

COMBAT & HEALING

THE MAGAZINE OF THE WORLD TAIJI BOXING ASSOC.



MARCH 1993 NUMBER 12

COMBAT & HEALING

EDITOR

Erle Montague

ART DIRECTOR

Ben Gabriel

U.S Correspondent, Rolly Brown:

SUB EDITORS:

Sandra Press and Eli Dana

TECHNICAL ADVISORS

Master Wang Xin-Wu China (Taiji, H'sin-I)

Master Chong Kwok China (Healing)

Master Mak Po-Sun Australia (Taiji)

Master Shao Shan-Karn China (H'sin-I)

Michael Babin Sifu Canada (Taiji)

Edward H Star Sifu USA (Kung-Fu)

Master Fu Sheng-yuan Australia (Taiji)

Mike Sigman U.S.A. (Chen Taiji)

Master Fu Zhongwen China (Yang Taiji)

Stephen Hurst Sifu England (Taiji)

Graham Noble Sensei England (Karate)

Uri Slomonski Poland (Pa-Kua Chang)

Master Dan Inosanto USA (Geet Kune do)

Jim Uglow, England (Hung-Gar & Taiji)

T'ai Chi, Combat & Healing is independently owned and published for the International Martial Arts Community, distributed worldwide. Opinions and viewpoints expressed in this magazine do not necessarily represent those of the editor, staff or publishers. Many will disagree, many will agree with articles and views published in the magazine. In the interest of fairplay and harmony among martial arts schools, all responsible instructors, individuals or organisations with something valid to say will be given a go.

POSTAL ADDRESS:

Taiji Publications, P/O Box 792 Murwillumbah NSW
2484 Australia (066)797145.

Published quarterly by Taiji Publications. Reproduction of any material without permission is strictly prohibited. All material remains under copyright to the publisher.

The acceptance of advertising does not necessarily imply endorsement of services or products. All articles, photographs and other material submitted for publication must be accompanied by return postage unless specifically solicited. Contributions are encouraged with each article being accepted or not upon its own merit.

Our eternal thanks to **Kevin Brennan, Editor supreme** of **Australasian Fighting Arts Magazine** for his valuable help and ideas.

printed by 'THE PRINT SPOT' Murwillumbah NSW Australia



ABOUT THE COVER

Mike Sigman and Michael Babin. Two outspoken members of the "World Taiji Boxing Association". Both believe in a less mystical approach to their Taiji.

See inside for their articles

CONTENTS

- 1 Does Taiji Relieve Stress:
An article by Michael Babin on an important part of one's taiji training.
- 3 Tournament Push Hands
An article by Mike Sigman on the judging of push hands tournaments and much more.
- 7 Ken Johnson a high ranking karateman taking to Taiji in a big way.
By Erle Montague
- 12 Taiji, The greatest Qigong
By Erle Montague
- 15 The Active Ingredients By Wally Simpson:
An Australian acupuncturist and Taiji practitioner takes a look at Qi from that level.
- 18 WTBA NEWS PAGE

WTBA TRAINING CAMPS 1993 Australia

March 19-23. Then September 29th to 5th October
To be held at Midginbill Camp Northern NSW.

The cost will be \$250.00 for the week long camp all inclusive and
\$150.00 for the two day camp, all inclusive.

All you have to bring are some eating utensiles and bedding etc.

Phone us here at (066)797145 or Fax: (066)797028

DOES T'AI CHI CH'UAN RELIEVE STRESS?

by Michael Babin

Many beginners take-up T'ai Chi because they read or have been told by physicians or devotees that such practice is easy and will help them to learn how to reduce their stress levels.

Contrary to these expectations, it is more likely that the first few weeks/months of classes will serve only to elevate the stress-levels of the average beginner as he or she discovers that T'ai chi is not as effortless as it looks.

Even with adequate and sincere instructor, a novice is more likely to leave a T'ai Chi class tense and frustrated. If the style uses low stances or poor body mechanics; he or she is also likely to be stiff and sore; especially, if the individual is in poor physical condition.

