

FIGHTING TALK

IMPROVE YOUR COMBAT SKILLS

THE BIGGEST MISCONCEPTIONS IN FIGHTING SPORTS

BY **MARCO MASTROROCCHO**
PHOTOGRAPHS BY **TAUSEEF ASRI**
PHOTOS TAKEN AT **GYM BOX** IN WESTFIELD LONDON



Combat sports have always been shrouded in mystery, particularly to those who don't follow them. This is partly explained by the fact that many martial arts have their roots in the Far East, which gives them a mystical aura. Hollywood movies have added another layer of misunderstanding as to what fighting is all about.

This has led to the creation of some persistent myths, which have been repeated so often over the years that they have become widely accepted as facts. These myths have given people a false impression of martial arts and martial artists. Some ignorant and self-proclaimed "master instructors" are happy to repeat the myths to sound impressive and make what they do seem more glamorous. The myths have also survived because, sometimes, people want to believe them. They like to hero-worship others and besides, the misconceptions make their own participation in martial arts seem "cool".

Here I have attempted to debunk the most common myths.

BIG BICEPS = BIG PUNCHES

There may be some truth in the belief that stronger arms throw stronger punches—but only in so far as bigger arms mean greater mass hitting a target. Beyond that it is nonsense.

Assuming that big arms are going to

fire big punches is like saying that a bus can accelerate faster than a motorbike. In previous articles I have discussed how arms are just part of the kinetic chain involved in punching. If you rely solely on the power of your biceps, you are making a big mistake.

Without the right motor development and structural support, the final power transmitted through your arms is greatly diminished. Legs, and the transmission of power through the entire body's kinetic chain, are of far greater importance for powerful punching.

People who want big biceps usually train with weights in isolation which gives them bulk but also slows the speed at which they can extend their arm for punching, which will reduce the power of the punch.

LEGS, AND THE TRANSMISSION OF POWER THROUGH THE ENTIRE BODY'S KINETIC CHAIN, ARE OF FAR GREATER IMPORTANCE FOR POWERFUL PUNCHING.





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period at the start of their season but after then it is not necessary.

If you enjoy running do it in other ways. Replicate what your heart requires for a fight, where it works intensely then rests briefly. If, like most people, you don't enjoy cardio this should be good news. Try alternatives, such as circuit training using Tabata-style, high intensity interval training and kettlebells.

One of my former fighters prepared for his first professional boxing match by doing hardly any running. He did most of his work on the bags and by circuit training and he breezed through the eight rounds.

MMA FIGHTERS ARE BETTER THAN BOXERS (AND VICE VERSA)

The need to determine which fighting discipline is better has existed longer than I have been alive. The answer is neither. You cannot compare two different combat sports on the basis of individual fights. The winner will simply be the better fighter on the night.

I asked my friend Fari about this recently. We agreed that fighters are individuals with unique skills and genes. So we will never know which fighting art is best. Just choose the sport that gives

LIFTING WEIGHTS SLOWS YOU DOWN

This relates to the above point and at first glance may appear to contradict it. The notion that weights slow you down is a fallacy that haunted me when I competed in fighting sports but over the years I learnt to regard weight training as an ally rather than an enemy.

Basically, it all depends on the kind of weight training you do. If you lift weights in the traditional manner to build mass, when your actual aim is to increase power for striking, you are going in the wrong direction. If you do this you will teach your muscles to perform small-range-of-motion exercises, and will be mainly working the Type I slow twitch muscle fibres when you really want to stress the Type 2 fast twitch fibres.

If you follow the right protocol, you have nothing to fear from lifting weights. The correct form of power training will strengthen your muscles and increase force. Remember—it is not the weight you lift that slows muscles down but the way you lift it. Herein lies the problem: most people's knowledge of weight training is limited to bodybuilding training so they tend to follow a hypertrophy programme. But if you do more power training you will become faster and more explosive. At the end of the day muscles know movement, not reps so they react according to the way we move them.

