

History of Bando

*As recounted from documents published by the
American Bando Association*

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Brief Bando Overview

The primary Burmese martial arts system practiced in the U.S. today is "Bando." The word "Bando" is a hybrid, composed from the Burmese "Ban" and the Japanese suffix "do"; it is generally held to have three primary meanings:

1. A "way of discipline";
2. Systems of defense;
3. The art of fighting, or combat.

Bando is a composite or synthesis of numerous traditional personal combative systems from Burma. Bando, as it is practiced in the U.S., was introduced in the late 1950's by Maung Gyi, and is promulgated today in the U.S. by the non-profit "American Bando Association, Inc." Maung Gyi is now known as Dr. U M. Gyi, after earning his doctoral degree. He serves as the Grandmaster of American Bando. Although he retired from leadership of the ABA recently, he still maintains a vigorous, rigorous teaching schedule with students across the U.S.

A date of 1968 has also been reported as to Bando's introduction in the U.S., but this refers to the later-created American Bando Association, as opposed to the first classes instructed by Dr. Gyi.

For the broad purposes of this article, we can identify three key periods of time in the evolution of Bando as we know it today. First, it is generally held that Bando traditions practiced in the U.S. today by Dr. Gyi's students can be traced to around the time of Christ. Second, it is thought that the first Bando traditions became more readily recognizable around 300 A.D. The third milestone date is the exposition of what could be recognized as "modern" Bando around 1,500 A.D.

Bando History

As indicated earlier, some writers contend that Bando's beginnings can be dated to the time of Christ. This view holds that the Bando system promulgated in the U.S. today ("Hanthawaddy Bando") evolved initially as the indigenous fighting system of the Pyus of Northern Burma. Subsequent contact with traveling priests, merchants, and diplomats of the Roman Empire, Ceylon, India, Tibet and China greatly influenced the philosophical and technical evolution of combative systems in Burma.

For example, Roman contacts in the area have been verified by archaeologists as early as 132 A.D. Documented visits from Roman ambassadors occurred in 97 and 121 A.D. These records compliment the grace, elegance and hospitality of the ancient Pyus. Chinese contact (T'ang Dynasty), a visit by Marco Polo and other influences have been corroborated.

The early and advanced development of Burmese civilization is also well-known. The famous pagoda city of Pagan has been referred to as early as 108 A.D., but there is considerable skepticism as to this date. In any event, the splendor of the kingdom remains uncontested.

The Ayeygyi warrior-monks (First Burmese Empire 1057-1287 A.D.) added philosophical and religious aspects to the evolving Pyu combative systems. These monks also contributed sophistication in certain physical aspects of the system (while maintaining its combative orientation). Dr. Gyi has begun to teach the Bando Monk System (see discussion later), a remarkable "non-violent martial art".

The Pyu monks are believed to have been highly skilled in boxing, archery, sword and stick fighting. Some historians speculate that these monk arts may have been influenced by Chinese systems. A recent (twentieth century) change in these systems came with the infusion of the warrior codes of the Gurkhas into Bando, along with emphasis upon use of the famous Gurkha short-sword, the kukri.

The Pyu monks taught various systems at either Ghaza Khunit Kyaung (Seven Schools of Arts) or Kho Kyuang (Nine Schools of Arts). Royal princes, noblemen and military personnel all received formal training in martial arts at these schools. Up to the era of King Thibaw, the last Burmese king (1878-1885 A.D.), warriors who were highly skilled in the martial arts were designated as "Royal Boxers." Their names were recorded on the Royal treasury scrolls. Hence the term "sport of Kings" for Burmese Boxing (or "Letwhay"). Full Members (black belts) of the American Bando Association are entitled to wear the Royal Boxer's Ring.

When compared with its status as the Sport of Kings, the art of Burmese Boxing today is all but extinct in Burma (now called Myanmar), according to the reports

of visitors to Burma in the 1980's and 1990's. It is no longer practiced by professional boxers whose time is chiefly devoted to training. Instead, farmers and peasants in rural areas box on festival days, but their lifestyle and economic condition does not allow for full time training. This contrasts dramatically with the situation in Thailand relative to Muay-Thai.

