

FIGHTING TALK

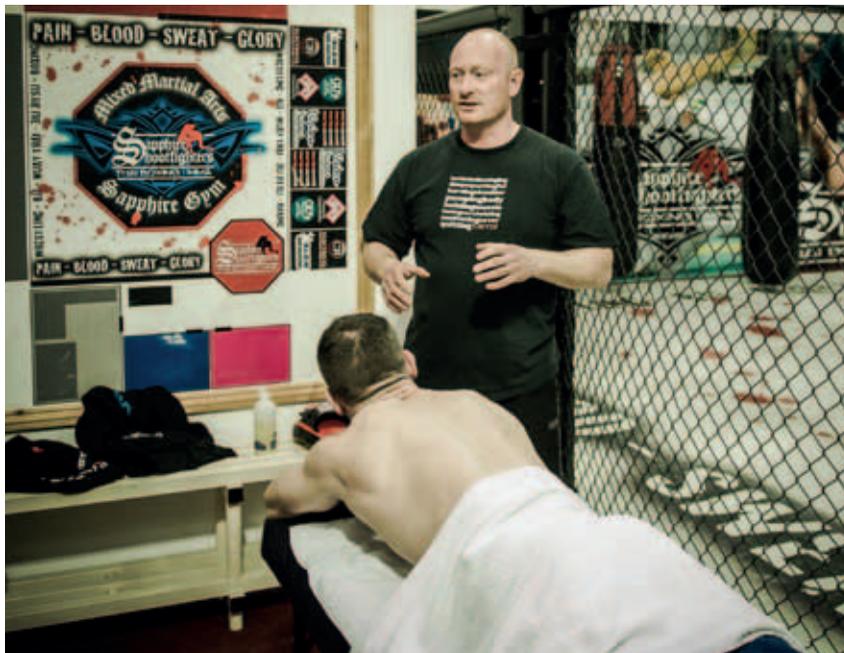
IMPROVE YOUR COMBAT SKILLS

IN RECENT MONTHS I HAVE FOCUSED ON ENERGY-SAPPING EXERCISES AND CIRCUIT TRAINING. **NOW IT IS TIME TO REST**

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Recovery is crucial after training, whatever your level. Body and mind need to recharge before more intensive training can take place but many fighters don't allow this to happen.

Here are reasons for this. There isn't really an offseason in combat sports so fighters need to be in good condition all year round. They also fear shifting down a gear, losing conditioning, and putting on weight. It goes against their instincts.

Consequently, it is easy for them to slip into overtraining, which combined with regular fighting and sparring can quickly lead to injuries. They need to think more seriously about rest and recovery strategies, such as massage.

Tim Briggs is an expert in injury prevention and sports massage who, for the past two years, has helped me in my role as performance coach to many fighters. He joined me on my recent trip to the Body Torque Institute of Physical Performance in Huyton,

Merseyside, which I have written about in recent months.

After I had subjected the fighters of Sapphire Gym to a strenuous workout, we turned to the subject of recovery. Everyone had lots of questions for Tim, but our discussion focussed on three main areas...

1. THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF INJURY IN COMBAT SPORTS

In Tim's experience, the shoulder muscles are the most frequently injured. The rotator cuff is particularly important to fighters. It is a group of muscles and tendons that stabilise the shoulder, which is the joint fighters use most often. "Overextending or missing a hard jab could cause a tear or rupture of the rotator cuff muscles," Tim explains. "Without stabilisation of the core, powerful punches could lead to trauma of the tendons, as could too much power with poor technique. As the shoulder is an unstable joint, it is much easier to injure than others".

Tim gave this advice:

- Strengthen the rotator cuff.
- Have regular massages to increase blood flow, realign tissue and ensure tensile strength through the muscle/tendon fibres.



- Stretch regularly, utilising both static stretching during rest periods and dynamic stretching pre-training.
- If an injury occurs, don't ignore the pain and hope it will go away. Take ibuprofen, ice and rest.