Contrary to these expectations, it is more likely that the first few weeks/months of classes will serve only to elevate the stress-levels of the average beginner as he or she discovers that T'ai chi is not as effortless as it looks.

There is no doubt that, with time and effort, T'ai Chi form practice brings many mental and physical benefits. However, are all T'ai Chi forms and practices really beneficial in terms of teaching you how to reduce your stress levels on a physiological level?



Michael Babin: "I thought I heard someone down here"

Not, it would seem, if your practice consists exclusively of one of the many recent versions of slow form, especially in the Yang style. Modern research is reinforcing the paradoxical notion that you actually have to put some effort into relaxing!

Researchers in a recent study at the University of Wisconsin in the United States reported that vigorous aerobic exercise triggered a significant drop in anxiety/stress levels. More interestingly, the physiological effects lasted for approximately three hours after cessation of the exercise, versus fewer than 30 minutes for quiet relaxation or passive meditation.

Long, slow form is an active form of meditation and does stimulate the body {recent research in the U.S. has shown that such practice provides the equivalent exercise value to walking at a moderate pace for an equivalent amount of time} as well as the mind/spirit.

However, a vigorous workout is more effective in stimulating the

body to produce endorphins, those chemicals that promote a sense of well-being. In addition such vigorous workouts raise the
Babin/stress/3

body temperature which triggers certain chemical changes in the brain that help ease anxiety (hot showers and saunas have much the same effect).

Sadly, many of the modern variations of Yang-style T'ai Chi have become so "effortless" that they do very little in terms of creating either physical skills or internal development; much

less reducing stress on an internal level. This is particularly true if you don't do any of the martial exercises of T'ai Chi or if you only do slow form.

Simplifying T'ai Chi is hardly a new trend. In the Yang style, Yang Ch'eng-fu changed his father's form several times to try and meet the needs of larger and larger segments of the Chinese population.

The trend towards making form practice easier is due, in part, to the desire of many modern instructors to make the form more accessible to those who need it the most: those unused to exercise as well as seniors and the physically-challenged.

Simplifying T'ai Chi is hardly a new trend. In the Yang style, Yang Ch'eng-fu changed his father's form several times to try and meet the needs of larger and larger segments of the Chinese population.

Such motivation is laudable as long as such training methods remain in the hands of those they are designed for and do not replace traditional forms for those *WHO ARE OR CAN BECOME CAPABLE OF DOING THEM*.

It is also sadly true that many instructor's change the forms that they have inherited for base purposes. Human nature being what it is, the incompetent or fraudulent are often able to seduce large numbers of students into believing that the less they do physically, the more mystical/internal the benefits. This is often accomplished by wrapping the debased practices in the mantle of "ancient secrets".

It is also sadly true that many instructor's change the forms that they have inherited for base purposes.

Without getting into the fruitless debate of who should or should-not teach T'ai Chi; it is patently evident that many instructors are not much further ahead than their students in terms of real internal skill/knowledge.

In light of scientific research (and common-sense), it would seem obvious that the traditional styles of T'ai Chi (ie., old Yang Family and Chen) and/or those that have fast or slow/fast forms would be of the greatest use in terms of maximizing stress-reduction.

Of course, this does not mean that you should abandon doing the long, slow meditative forms — only that you should supplement their practice with vigorous push-hands; the use of fast forms and/or such methods as punching a heavy bag or a speed ball.

In my own teaching, I have noticed that those days in which students drag themselves to class with long faces and fatigued steps that they usually perk-up dramatically after a few minutes of using me as a "heavy bag" while practicing their techniques with speed and power. On the

other hand, perhaps there's just something satisfying about hitting me ...?

As in all aspects of the internal arts, there is a negative side to reducing stress through a hard work-out. I would like to select one particular aspect which is relevant to those of you who still smoke.

Recent medical research also seems to be indicating that the cardiovascular systems of smokers can be starved for blood during exercise because of previously unsuspected damage to tiny blood vessels.

