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Building The Perfect K-1 Fighter

A dash of Peter, a touch of Maurice, a pinch of Ernesto and a smidge of Andy. And voila. You have built yourself the prototypical K-1 fighter.

By Terry L. Wilson

One of the most punishing contests in the world of contact martial arts is the K-1 Grand Prix. To earn the title of "champion" a fighter must win three fights on the same evening, generally with just 45 minutes of rest in between.

This grueling contest not only puts to task a fighter's skills, but also his physical stamina and mental endurance. To be the last one standing in the K-1 requires much preparation. And no one knows that better than Bob Chaney.

Once a champion and world-class fighter himself, Chaney still spends much of his time trading leather and kicks in the ring. But Chaney is best known for training champion muay Thai fighters. As an observer of K-1 battles throughout the world, Chaney says there are reasons an Ernesto Hoost or Peter Aerts succeeds while Jerome LeBanner and Masaaki Satake fall by the wayside.

"The guys who are winning in the K-1 events are coming out of Holland, Germany, France, New Zealand, and Japan and they're cross-training in boxing and muay Thai," explains Chaney. "One of the most-important elements when grooming a fighter for the K-1 is for him to have international experi-

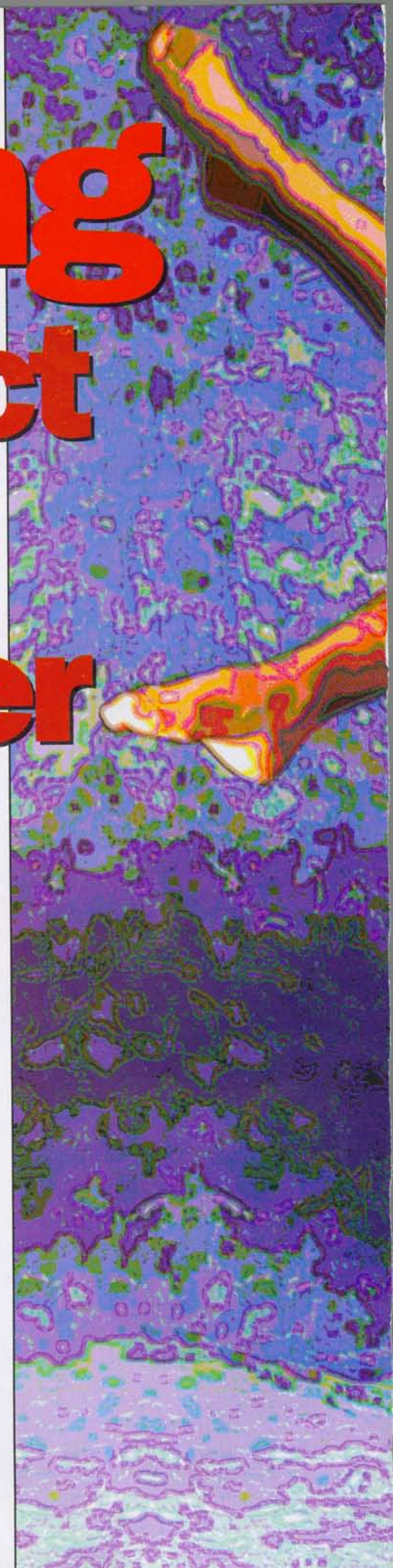
ence. An American fighter who has only fought in the United States isn't equipped to fight K-1 fighters from other parts of the world. They don't train seriously enough and aren't conditioned for that level of competition. Most of the heavyweights that could be serious contenders go for the money in other pro sports like boxing or football.

"If I were grooming a fighter for K-1 I'd take him to Thailand and train him in muay Thai," he adds. "Then I'd get him into a good professional boxing gym and teach him strong punching skills."