2. MASSAGE PRE- AND POST-FIGHT

Tim added: "Pre-fight, the aim is to ensure that muscles, tendons and ligaments are warmed up, have efficient blood supply and feel fluid," massage can help this process of preparing the muscles to work.

After the fight massage can relax muscle fibres by stimulating the lymphatic system to assist the healing

process, and by realigning tissue. "Deep tissue massage is not appropriate at this time as it will cause more trauma. Instead mild pressure assists in recovering strength and flexibility," said Tim.

All exercise causes damage to muscles. When tears occur, the body repairs them with deposits of collagen fibres, but doesn't lay these in alignment with the tensile strength of the muscle. "Deep tissue massage will pull the collagen into line, restoring range of motion, flexibility and correct function. It also assists with the body's cleaning and immune functions, speeding up the healing of injured areas," said Tim.

During fight camps, when there is barely any time for breaks, professionals such as Tim are crucial to keep fighters going. Although it can feel like torture, massage is definitely worth it.

3. FINDING THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN WORK AND REST

Most fighters lead busy lives and finding a balance between family, friends and training is difficult. Proper rest is usually the first thing to be sacrificed. "The common misconception is that you get fitter and stronger with exercise. The truth is this comes in the rest period, when your body has time to recuperate and repair," Tim explains.

One of the most common injuries Tim treats is a tight or inflamed ITB (Iliotibial band). This is a band of fascia (fibrous tissue) on the outside of the leg that assists in the abduction and stabilisation of the knee. "Overuse through kicking can cause extreme pain and loss of function. This can be prevented by use of a foam roller, which will provide fascial stimulation in the same way as massage. This pulls fibres into line, and only takes five minutes a day," says Tim.

"If you want to be injury free for as long as possible, take time to look after your body after exercise. Overtraining is as harmful as no training".

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

It is difficult to give general advice because there are so many variable factors affecting fighters, but I think of recovery in two time-frames.

BEFORE THE FIGHT:

When a fight is only four weeks away there is no time for rest. This is when massage comes into play. However, when you have the normal 12 weeks to prepare, the best balance is to peak in intensity every four weeks, spending the following week on light drills, body-weight circuits, and a couple of massages. It is then you will notice a refuelling of energy and motivation, as well as an improvement in the look of your body.

This is part of the natural process of muscles' regeneration because of the body's constant search for homeostasis (balance) after a period of stress (training). This helps the body to rebound beyond its starting point, making you stronger.

BEFORE THE FIGHT:

I normally advise fighters to forget physical conditioning in the last week before a fight. The merits of resting far outweigh those of training up to the last minute.

Instead, it is better to focus on drills, strategy, and a few daily rounds on the pads to let off steam. Clean eating and good sleep do the rest. You will not lose



your edge by having a few days off. Rather you will benefit from having a fresh body that is ready and raring to spring into action.

The most recent evidence I have to support this view is a fighter called Matteo Cara, who I took for a fight in Brazil at the end of May. He followed my final week procedure and felt better than ever. He won his fight and brought a belt back to Europe (see my blog for more details).

CONCLUSION

During my career I was one of those who ignored advice about proper resting. I spent my holidays running and going to the local boxing or kickboxing gyms.

For me it was all about the fight. The more I did, the better I thought I would be. This may be true to some extent, but any gains I got from it were probably

offset by my physical and mental inability to fully recover. Even if I did not suffer any significant decreases in performance, I believe I could have reached higher peaks if I had listened to my coach and taken a break.

Finally, you must never overlook the importance of age. After 30, recovering from injury and strenuous exercise takes longer. All athletes at this stage need to pay closer attention to their body's needs and ensure they get adequate rest if they want to keep going at a high level. If they don't, eventually the cost will be very high.

Enjoy your training. **M&F**

Marco Mastrorocco is a strength & conditioning coach. He is a former pro fighter (WAKO) in the S.A.M Fragale (Pisa, Italy) who won 4 Italian titles and the Bronze medal at the European Championships (2004). He currently runs international seminars for ring sports and conditioning. Director GIFT-Academy (www.giftacademy.com) and Head of Performance for www.ultimateconditioningcoach.com.

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