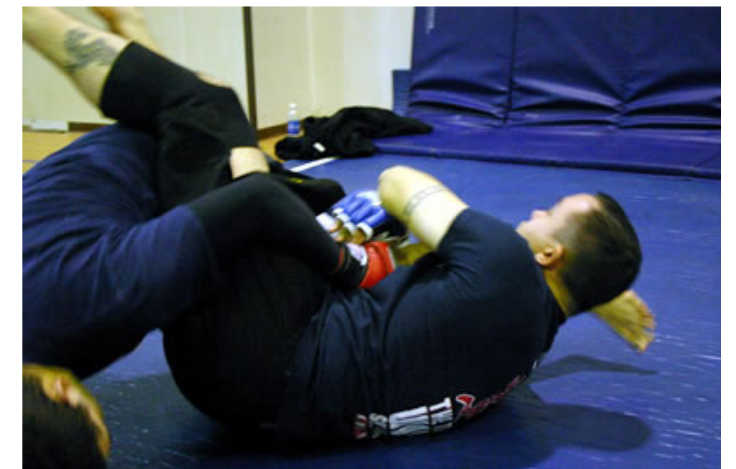
It is this visual appeal that I speak of when I use the term “Sizzle”. Understand that taken by itself, “Sizzle” is neither “good” or “bad”. Those two classifiers only come into play when a specific context is applied to the situation. As an example consider one of the modern, highly acrobatic empty hand demonstrations that have become popular over the last two decades that feature more backflips than strikes. Taken on its own merit, this type of demo shows athleticism, flexibility, and clearly a level of dedication to perform such feats. All of these are positive traits that should be expected of any martial artist. Further, such a demonstration may inspire someone watching to take up the arts themselves, ensuring a new generation of students.

If this acrobatic demo were to be placed into the context of an “Assault” however, it will quickly become obvious that these movements are not in any way suited to the situation. While they have plenty of “flavor”, they fall short to the primary purpose of martial arts and that is to sustain our life. This is an example of having much more “Sizzle” than “Steak”.

Another example would be the new trend in extremely fast and coordinated “mitt work” that we are seeing pop up in boxing and MMA gyms. On the surface these drills look incredibly impressive and can indeed serve a positive role in a student’s training, but they must be placed in context. In the context of a tool to work on cardio and speed, they are practical and sufficient. However they do not focus on footwork, proper head movement, or power generation. Taken in isolation, these drills can form more bad habits than good ones and provide little true sustenance in either a “Duel”, “Fight”, or “Assault” context. It was a reliance on these kind of “feel good” drills as opposed to good hard sparring that contributed to Ronda Rousey’s downfall. They are “Sizzle” personified.

Another way of considering “Sizzle” is as what is often called in grappling circles as “Low Percentage Technique”. These are those moves that “could” work in a variety of situations and may have in fact proven themselves effective on a specific occasion. However, they may only be effective 2 or 3 times out of every 10 attempts. It becomes a question of risk versus reward. Let’s take a jumping back spin kick as an example. Can it do damage? Certainly! Has it been used effectively in an “alive” format, i.e. against another human being who is actively trying to stop you and is utterly uncooperative and not fighting within rules designed to make the technique more practical? Yes it has. With all that said though, is that the “go to” technique that you want to have as your first thought when you are fighting for your life in a dark alley?

There is a time and place for everything. Creativity is an essential part of any martial art and the “Sizzle” is often where we see that come shining through. It is also one of the aspects of training that can be maintained even as a practitioner ages and is past their “fighting” years. But just as too much spice can ruin a great steak, it is all about proportion.



Depending on the situation, “Duel”, “Fight”, or “Assault”, a technique such as knee bar might be either “Sizzle” or “Steak” depending on the totality of the circumstances. Due to the damage such an attack could cause if executed with total commitment, it could also be an example of the “T-Bone”.