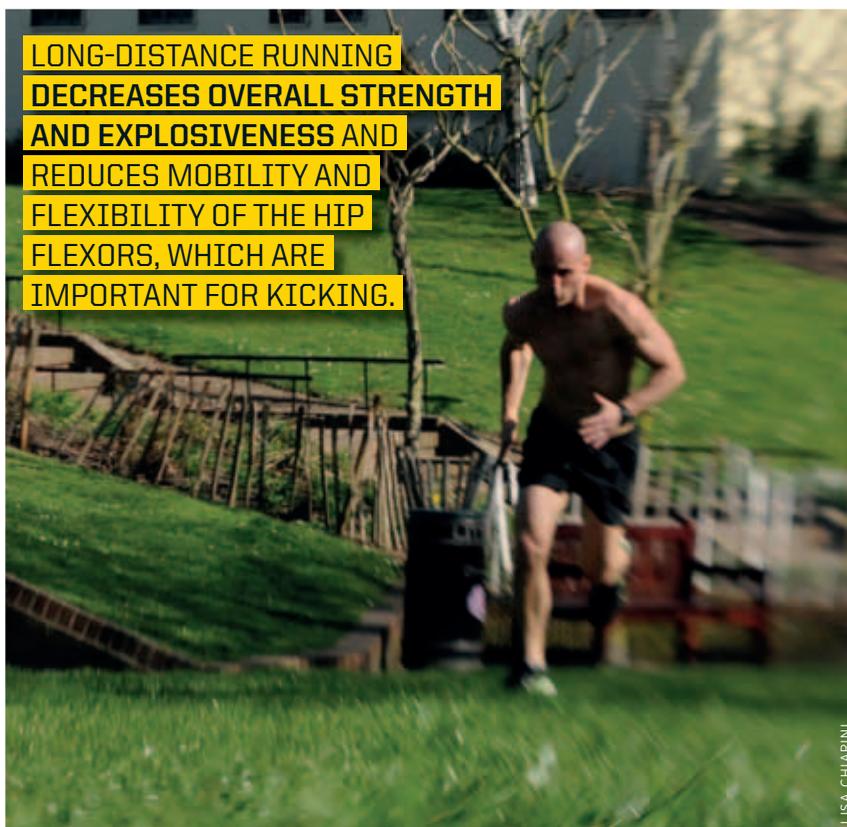
REGULAR LONG-DISTANCE RUNNING MAKES YOU FIGHTING FIT

How many of you waste hours running miles and miles? So many coaches still make fighters do it, saying it will improve their endurance.

Let's be clear: distance running has benefits but it lacks efficacy in a fighter's training programme. It builds stamina, improves functions in your mitochondria and oxidative system, uses fats better, strengthens your heart and increases lung capacity. But it is too simple to say that better stamina equates to better endurance. Furthermore, long-distance running decreases overall strength and explosiveness and reduces mobility and flexibility of the hip flexors, which are important for kicking.

Distance running is useful during a fighter's eight to 10-week adaptation

LONG-DISTANCE RUNNING DECREASES OVERALL STRENGTH AND EXPLOSIVENESS AND REDUCES MOBILITY AND FLEXIBILITY OF THE HIP FLEXORS, WHICH ARE IMPORTANT FOR KICKING.



LISA CHIARINI

you the most pleasure and is most suitable for your skills and leave the chit-chat to the wannabes.

SOME FIGHTERS LACK HEART

My friend, the fighter Tony Moran—sparing partner of UFC fighter Quinton Rampage Jackson—brought this up during a conversation on Facebook. It made me realise how some misconceptions can also be disrespectful.

We have all heard people say of a fighter “he has no heart” and you may even have had it said about you. Well, it is very easy to judge from a comfortable chair. But let’s be clear: there is no such thing as a fighter without heart.

Anyone with the courage to take part in any sort of combat competition, whether it’s for charity, White Collar Boxing, or sparring, has proved that he or she has heart. My trainer used to say all the time that once you step in the ring, you already are a winner.

Tony pointed out you rarely hear anyone say a footballer or tennis player doesn’t have heart. Why? Because no matter what fighters go through, they are expected to look nasty and act like thugs. If they show human emotions they are immediately dubbed as soft or criticised for lacking heart.

Poor performance is more often due to poor mental preparation than a lack of heart. No one should ever question a fighter’s will to try and challenge himself and his own weaknesses. Stepping into a ring is the hardest confrontation in sport.