Given the declining state of traditional full-contact boxing in Myanmar today, Bando boxers in the U.S. do their best to carry on the traditions of Royal Boxers. Each November, the ABA stages an annual Kickboxing Tournament in Columbus, Ohio.

The Mongols Invade

The grand civilization of the first Burmese Empire was devastated by Mongol invasion of Genghis Khan in the 13th century; it would take the Burmese some 200 years to restore peace and unity. Despite the clear military superiority of the invading Mongols, the Burmese resisted against all odds.

After suffering ultimate defeat at the hands of the Mongols (including the fall of Pagan), the Burmese continued to harass and attack the conquering Mongols. One is reminded of the resistance in Afghanistan following the Soviet invasion of that country. With the assistance of the fierce Shan tribesmen in Northern Burma, the Mongols suffered a particularly punishing guerrilla war across the mountains of Burma.

Rise of Post-Mongol Burma

A Second Burmese Empire was established during the lifetime of the warrior-king Bayinnaung (1551 A.D.). However, after his death, the kingdom disintegrated. It was not until 1758 that a third warrior-king, Alaungpaya, successfully and fully reunified the nation. He was killed at the siege of the Siamese (Thai) capital of Ayuthiya. He had already expelled the French and burned the British trading posts. Alaungpaya's son continued the war, and, in a savage act of revenge, conquered and devastated the Siamese capital in 1767 A.D.

The pagodas, temples, relics and irreplaceable cultural artifacts in the capital were decimated as the rampaging Burmese sacked the capital.

Dr. Gyi points out that to this day, the Burmese people carry the guilt of this cultural atrocity. The virtual demolition of a great cultural and religious center was an act of unrestrained vengeance.

Conquered by the British

After repulsing forces from China, the Burmese then pressed West into India, seizing Assam. There, the Burmese encountered an immovable object directly astride their path of conquest: the British Empire. Three bloody Anglo-Burmese Wars resulted: 1824-26, 1852 and 1878. Losing these wars, Burma became a subjugated Asian Colony of Britain, annexed to India.

With this accomplished, the British set about ruthlessly suppressing indigenous Burmese combative systems, both empty-hand and weapon-oriented. This action was calculated to inhibit rebellion, but it also nearly destroyed the precious cultural artifact of indigenous and highly-developed Burmese combative systems. This process is not unlike the suppression of indigenous martial arts on Okinawa.

Burmese Martial Arts Go "Underground"

Prior to World War II, Burmese combative systems had been generally termed "Thaing," with at least nine major systems, each linked to the primary Burmese racial/ethnic groups: Burmese, Chin, Chinese, Indian, Kachin, Karen, Mon, Shan and Talaing, each with a different manifestation of the art. Nonetheless, these systems had been driven "underground" for nearly a century as World War II approached.

Only a select few were taught the arts in secret by the Masters, so the young could carry on the knowledge of the past. In the land where Bando Boxing had been the "Sport of Kings", it had now become a criminal act. Under Sections 109 and 110 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, imposed by the British, Burmese "Letway" boxers and Thaing/Bando practitioners were classed as "vagrants" and "habitual criminal offenders."

Rescued from Oblivion: The Military Athletic Club

As the clouds of what would become World War II hung over Asia, the British authorities in Burma permitted small scale martial arts training under government sponsorship and rigid controls (in order to prevent the spread of these disciplines into the populace as a whole). This was accomplished through the establishment, in 1933, of the famous "Military Athletic Club."

The Club was first formed by nine Gurkha officers (including Dr. Gyi's father, U Ba Than Gyi). These nine men were determined to restore full vigor to the ancient fighting arts of India, Tibet, Burma, and China. The group also was intent upon integrating some aspects of Japanese arts. As of 1966, information on the Founders of the Military Athletic Club was as follows (ages as of 1966):