The K-1 Formula

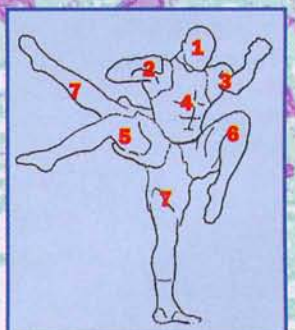
Chaney insists that all he would need is six months of kicking training with Mike Tyson or Lennox Lewis to create the first K-1/World Heavyweight Champion. According to Chaney, kicks are important, but it's a fighter's ability to use those kicks to set up damaging punches that usually determines the winners.

"Strong hand techniques prevail," Chaney insists. "You must have good kicks, but those who win the K-1 usually do it with their hands. One of the things American fighters don't do is to train with good boxers. The other thing they don't do is enough conditioning. In the





- 1) Ernesto Hoost
- 2) "Duke" Roufus
- 3) Francisco Filho
- 4) Andy Hug
- 5) Peter Aerts
- 6) Stefan Leko
- 7) Maurice Smith

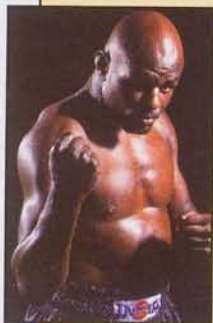


Ranking the Fighters

Muay Thai veteran Bob Chaney rates the strengths and weaknesses of K-1 Grand Prix greats.

PETER AERTS: Strengths — Height and aggression allow him to throw everything strong. Throws hand combinations and finishes with strong kicks. Good leg kicker, good high kicker, Good chin.

Weaknesses — One-dimensional fighter; somewhat predictable. Often not hungry enough. Strategically weak. Not always in top condition.

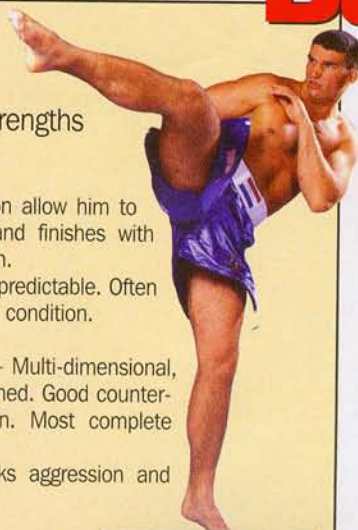


ERNESTO HOOST: Strengths — Multi-dimensional, smart experienced, and well-conditioned. Good counter-puncher, good strategist, good chin. Most complete fighter in the history of K-1.

Weaknesses — Sometimes lacks aggression and motivation.

ANDY HUG: Strengths — He was the complete package. Probably the best kicker, with equally strong hands. Very disciplined.

Weaknesses — Tended to overtrain and this left him at less than 100 percent on fight night.



RICK ROUFUS: Strengths — Excellent boxing skills, good head movement, strategically strong, good heart, strong chin.

Weaknesses — Lacked kicking and leg checking skills. Tendency to be too aggressive, particularly with taller fighters. This leaves himself open to counterattacks and getting caught during the act of committing forward motion.



MAURICE SMITH: Strengths — Great technique, experienced, good leg kicker with decent hands. Strong heart, good chin, tricky fighter. Tears his opponents down with technique and superior strategy.

Weaknesses — Late starter giving up early rounds to more-aggressive fighters. Not always hungry; lacks motivation and desire. Lacks head movement; limited boxing skills.

STEFAN LEKO: Strengths — Very strong hands, good chin, aggressiveness, good timing and counterpunching skills.

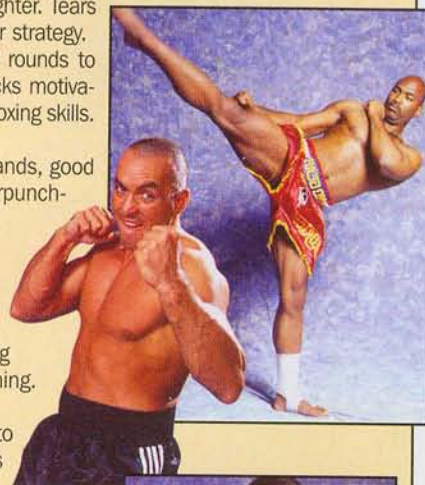
Weaknesses — Lacks leg-kicking skills.



