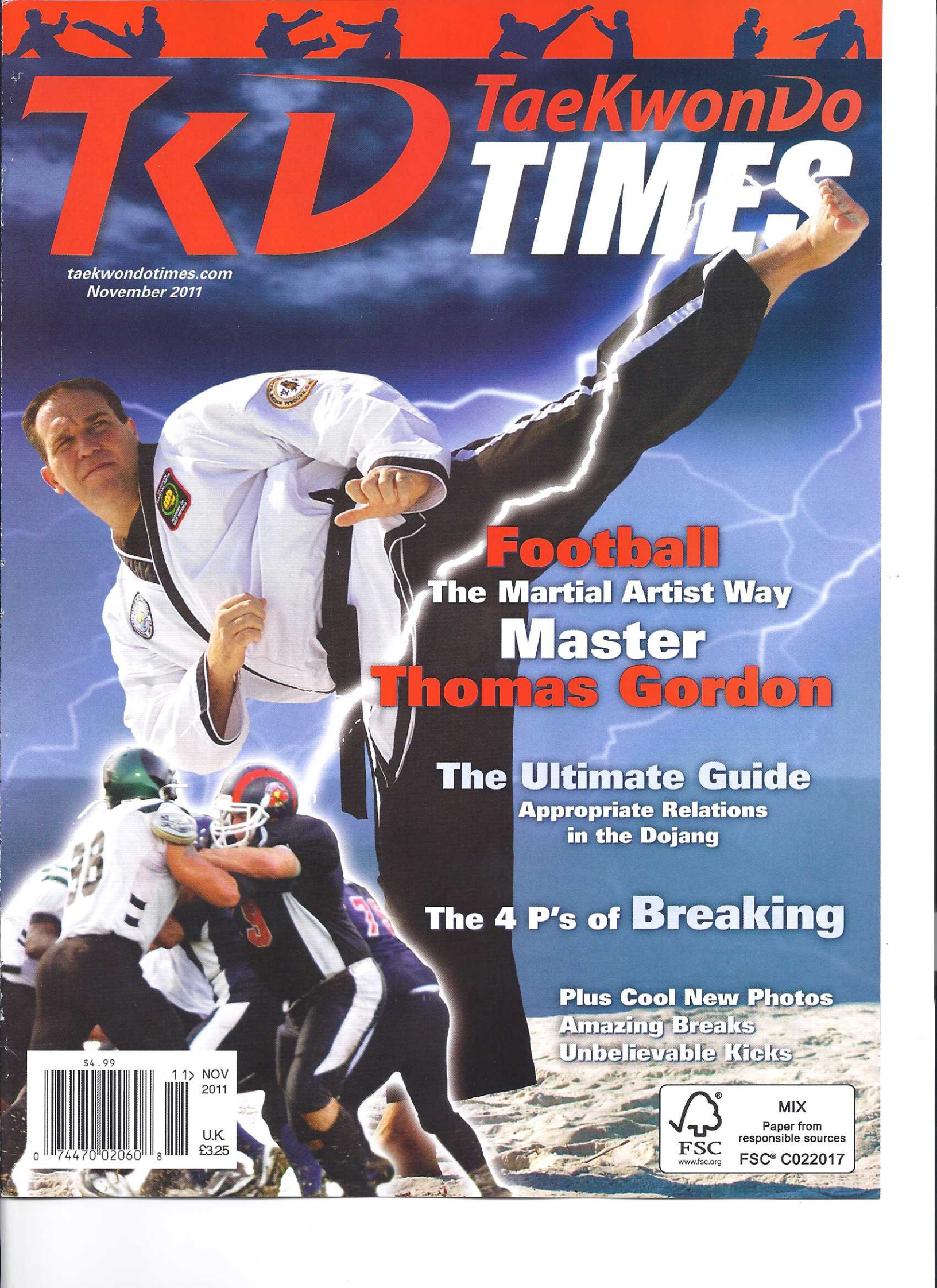




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Fighting to Win On the Street and in Court

By Erik Richardson

Real world self-defense is not a sport, and that means two very important and very specific things: staying alive and staying out of jail. This author spent some time with Dave Young, of United States Fighting Systems (USFS), talking, sitting in on a lecture and going through one of his 4-hour training classes to give you a chance to learn how to win.

Regarding the first, staying alive, Dave likes to say: "With self-defense, you can't afford to be 10 and 1." Martial arts build a solid foundation for learning to deal with potentially dangerous situations on the street, but students should never confuse the two. Conventional martial arts are structured to be sports, with a variety of elements to keep them safe—mats, time limits, weight classes, rules, and referees. If you are attacked on the street (or in the hallways at school, or in a bar), you can't just throw in the towel when things go badly. Unlike martial arts, the kind of self-defense that can keep you alive and safe can't take years to learn. While you can wait to compete in tournaments until you feel ready, there's no way of knowing when you might need hardcore survival techniques to defend your life. What is more, doing the wrong thing in a tournament can get you disqualified, but in a real-life confrontation, doing the wrong thing can result in lawsuits and jail time.