A combination of smoking and stress pushes the already elevated heart attack risk of smokers even higher, according to recent research done at the Iowa Heart Institute in the United states. Researchers there found that the flow of blood to the heart in smokers fell well below the levels of those in non-smokers during times of aerobic exercise/stress; thus increasing the possibility of heart attack.

Recent medical research also seems to be indicating that the cardiovascular systems of smokers can be starved for blood during exercise because of previously unsuspected damage to tiny blood vessels.

Such damage is difficult to detect through conventional heart tests which means that smokers could be wrongly told that they are "healthy" enough to start an exercise program.

As in any worthwhile activity, a mental AND physical investment is needed to acquire the necessary skills in an internal martial art.

In the long run, T'ai Chi does relieve stress and is relatively effortless — once you know what you are doing! Until then, the average beginner is more likely to leave a class physically sore and mentally frustrated. More

advanced students should finish feeling as if they have worked; but not to the point of exhaustion.

As in all aspects of T'ai Chi and the internal arts, it's really a question of balancing the external and internal aspects of your training.

Michael Babin

Heads the W.T.B.A. in Canada and has been a contributing writer for the magazine since its birth.

The excellent book, "*T'ai Chi, The Martial Side*" is written by Michael and is available from bookstores. For the purpose of ordering, tell the store that it is published by;

Paladin Press
P/O Box 1307 Boulder CO
80306 U.S.A.

You may purchase directly from them as well.

To contact Michael Babin for training etc. Phone:
613-7397805

MIKE SIGMAN

(Denver Chen Style Society)

Mike Sigman has just released two training videos. No. 1 is called "*Basic Building Blocks Of Internal Stength*"

No.2 is called "*Basic Push Hands, Using Internal Strength*".

Both videos are recommended and show some baics that many tend to leave out, mainly because they don't know them. Mike does Chen style, however, his videos are useful for all styles.

You can contact Mike at;
Ph:(303)2789894
312 Crawford Court Golden
CO 80401 U.S.A.

TOURNAMENT PUSH HANDS

By Mike Sigman Colorado U.S.A.

“Peng...is the concealed strength because it is created mainly by feeling and craft and it can be barely discerned in the surface of the forms. ...In tuishou (push-hands) practice, the learner is said to have crossed the threshold only when he has learned the meaning and method of peng. Beginners often take years to accomplish this. The warding force (peng) is used to determine the entering force and its direction of the opponent. It is solid in one respect but void in another. It appears solid but is void in reality and vice versa. The strength and attempt of the opponent is seen, but one’s own strength is kept hidden from him. That is why it is called the concealed force. While practicing, not only the hands and arms, but any part of the body which gets into contact with the opponent makes use of the warding force (peng). It has been described as an audible force, because you can detect the fine motions of your opponent as if through the sense of hearing, and you can thus make a rapid response for rapid attack and a slow response for slow attack. The strength needed for warding depends only on the opponent. If the force of the attack from the opponent is heavy, your peng force must also be increased and if it is light, your warding force is also decreased accordingly. You must not hold up against him nor lose contact. Your peng force should not exceed your opponent’s.”

Ma Yueh-liang and Zee Wen, Taichichuan Tuishou

I listened to a lot of the discussion this year about the low level of the push-hands in many of the tournaments in North America. Although the trend of spoken concern seems to go toward the referees who allow the matches to deteriorate, I think there are more factors involved than just the referees and I also optimistically think that there are solutions to most of the problems.

The most overlooked aspect of T'ai Chi seems to be demonstrable results, particularly as they should be in relation to the Classics, in relation to demonstrations by world-class masters, and in relation to anecdotes of previous masters.

In my opinion, the tournaments offer one of the best forums for the improvement of North American T'ai Chi. The tournaments should be encouraged and supported, but they

have to earn those endorsements by striving for excellence. I personally support the idea of tournaments; I oppose those tournaments which promote poor T'ai Chi Chuan under the premise that all T'ai Chi is good T'ai Chi.

There are two major problems with most current T'ai Chi tournaments, the young level of current T'ai Chi and the seeming inability of the tournament promoters to acknowledge and deal with the growing, but still young level. Defensiveness abounds, too; I've found that any attempt at discussing a demonstrated low level often results in wounded cries of personal attack.