Steak

My mentor and instructor Tim Kashino used to tell me that the Abecedario (basics) of a system were like the bread of a sandwich. It holds everything together. The “meat” was that deeper understanding of what we call the “classical styles” and how they applied within the context of the Abecedario. It is the combination of these factors, along with concepts such as timing, distance, and spatial relationships that make up the “Steak” concept.

Any true Master of martial arts will tell you that there is no such thing as “advanced” techniques, just advanced applications of the basics. Solid basic technique is like a good cut of beef. Nourishing and sustaining. If the cut of beef is good quality, you won’t need to pile a ton of spice onto it to make it taste better, just a little bit to enhance what is already there. Conversely, you could drop a poor cut of beef that is mostly fat in a pan and no amount of spice and “Sizzle” is going to allow it to stand up to the superior cut.

One of the best examples of “Steak” in martial arts is Muay Thai. Relatively simple techniques developed to devastating effect that can be applied in a wide array of situations equally and all are applicable to each of the empty hand paradigms of “Duel”, “Fight”, and “Assault”. These are all “High Percentage Techniques”. They offer high reward with little comparative risk.

The problem with “Steak” is that by itself, it isn’t always that visually appealing. It’s just kind of “there” a lot of the time. Solid basic technique is not flashy and developing it to a highly effective degree is often repetitive and hard. Most people shy away from this and gravitate straight back to the “Sizzle” because it makes them feel good and look good. From a teaching standpoint, this is important to keep in mind. When I feel that students might be feeling a little burned out from thousands and thousands of tire strikes, I’ll throw in a class on twirling or demos. If people’s bodies are a little worn down from sparring, we’ll do a day of utilizing hubud as a reference point to other techniques. Just enough “Sizzle” to make the “Steak” more palatable.

“Steak” is about more than just physical technique. Many people don’t initially believe me when I say that the most important parts of your martial art education happen outside of your time in the “dojo”, but trust me on this one. In my eyes there are three elements of your training that are essential to your development as a martial artist and none of them require you to be in the presence of your teacher. Yet they are all incredibly important if you desire to be taken seriously.

The first is your fitness. If you are relying on your time in class to be your only form of exercise, you are wrong. Period. You need to do more. Maintaining your range of motion and flexibility needs to be an integral part of your training plans. Even just a few minutes a day can pay dividends. Even if you hate cardio, you need to know what your limits are so that you have the awareness of just how fast and far you

Wristlocks performed empty hand can have practical application and be “Steak” but work best when used with a “T-Bone” mindset with the intention to break the joint immediately as opposed to a control function.



Tactics like neck manipulations may not always look as impressive as other techniques but controlling the head and neck of your attacker is always a sound theory and falls into what we consider “Steak”. Here the author applies a compression and control to training partner Ben Germano



can run away from a fight. While strength training is not the focus of my workouts, I will say that nothing feels worse than being over powered. You don’t have to be the strongest person in the room but you do have to have the body mechanics and power to make sure that when you hit someone, they stay down.

The second aspect is your solo work with what you have learned. Be it through karensa, sayaws, drills, footwork, tire work, etc. While you don’t want to reinforce bad habits, once you know that you are doing something right, you need to be practicing it every chance you get. Twice a week for 20 minutes per class will help, but it will not develop the familiarity and learning that 15 minutes every single day will. It is a question of passion and desire. If you want to get good, you have to put in the work. Of the three elements, this one is usually not that hard to convince a student of.

The third and in some ways most important, is your scholarly work. You need to be reading and studying and writing. What is the history of your system? Do you know it? Why not? How can you tell people about what you do or where your art comes from? What about the basic history of systems other than your own? Are you watching documentaries and reading books? Are you accepting the history lessons presented by your teacher as gospel truth or are you willing to consider alternate narratives? There are three sides to any story and if you are to be taken seriously you need to know all of them. Are you taking notes? A notebook is probably the easiest way to document and accelerate your training and yet so few students bother to do it. It is this third element that helps differentiate the casual student from the future expert.