In 2010, Dave came to the conclusion that the same approach he had been using for years to teach defensive tactics and use of force to groups in security and law enforcement was desperately needed as an add-on to complement traditional martial arts training. With that goal in mind, he set out to develop a program that met his criteria for real-world self-defense that can be used in martial arts schools throughout the world to train individuals (regardless of age, gender or physical capability) how to defend themselves if attacked—and to win, both on the street and in the courtroom. The result was U.S. Fighting Systems.

Dave Young

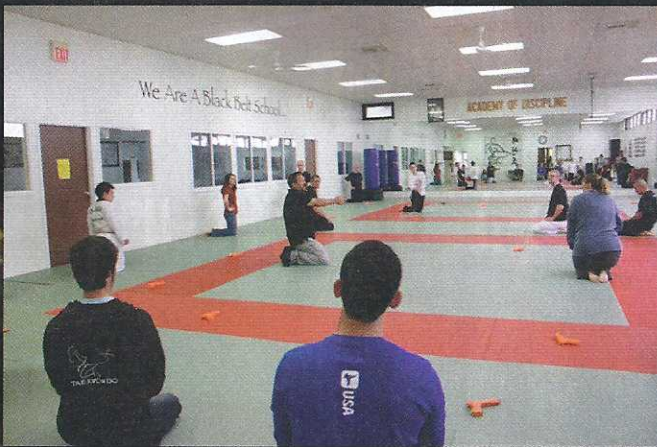
Dave graduated from his first police academy in 1985, and over the past 26 years his field experience has included law enforcement officer in the state of Florida, gate sentry, patrol officer, watch commander, investigator, Special Reaction Team (SRT) member and commander in the United States Marine Corps. He also helped design the training program for Marine MP's in overlapping military-civilian jurisdictions.

In his role as an expert and trainer, his background branched out even further. From 2005-2008, Dave hosted a *National Geographic* television series *Crash Test Human*. The show focused on Dave's expertise with product testing and evaluation, and included him surviving a head-on car collision, being trapped in a submerged car and spending time in a hyperbaric chamber.

Dave has been featured in many police publications, the *Wall Street Journal*, *National Esquire* and *People*, for his innovative defense tactics and his dedication to survival training. Dave and Gary Klugiewicz, a fellow director at Vistelar Group, the parent organization for USFS, is a member of the Police Training Advisory Board, which provides feedback and quality assessment to law enforcement agencies.

Bringing in Reality

When working with professional law enforcement organizations, there is a certain prerequisite level of strength and fitness that provides a baseline, but in situations like a traditional martial arts school, the biggest challenge is working within the wide range of physical limitations the students bring to the training program. At the same time, Dave explains, "the level of dedication, the spirit, and the self-discipline are very high in martial arts students, and that similarity allows us to easily



create the same kind of training atmosphere and bring many of the same expectations that we use with law enforcement professionals.”

One of the forgotten realities of real-world training is that on the street, the real fight starts after you’ve been hit. As soon as that happens and your brain registers that this is a real danger, not a sporting event, your brain and body systems shift gears, so success requires a specific kind of training. Fine motor skills require thinking, but actions like gripping, grabbing, kicking out; those things are rooted in the mid brain. That’s the part that runs the sympathetic nervous system, and it’s the part we have to be able to rely on in high-stress confrontations, because the confrontation will shift control away from our forebrain, the parasympathetic nervous system and fine motor activities. (While the systemic reaction and interactions are somewhat more complex than this, it is a helpful model.) Among other things, this shift means that complicated techniques, and even the strategic thinking used in sparring and tournaments, have gone out the window.

As a result, successfully integrating programs like this into a school can’t just be done “at the end of class.” While some of the specific ingredients will be discussed below, the basic idea is that the students need to change into a whole different mind space for this training. A successful self-defense program, like USFS, will focus around dedicated workshops and training days.

Levels of Simulation

A real-world self-defense program helps you remember your training when confronted with fear and stress during and after a potentially life-threatening confrontation. As Young expresses,

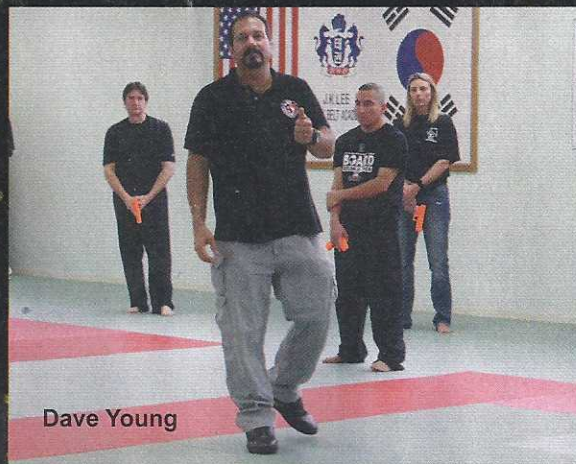
“You only remember under stress, if you practiced under stress.”