In my opinion, the tournaments offer one of the best forums for the improvement of North American T'ai Chi. The tournaments should be encouraged and supported, but they have to earn those endorsements by striving for excellence.

Certainly it would be more diplomatic to say nothing about the abilities of the tournament officials, but once they allow themselves to be put in a position of judging other (and equally important) people, the door is open to discuss *their* abilities. Bear in mind that these volunteer officials are *not* bad guys...they're just a part of the beginning level T'ai Chi enthusiasts in North America.

Often, it seems, the credentials in “brotherhood and sisterhood” and “T'ai Chi Friendship” far outweigh such incidentals as good T'ai Chi in some of the tournament circles.

T'ai Chi Chuan is a disciplined, multi-faceted hobby which I enjoy more than I can express. The presence or absence of a supportive T'ai Chi clique or of “brothers and sisters” is not of great consequence, although I enjoy almost all of my fellow enthusiasts.

Often, it seems, the credentials in “brotherhood and sisterhood” and



Mike Sigman: Pushing Hands With Rocky Todd

“T'ai Chi Friendship” far outweigh such incidentals as good T'ai Chi in some of the tournament circles. *Esprit de corps* is certainly desirable and I respect all who devote their time to T'ai Chi...but *good* T'ai Chi comes first.

It always bewilders me to hear discussions about results digress immediately into discussions about multi-years of experience, the focus on traditional T'ai Chi, the heroic discussions about the sage-like teacher, etc.

The Problems in General

The most overlooked aspect of T'ai Chi seems to be demonstrable results, particularly as they should be in relation to the Classics, in relation to demonstrations by world-class masters, and in relation to anecdotes of previous masters.

It always bewilders me to hear discussions about results digress immediately into discussions about multi-years of experience, the focus on **traditional** T'ai Chi, the heroic discussions about the sage-like teacher,

etc. These off-the-topic discussions are as sincerely described as are earnestly overlooked the reasons why the talker's form or push-hands is markedly stiff, or why they've never learned to use internal power. It's the immature level in general, I believe, and not just at the tournaments.

Again, I don't attach any ill intent to these phenomena, but they do exist and need to be addressed, since they have an affect on the attitude and approach to tournaments.

The idea of some tournament promoters that you don't have to do good T'ai Chi in order to officiate at a tournament is propagated only by people who don't do good T'ai Chi.

And sure, we could fault individual referees for not having the personal skill and expertise to know the *how* and *what* to guide the contestants toward good T'ai Chi, but how about the level of the judges and the levels of the contestants? Many tournament judges are the “teacher” (often read “friend, con-artist, political ac-

quaintance,” etc.) from down the road who has some talking credentials in T'ai Chi, but who is quite often less-skilled than many of the competitors.

Adding to the melee is the fact that many of our enthusiastic competitors are the product of student-level teachers, student-level referees, student-level judges, and overly aggressive fellow competitors. Most of the tournament winners I know are quite content with their victories; further interest in T'ai Chi seems to be based only on its relationship to tournament wins...real T'ai Chi principles often seem to have lost their enticement. If it wins, it must be good T'ai Chi.

At every tournament that I've attended, there have been routine concessions to excellence by allowing officials of questionable credentials to referee and judge.

That's not to say that there is *no* good T'ai Chi out there, it's just heavily outnumbered. It's very difficult to overcome the inertia of many people doing poor T'ai Chi, particularly when **they** don't view it as poor T'ai Chi. And because most North American T'ai Chi is not results oriented, pretty much any abstruse criterion satisfies many practitioners that they are doing “good T'ai Chi.”

At every tournament that I've attended, there have been routine concessions to excellence by allowing officials of questionable credentials to referee and judge. Although sometimes unavoidable, such a situation is very unfair to the competitors and the spectators, both of whom are the really important people at a tournament, not the officials.