These are the far less obvious aspects of the art that will definitely show you if someone has the “Steak” to back up the “Sizzle”

T-Bone



Tactics that cause pain for the sake of forcing an opponent to move or release a grip (as opposed to trying to restrain or control them) are an example of the viciousness of the “T-Bone”.

So what happens when all that sizzle has faded and there is no steak left? What are you capable of after it becomes clear that the low percentage techniques are not going to be applicable and even your high percentage material seems questionable or insufficient for the situation.

When I use the term “T-Bone”, I am not referring to a specific set of techniques, but rather to a state of mind. The 2009 film “Law Abiding Citizen” features a scene in which the imprisoned antagonist eats a t-bone steak and then, lacking any other weapons, uses the t-bone itself to stab his cellmate in the throat and kill him. It is this level of pragmatism and viciousness that I want people to consider when I use the term “T-Bone”.

Please understand that I am not advocating deadly force without proper consideration for the totality of circumstances as well as your moral and legal responsibilities. However, the need for this level of force is a sad reality of the human condition and to think otherwise is to court disaster. With that said, let us first consider the pragmatic nature of the “T-Bone”.

Pragmatic means “dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations.” To me, this means a solid understanding of what the warrior arts, of any style or system, are originally intended for without consideration to sporting application, fitness, or personal improvement. That is not to say those aspects are not important.

People train in martial arts for dozens of reasons unrelated to protecting themselves and their loved ones. I am simply saying that for an individual to have any hope of realistically surviving a “Fight” or “Assault” situation, they MUST look at their art pragmatically. What techniques and tactics do you have at your disposal that can be used in those circumstances you are most likely to face in a “Fight” or “Assault”?

Secondary to your existing techniques, another aspect of this pragmatism is realistically taking account of what tools you have at your disposal at any given moment to use in your protection. Short of an expandable baton, no Filipino martial artist that I know carries a stick on a regular basis as their first line of self-protection. Even fewer ever carry a bolo or a long knife, much less a “knife rig” that carries five or seven knives as part of their “Every Day Carry”.

Here is an exercise. Stop reading and look around you for everything within a few feet of you that you could pick up and consider how you could use that to injure an attacker if they were to immediately burst into your home. It may be an impact tool, a stabbing tool, a combination of the two (a beer bottle for example) or even a chemical weapon such as a can of wasp spray or a bleach. How quickly one adapts to variables and can make use of their environment is a very important part of realistic self-protection.

After these ideas are addressed, consider the viciousness of the “T-Bone” paradigm. Very few schools that teach weapon based arts ever honestly talk about the mental and emotional aspects of actually using a weapon on another human being. There is a fantasy that an attacker will simply stop or be knocked out after a proper stick strike or that you can use a knife to defend yourself without becoming involved in a potential bloodbath. Empty Hand combat can be just as vicious and messy. When your life is in danger and the conditions have been met for you to morally and legally do whatever is necessary to ensure you walk away alive, are you prepared to go to any extreme? Have you mentally prepared yourself for the possibility that you may have to kill in order to save your own life? Do you fully believe that your life is more important than your attacker?

Commonly, our art is taught in one of two ways. Some teachers focus on the sporting and personal development side of the art, while others focus on the fighting applications. Sadly, those that teach mostly the fighting applications tend to fall in one of two categories themselves. They teach the art either in a “traditional” sense with no thought given to the modern ramifications of a tribal art used for warfare, or they teach as a modern paramilitary “ultra deadly” knife and stick art that once again, gives no thought to the legal and moral ramifications of such a style. (Don’t get me started on the fact that many of these people have absolutely no military or police background and the only thing that makes many of these teachers “tactical” is that they are wearing camouflage pants). I can count on one hand the number of teacher’s I’ve met who actually put any thought into legal consequences.