MARK HUNT:

Strengths — Aggressive, comes forward, decent leg kicker and great conditioning. Can absorb punishment.

Weaknesses — Likes to exchange punches, needs work on set-up and strategy. Holds his head high, vulnerable to the overhand right cross or left hook.



FRANCISCO FILHO: Strengths — Very strong kicker, converted shotokan stylist with a strong heart.

Weaknesses — Knees, and boxing skills and has limited movement. Tends to stay in front of his opponent; needs to learn to work angles.



"DUKE" ROUFUS: Strengths — Good hands, good heart, good timing, aggressiveness with ability to absorb punishment.

Weakness — Doesn't work angles, needs strategy and set-up. Needs to be more patient and work more kicks off his hands. Weak knees.

Building The Perfect K-1 Fighter

K-1 a fighter must fight three times in an evening (to win). So conditioning is an absolute must."

K-1 fighters must learn to be "smart" in the ring. Because a fighter has to face more than one opponent in his quest for the title, he must take care not to get injured in the early going of the event. For example, in the first K-1 USA, Curtis Schuster was so hurt after his semifinal match he had to withdraw from the championship bout.

"Injuries are more debilitating if you're not in top physical condition," Chaney says. "Injuries frequently happen because the fighter isn't in good enough shape to counter or avoid the attack. An athlete that's conditioned properly can continue after being injured. Heart plays an important role, too. There are not a lot of American kickboxers out there with the heart necessary to endure the K-1 level of competition. You can give a fighter all the training in the world, but if he doesn't have the heart or the will to win he will fail."

Worth the Weight

Chaney also believes strongly in weight training. He says the right selection of a good weight training coach who knows how to develop drills that create explosive power can put the KO in a fighter's punch.

"I think that weightlifting is downplayed and that's a serious mistake," said Chaney. "Weight lifting is a major reason why fighters like Mike Tyson have so much strength. Technique is important, but almost more important is a fighter's strength."

A fighter also must possess the intangible quality of recovery time.

"The key to getting in shape for a full-contact match is recovery time," Chaney explained. "What I mean by that is the time it takes to recover from a full-out sprint while jogging. When I'm training a fighter I'll run with him and after about a one mile warm-up I'll say, 'see that house 70 or 80 yards away? Hit it!' He'll run full out and

Continued on page 84

How to Master Dim Mak Pressure Points

Dr Pier Tsui-Po, Grandmaster of the Golden Lion Martial Arts Academy, reveals the secrets of authentic Dim Mak for self defence and healing. With 38 years of martial arts experience, a qualified Acupuncturist and Chinese Herbalist, he is a leading authority on this ancient martial technique. You can benefit from his wealth of knowledge in the following ways:



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Tai Chi 1-2-3

Continued from page 57

Ageless Wonder

Advances in medicine have resulted in a greater lifespan among people. And this has resulted in an increase in falls and fractures among older Americans. Olivas notes this program could have world-wide implications by benefiting the doubly impaired, as well as all seniors and others with balance problems.

Olivas maintains that in the United States, more than 4.5 million people will turn 55 each year for the next decade. This group is most at risk for heart attack, stroke, other stress-related conditions and osteoporosis. He believes that for the martial arts industry to capture a part of this segment, it has to offer programs that include stretching, chi kung and then tai chi so health benefits can be realized in a short time. He further believes a window of opportunity exists for martial arts instructors to reach this largest demographic group.