The idea of some tournament promoters that you don't have to do good T'ai Chi in order to officiate at a tournament is propagated only by people who don't do good T'ai Chi. Putting your financial neck on the block by promoting a tournament doesn't increase your skills and

judgement in T'ai Chi, either, but it does endear you mightily to the rest of us enthusiasts...particularly if you put on a good tournament.

Because few challenges are being made about the **quality** of T'ai Chi, at **all** levels, many errors are being made. Tournament officiating needs constant scrutiny and a consensus of basic groundrules would provide a framework for the scrutiny.

Because few challenges are being made about the quality of T'ai Chi, at all levels, many errors are being made.

Also, often compounding the problems of a tournament is finding **enough** judges, let alone well-qualified ones. The question often devolves to whether to tolerate some questionable judging or not to have the tournament, with all of its positive benefits, at all. It's a tough call. At the moment, all I can suggest is culling the known *poseurs* from the officials and work our way up from there.

It's diplomatically impossible to obtain a set of qualified judges without "embarrassing" some people who are certain that they're qualified, but we need to go in that direction. It's equally hard to examine some of these subjects in articles without "embarrassing" some of these same people. However, I haven't seen many of these people flinch from the idea of embarrassing some competitors who have lost competitions when they shouldn't have...if the judges had been truly knowledgeable.

The Problems in Particular

Over the last five or six years, I've overheard many comments from the observers of tournament push-hands, some positive, but most comments negative. Generally speaking, I think that the majority of negative

comments refer to the stiff, grappling aspect of most tournament push-hands. The "turning-of-the-corner" which bothers me seems to come with accepting the necessity of a muscular competition in lieu of the soft, skilled competition spoken of in Classical literature.

If, as I've heard voiced, "Tournament Push-Hands" is by necessity a harsher, more muscular version of "Real Push-Hands," then what is the point in sponsoring it? What is exhibited in most tourneys today does not require especially different skills from those found on most school playgrounds. A good wrestler (yes, this has happened quite a few times) can walk off with the trophies if the officiating body allows non-T'ai Chi criteria to prevail in the naive hope that "good T'ai Chi will win."

It's diplomatically impossible to obtain a set of qualified judges without "embarrassing" some people who are certain that they're qualified,

T'ai Chi fixed-step push-hands is not wrestling or fighting, it is far more constrained. If the same constraints are not required of both parties, then the advantage is with the contender who has greater root, strength, and technique, not necessarily better T'ai Chi. The person who is trying to practice good T'ai Chi is at a disadvantage in a contest where the officials' T'ai Chi skills are too immature to know what to allow and what to disallow.

The very important purpose of developing and using internal strength is usually circumvented in the current approach to tournament push-hands.

Modifying the Rules

From the direction of each tourney I constantly hear of new approaches, via the rulebook, which will bring next year's push-hands more in line

with "good" push-hands. If the rules are enforced to the point where non-T'ai Chi aspects are disallowed, then most of the current contestants would be reduced to quivering non-action. If the contestants haven't been taught good T'ai Chi, the tournament rules aren't going to do it either. Again the problem of current T'ai Chi levels arises.

If, as I've heard voiced, "Tournament Push-Hands" is by necessity a harsher, more muscular version of "Real Push-Hands," then what is the point in sponsoring it?

Looking at the other players in the drama, how can we expect a referee or a judge to disallow stiff "Li" (the common, intuitive, muscular strength), when he (or she) him(or her)self has stiff push-hands and doesn't really understand or use "peng jing" (the learned "soft" strength which accesses the ground as the source of power). If the officials don't know the way to good T'ai Chi, how can they lead others to it, no matter how well-intentioned they are?

Push-Hands is a format in which *peng, lu, ji, an* are practiced in order to learn to attack, neutralize, and control the opponent...while using *internal strength*. In formal contests, no other techniques are used, and the elemental T'ai Chi criteria of whole body strength and *peng jing* are paramount.

Observing Push-Hands Matches

In a recent photograph from one of the tournaments, I noticed a well-known *poseur* solemnly judging a push-hands match. Since I know the promoter of that tournament, and I know that he knows how suspect are this individual's credentials, I guess I wonder why it's more important to not hurt this individual's feeling at the expense of those misguided