We do not live in the Wild West or in feudal Japan. In American at least, we live in a litigious society with very strict rules for how a man might defend himself, rules that change from state to state. Most citizens are not even aware that these specifics to self-defense laws exist, much less how they may apply to someone utilizing martial arts or weapons.

As we mentioned in the “Assault” section of the first article, the flip assertion that “it is better to be judged by twelve than carried by six” will be small comfort to a young man who misuses his knowledge and ends up paying for that mistake with years of his life in prison. By that token, no amount of legal waivers or disclaimers absolves a teacher of his moral accountability for what he teaches.

Regardless of your training methodology, you are responsible not just for what you have been taught but for how you chose to use it. Not equipping yourself with a basic knowledge of the consequences of your actions both legally and morally is doing a great disservice and setting yourself up for potentially life changing results.

You must at all times remember that YOU are the weapon, not the stick, not the bolo, not the knife. If you do not have faith in your ability to protect yourself and your loved ones without those tools, you need to seriously reevaluate how and why you are training.

These ideas, and how they connect everything else that you do, are the proverbial “T-Bone” in your martial art experience.



Eye gouges are no replacement for solid strikes and ground work, but they can definitely be used as an “enhancement” to other tactics or at the very least a distraction.

Conclusion

The American folk singer John Prine once related a story that during an intermission of a show he was playing in a bar, a woman came up to him and stated “I wish you would play a song that I know so that I can tell if you are any good or not”. The woman had no frame of reference to compare him to in order to establish the quality of what she was listening to.

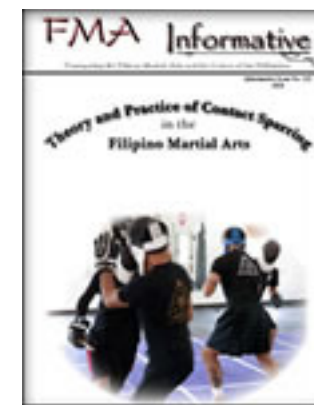
The same can be said of food. A dear friend of mine often relates a story that until he was in his early twenties, he’d only ever eaten steak that was “well done”. He had no comparison prove it but he was sure that “well done” was the way a steak should be. However, once he was convinced to eat a steak that was cooked “medium” he suddenly realized what he’d been missing out on. There was no going back to the old way of doing things.

Watching promotional materials of other martial artists can often create a similar sentiment. It is much easier to film and convey “Sizzle” in a two minute clip than it is to express what makes a system effective or unique. Additionally, that kind of video would be less likely to attract the newcomer. For these reasons, discerning “Sizzle” from “Steak” is no different than in real life. You have to try it and see for yourself. You may find that there is no going back to old ways.

Keep in mind that just because the system, the “cut of beef” so to speak, might be good, that doesn’t mean that the instructor, in this case the chef, can prepare it. I have seen two teachers of the same system vary greatly in regards to the quality of their instruction. Consider the fact that all boxing coaches are essentially teaching the same basic technique but there is a world of difference in the quality of fighters they produce. This is one of those situations where the “3 Factors” in the “Steak” portion really become obvious.

Now that the base paradigms and concepts used to provide the frame work to understanding Empty Hand material have been established, it is possible to begin delving into actual technique, which will make up the next installment in this series.

The FMA Informative reader may remember Daniel from is 2015 FMA Informative issue #201 - Cadenilla



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Eskrima Group written about the very basic, concepts and principles of Lightning Scientific Arnis - originally called “Tersia Serrada Cadenilla y Espada y Daga” - from Senior Grandmaster Vicente Sanchez.

Or from 2016 his very informative and realistic look at “Theory and Practice of Contact Sparring in in the Filipino martial arts” FMA Informative - Issue 220. In the issue Mr. Murray presents a number of key theories designed to establish a conceptual framework for the development of an effective sparring program that while designed specifically for the Filipino martial arts can be applied to virtually any style.



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

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