

## Balance of Power

When I was training in boxing, the pro ranks had “sluggers” like Ken Norton, Joe Frazier, and George Foreman and “boxers” like Muhammad Ali. Although Ali is often considered the greatest of all time, each one of these men became heavyweight champion of the world. A technical boxer like Ali is trickier and has more skills than a powerful slugger, but he doesn’t always beat the slugger (Norton knocked out Ali, for example). Each of the sluggers had to possess some percentage of boxing know-how. He could not jump into the ring like Ten-ton McGurk and just flail at his opponent. Conversely, technical boxers often wish they had the knock-out power of a Foreman so they would not have to dance into the fifteenth round and win on points. In either case, there is a balance of brute power to technical skill that suits the body-type and mentality of the individual athlete. Something similar exists among traditional martial artists, not in their sport karate, but in their training emphasis.

There are clubs that train with an emphasis on practical application. They work on scenarios, situational self-defense, or *kumite* drills that put the student mentally and physically into a simulated reality. There are other clubs that train in the details of execution, making sure their kata is just right and that students execute their individual techniques in order to produce “maximum results with minimum effort” (to quote Jigoro Kano).

In a previous article, I wrote, “Obviously, the ideal is to balance both detail and complete execution. ... I have noticed, however, that the sessions in which we [in my dojo] cover refinements and details tend to outnumber the sessions in which we apply our techniques—at a ratio of approximately eight or ten to one. Why is that? Are the trees more important than the forest?” There are two dominant reasons I have chosen to go this route, one practical, and the other philosophical.

Practically, now that I have a small home dojo with only 4 students per session, I have the ability to oversee almost everything they do and address their problems as they arise. It would be foolish not to take advantage of the small class size. Philosophically, since I have concentrated my own training on more and more subtlety and detail, I recognize that students are unlikely to learn these refinements anywhere else. If I do not teach these things (and sometimes commit them to video), these advanced refinements are less likely to survive into the next generation.

Neither of these reasons, however, addresses the approximate ratio of power to finesse appropriate for functional self-defense technique. Various countries’ special forces tend to favor the fast and hard route. That’s because they have a limited time to train and their troopers will generally be young men with stamina and strength to spare. But Systema (the method taught to

Russian elite forces), when taught to civilians, emphasizes tricks and refinements, albeit with a strong element of application practice.

Ultimately, the ratio depends on one's training goals, one's age, and the likelihood that one will use one's techniques for actual self-defense. Yuki Yoshi SAGAWA, aiki master, trained with such diligence that, as an older man, he stated that his aiki was so advanced that anyone who touched him would immediately be repelled or taken down. He proved this in the dojo numerous times. But he was not training for war or even for police action. He trained hard but had the luxury of knowing that he could invest in weakness for a long time. Military troops do not have that luxury.

I would strongly suggest balancing one's training between detail and application, but the ratio of each is ultimately up to the sensei and the student himself. This is an important factor that contributes to the formation of a style. (And we all know our style has got the balance just right.)

*This discussion continues in "What is Self-defense?" next time.*