Now part of that depends on how the techniques are designed, for instance, keeping the number of steps or elements in a technique down to three. Another way to help make the program easy to remember is to keep the number of separate and specialized techniques to a minimum—for instance, the USFS program uses as many of the same techniques as possible on the ground as we do in stand-up situations. Not only does this provide for continuity and conformity throughout, but it also increases the speed of recall and the speed of execution under stress.

The heart of successfully embedding responses deep into a student’s reaction though, is the use of different levels of simulation gradually approaching a more and more realistic scenario. The USFS program uses nine different levels of escalating simulation, building on the work of Gary Klugiewicz, a use-of-force expert with 25 years of law enforcement experience.

At the lower levels, the types of simulations would include such things as shadow drills by yourself and practicing with props (for instance grabbing or holding the simulation guns). At this level, the students might be practicing one specific technique. As training moves up the scale of simulation, it would add in working with partners, use of verbal simulations (the attacker issuing threats and shouting, you practicing pleading to engage while you close distance), and the possibility of needing various techniques. Approaching the top end of the scale, the program would pile on background noise, simulated injuries, and additional accomplices among the bystanders.

I can testify that thinking you know a technique and being able to pull it off when you have fingers taped to splints to simulate broken bones, or trying to orient when wearing goggles that mess with



Dave Young

your vision like an eye injury, are two very different levels of confidence and speed.

Repeatedly during the training, Dave reminded us that if we consistently aim at 100% response in correct execution of the technique that will still only translate to about 70-80% correct performance under real, live adrenaline-dump stress, so think of what aiming our practice at less than 100% would mean.

Only Part of the Battle

The encounter is not over when the attacker is down. That bears repeating: the encounter is not over when the attacker is down. In some ways you are entering a territory that is almost as dangerous for you and your loved ones as the attack itself. Dave points out that, "Self-restraint under combat conditions is almost never covered sufficiently, sometimes even by other programs that call themselves 'reality-based.'" Once we practiced disarming or defending against attacks, Dave had us practice (over and over . . . and over) dealing with bystanders, calling the police, and dealing with police officers once they arrive on the scene. This was remarkable, and most of it would never occur to a person who just survived an attack.

From the beginning of the encounter, and even after the attacker is down, your actions must be courtroom defensible, which means the student needs to be able to verbally explain what happened, but also must be able to justify their actions. The philosophy of the USFS program has a ranking of safety concerns: yours come first in a confrontation, second, surprisingly, is the safety of the bad guy, third comes the safety of any bystanders, and then fourth is the safety of the public impression.

Let's talk about two and four, though, because it would be easy to misunderstand, if you have not had law enforcement training. The safety of the bad guy refers to your use (or escalation) of force. If you have the gun, and have told him to lie still, and he does, you're not allowed to shoot him (or even kick him). If the bad guy tries to run away, let him. Attempting to restrain him or shooting him in the leg is not an option. At the point where the immediate threat has been neutralized, you must not cross the fine line that would make you into an attacker.

The safety of the public image has to do with an awareness of what your actions will seem like to an

eyewitness or to a jury. Yes, it might seem strange to worry about that when you have just survived a dangerous encounter, but that's why this training can be so valuable. As Dave Young explains, "You can win in criminal court and still lose in civil court." Did you try less lethal options first? Was there evidence that the person was still a threat? You have to be prepared to answer these and similar questions.

When it comes to elements that will be judged in court, you have to be able to indicate that other rational people with similar training and experience would have done the same thing. You also have to be able to justify that you had good reasons to think this was the best option available at the time. In fact, the legal aspects of the program are so important that if one of the students from a USFS program has to actually use the techniques in real life, Dave or one of his trained, certified instructors will come in and testify in court on your behalf.

It's strange to cover a topic like this, because while some articles leave you with a feeling that you know a lot more than you did at the beginning of the piece, some leave you with a feeling that you might know less than you thought you did, and some do a little of both. If this discussion about real-life survival on the street and in the courtroom falls into that last group, take heart, because the training seminars with Dave Young had the same effect—I feel much more prepared for the scenarios we trained for, but distinctly aware of how many more of these workshops (and constant practice) I need for a wide range of other scenarios and situations. **TKD**

To learn more about USFS training programs, visit www.usfightingsystems.com or contact them at usfightingsystems@yahoo.com.

Erik Richardson is a Certified Sports Nutritionist in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he practices two different martial arts. With graduate degrees in philosophy, education, and business, he is currently President of Richardson Ideaworks, Inc., which specializes in education and corporate training.