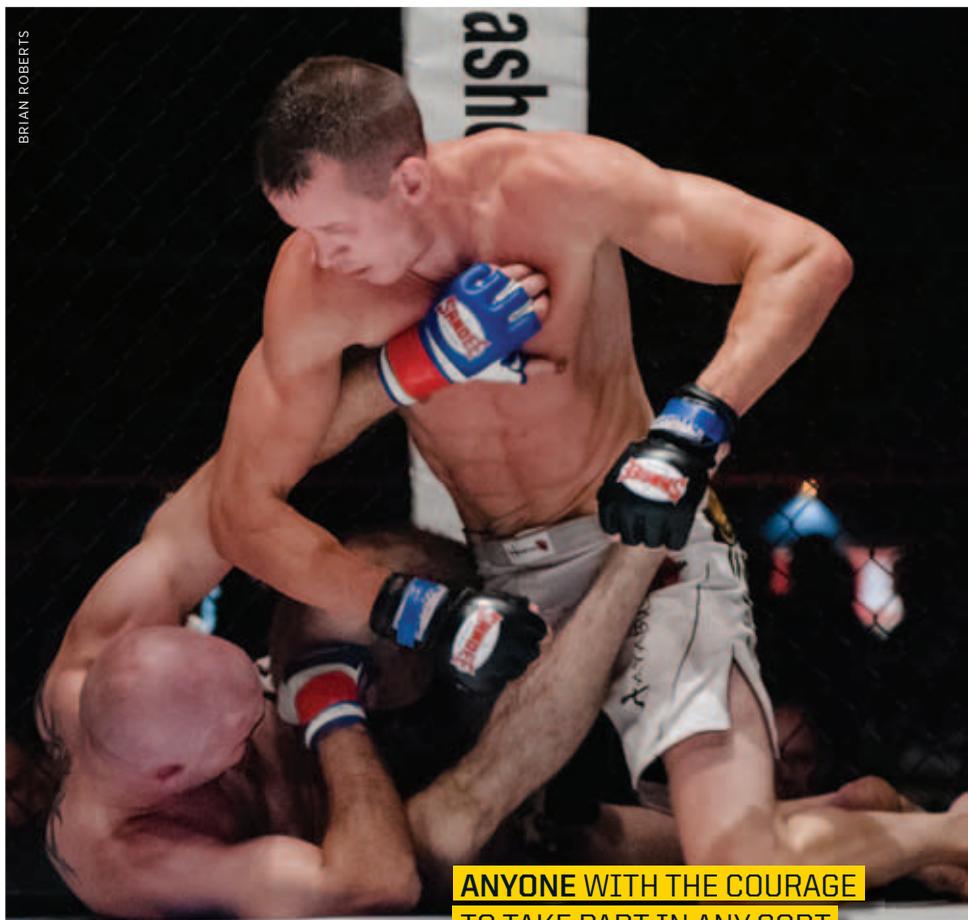
COMBAT SPORTS ARE JUST EXPRESSIONS OF BRUTE FORCE

Many people think a boxing match is an encounter between two semi-civilized men to entertain a crowd. This view could not be further from the truth.

Any combat sport is primarily about strategy. Certainly there is something raw and wild about fighting, but there is a lot more to it than that. What you see in the ring is, to use a cliché, a chess game.

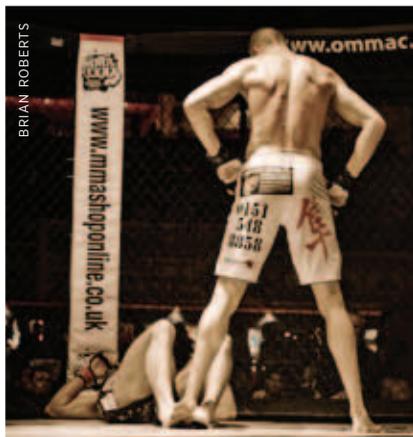
Coaches direct their fighters; they observe and they develop strategies as fights evolve.

Very few fights are an expression of violence between two people. Sometimes at the lower levels, people really think being angry will make them fight better but every professional knows he should keep cool and use his head.



BRIAN ROBERTS

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What might look like hatred is usually just business. I made quite a few friends after fierce battles in the ring, which forged feelings of respect and pride. These are things that maybe only sports people can understand.

My list could go on for other 10 pages! Some misconceptions are funny (no sex

before a fight, hit a hard target to condition your shins, for example); others are damaging for the entire industry (you must break your nose before being accepted in combat gyms). Do not be deceived. There is far more to combat sports than Hollywood or the media let on. There is showbiz and there is reality. What you see is the tip of a very complex and multifaceted iceberg.

Fighting sports are beautiful and valuable disciplines, and are a great way for youths to gain direction and focus. The fight is the cherry on the cake of many weeks of drills and conditioning of head and body. Enjoy your next fight on TV! **M&F**

MARCO MASTROROCCHO 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.gift-academy.com) and Head of Performance for www.ultimateconditioningcoach.com.

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