Olivas taught at Gathering of Eagles II last year in Las Vegas, where he presented his tai chi application and marketing program. This drew high praise from the national and international kenpo practitioners, according to grandmaster Tracy. At the Gathering of Eagles II, Olivas was honored with his senior master rank — eighth-degree black belt — for his lifetime contribution to the arts.

After one of his classes he was asked, "How do you know your program will work?"

"I know it will because I'm living it!" he confidently responded.

Ernest B. Altekruze, M.D., of Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, studies tai chi with sifu Paul Olivas.

Building the K-1 Fighter

Continued from page 74

blitz back, and we continue jogging. He's dying he's so out of breath, but I'm fine. It takes him about a minute to recover, and now he's jogging and talking with me just like before. Then I'll send him out on another sprint and we continue to repeat the process. Now three weeks later we're at it again only after we find a 30-degree incline set of stairs. After several weeks the same guy is just as tired when he comes back from the sprint because running all out is running all out. The difference is his recovery time. Now it's down to about 40 seconds; eventually it will get down to 20 seconds. So in a fight, the pro fighter will be able fight at various levels of intensity. A fighter should never go so hard and so long to where he is totally out of gas."

A fighter also can conserve energy by using some ring smarts in combination with good techniques. Chaney believes that the better a fighter's technique, the more efficient he becomes. That should give him a definite edge in the later rounds of the contest. Ring experience equates to relaxation. And relaxation means conservations of energy.

Fighting smart takes on a potpourri of meanings. One of the most valuable lessons for a fighter to learn is how and when

"An American fighter who has only fought in the United States isn't equipped to fight K-1 fighters from other parts of the world."

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Building the K-1 Fighter

Continued from page 76

to set up an opponent. Chaney believes that all too often the kick is employed when a punch would do the job more efficiently.

"You see a lot of fighters lead with a kick and that in my opinion is a mistake," said Chaney. "That leads to getting your leg checked, injured or broken. And you risk getting caught during your forward motion. For example, if I'm fighting you and you lead off with a leg kick, I can check you with my knee against your instep. I can bust you up real fast that way. Leading with a kick is also easier to read, so I prefer to start with strong hands and finish with a kick."

Punch vs. Push

Chaney says the difference between punching something and pushing it depends upon how much time you allow your punch or kick to extend into the target. The muay Thai and tae kwon do expert also proclaims that many fighters open themselves up for an attack because they don't understand the scientific concept that allows them to get the most bang for their buck without exposing themselves to a counterattack.

"Fighters are most vulnerable when they're hitting," says Chaney. "Most fighters extend their punch beyond their center of power; they're reaching out to make contact. Also, when a person's hands and arms are extended they're wide open for a counter. They can't cover

"You can give a fighter all the training in the world but if he doesn't have the heart or the will to win he will fail."

up in the amount of time it takes for their opponent to hit back. Your hands should never punch more than six or eight inches, because most of your power is generated from body motion. Don't extend the technique. That turns your punch into a push. Keep it short and powerful."

In a K-1-style event a wide variety of styles find their way to the center ring. The arsenal of techniques can include muay Thai, traditional karate, kung-fu and tae kwon do. So how does a fighter know which kick to use and when?

"I think all of these kicks can be effective," said Chaney. "You just have to know which ones to use in a given situation. For example, I like a muay Thai 'teep' kick to keep an opponent off balance. The teep kick is used like a fighter would use his jab, except instead of using your fist, you use the foot. The teep kick makes it difficult for an opponent to close the gap and keeps him off balance."

Chaney's decades of experience as both a fighter and trainer leads him to one final conclusion regarding full-contact competition.

"It's like a war in there," said Chaney. "What's the best weapon to use? A fighter should train so he can effectively use everything from every style. You may have to change that plan during the fight, but it's important to have a battle plan going in. Like I said, in K-1 you're going to fight multiple fights and each one will be different. It's a chess game and you've got to be flexible enough to make him fight your fight." 🐉

Terry L. Wilson is a frequent contributor to Inside Kung-Fu.



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