1. **Yogi Abehanada** Indian, 76 years old, retired near Darjeeling, India
2. **C. C. Chu** Chinese, 80 years old, returned to mainland China
3. **K. Khan** Pakistani, 69 years old, retired in Karachi, East Pakistan
4. **U Zaw Min** Burmese, 70 years old, retired in Tongoo, Burma
5. **G. Bahadur** Gurkha, 79 years old, retired in Darjeeling, India
6. **Saw Ba U** Karen, 66 years old, retired in Insein, Burma
7. **Dowa Naung** Kachin, 71 years old, retired in Mogong, Burma
8. **Boji Mein Sa** Arakanese, 63 years old, retired in Rangoon, Burma
9. **U Ba Than (Gyi)** Burmese, 81 years old, retired in Twante, Burma

Guruji Gonju Bahadur was the first Chairman of the Club. Initially, beyond the Founders, there were some 90 members. In 1936, selected non-military men were allowed to participate due to their high level of martial / combative knowledge and skill. In 1939, total membership was increased to 300.

The training in the Military Athletic Club was extremely stark, rugged, brutal and realistic. From the perspective of today's legal environment in the United States, such training is inconceivable. For example, it is reported that 15 members collapsed and died during a series of incredibly rigorous training drills. Some 33 members are said to have died of injuries during the group's annually staged private combat bouts.

Lord Mountbatten (then High Commissioner of His Majesty's Imperial and Colonial Forces in Asia) reportedly attended one of these tournaments in 1937. After viewing these life and death contests, he is said to have made his historic remark: "Beautifully brutal art . . . I'm happy they're on our side." General Orde Wingate is said to have called the members of this private military club "Bando Bastards."

Nationalism

During the same time, small sects of *thama* (ones who use Burmese fighting arts) trained secretly in the Hanthawaddy district and elsewhere. Burmese youth movements of the 1930s also used these combative systems for the purpose of defying the British and to emphasize the nationalistic ideology which was becoming more prominent.

After the successful invasion of Burma by the Japanese, Burmese nationalists were genuinely happy the British had been driven in disarray from Burma. The Japanese encouraged revival of Burmese combative arts. The humiliating British defeat is well described in the literature: Belden, (1944), Slim (1957), and Segrave (1943), are but a few of the popular "I was there" descriptions of those desperate days.

In Burma, a "trust Japan" campaign for gaining the confidence of the populace was instituted throughout Burma. From the perspective of the martial arts, the key organizations were the East Asia Youth League and the Japanese-Burmese Budo Association. During this time, some Japanese influence was added to the Burmese arts, particularly from the arts of Aikido and Jiu-Jitsu.

The Japanese Occupation: "Independence"

On January 22, 1943, Premier Tojo of Japan announced that Burma would be given her freedom and independence. This was looked upon by many Burmese citizens as final deliverance from the British occupation and its concomitant oppression of their own culture. Instead, a puppet government was installed by the Japanese.

The new government was determined to establish an unbreakable grip on the populace. Its most horrifying tool was the use of the Japanese Secret Police (KEMPETAI). The KEMPETAI's actions seemed to be deliberately modelled after the Nazi Gestapo. The KEMPETAI shocked not only the Burmese, but many high-level well-educated Japanese military personnel. Thus, initial admiration and support of the Japanese turned into hatred. Burmese troops led by General Aung San eventually joined the Allied cause.

The Japanese staged a major offensive to conquer India, using Burma as a base for the attack. After some of the bloodiest battles in Asia, the Japanese were defeated. (V-J Day remains a holy day for American Bando practitioners.) The Japanese suffered as many as 150,000 dead, wounded and missing.

Bando After the War

U Ba Than Gyi and the Systemization of Bando

Dr. Gyi's father, U Ba Than Gyi, became a key part of the post-war Burmese government. A brilliant scholar and masterful martial artist, U Ba Than Gyi had played a key role in the establishment of the Military Athletic Club in pre-World War II Burma. Now, he would find himself in an ideal situation to further the goals of the Military Athletic Club: U Ba Than Gyi would become the director of the Burmese program of physical education and athletics. To Bando's great benefit, U Ba Than Gyi seized the opportunity to travel throughout the country under the auspices of the government. He sought out masters of the martial arts throughout Burma from many styles and systems.

The British had originally suppressed the native Burmese martial arts, as had been the case with the rulers of Okinawa. And, as was the case in Okinawa, the indigenous Burmese martial arts had not disappeared altogether. Instead,

masters and families had kept the suppressed systems alive in secret. Now, U Ba Than could travel the nation openly and confer with these living legacies.

U Ba Than was particularly interested in organizing the knowledge of the surviving masters in Burma. Their arts had been preserved within close-knit family structures, or perhaps disguised for preservation in the form of folk dance (as in China and Okinawa), or in forms of entertainment, such as the theater and the opera, as in the Chinese opera. In addition, some clever progenitors had hidden the essence of some systems in the guise of sports activities, channeling aggression and conflict into an arena between two men as opposed to training groups to undertake resistance against the government.

Eventually, martial artists from many styles came to visit the Elder Gyi's (U Ba Than Gyi's) compound and demonstrate their various systems. Those demonstrations were very demanding. "Masters" who could not perform on their promises faced a series of aggressive "reality checks".

For example, Dr. Gyi relates the story of one "master" who claimed his martial prowess would allow him to defeat ten attackers simultaneously. A test was arranged by the Gyis at a soccer field. Ten attackers were arrayed against the "master". The "master" was simultaneously attacked by all ten.

Resurgence of Bando Boxing

As he undertook to gain widespread credibility and acceptance across stylistic, racial/ethnic and class lines, U Ba Than organized the traditionally brutal and savage indigenous Bando Boxing, in an attempt to make it safer and to reduce injuries and fatalities. At that time in the early post-World War II period, Bando Boxing was not yet "Westernized." The Thais, however, proved less resistant to change and fairly readily westernized Muay Thai.

U Ba Than Gyi's son, Maung Gyi (Dr. Gyi), was a participant in these bouts. These brutal experiences made an indelible impression on Dr. Gyi. To this day, he insists that Bando be highly effective in combat.

Reviving Bando Boxing was a critical way to establish credibility for U Ba Than Gyi with the "underground" martial arts culture. His involvement in the Military Athletic Club and his force of personality all combined to uniquely qualify U Ba Than Gyi as the man who could elicit the essence of the underground systems from the remaining masters.

One enormous problem facing U Ba Than Gyi was the difficulty encountered in resurrecting and reviving systems without offending the holders of the knowledge. A keen political balancing act was needed to satisfy the demands of surviving "traditional" masters, heads of family systems, various monk sects and

ethnic groups. Thus, as U Ba Than traveled the country and contacted a growing network of such persons, he interviewed them and gained their confidence gradually.

As he began to perceive the nature of what had been driven underground, U Ba Than Gyi concluded that a real part of the Burmese culture had been threatened with extinction. In Burma, the martial artist lived as a critical part of the society. Not only could one punch and kick, but was a kind of "Renaissance Man" or "Renaissance Woman."

The Burmese martial artist was, traditionally, in addition to being a repository of knowledge concerning methods of harming or killing the individual, a repository of knowledge concerning health and medicine. Frequently, martial artists were indigenous medical practitioners to whom the community turned for treatment from illness and injury.

Moreover, the martial artist in Burmese society was sought after by the populace for his or her understanding of nature, animals, plants, the elements, geography, language and customs, as well as historical fact and cultural traditions. Frequently, because of their advantages in these areas, they were called upon to act as arbitrators of disputes, or as judges. Thus, the Burmese martial artist, prior to the British suppression of the arts, had served in a highly respected position in the society. Therefore, the presence of the martial artist in a community or in a given situation, was the presence of a person of wisdom (a physician, herbologist, scholar, warrior, philosopher, jurist) and was the symbolic infusion of great power and justice into a community environment or an inter-personal or inter-group transaction.

Recognizing this, U Ba Than Gyi gave these surviving masters the deference they deserved, and asked that they share with him, for posterity, their knowledge. The reaction to Gyi's shrewd and genuine inquiries was outstanding; some 200 masters met with him, taught him and demonstrated their methods, disclosing the history and context of their heritage.

The Common Thread: "Principles"

As he pursued the laborious process of systematizing this huge body of evolved knowledge, U Ba Than began to realize that, despite varied origins, purposes, outward manifestations and historical contexts, all martial systems shared, at their root, certain immutable and common principles. He also noted that there was an inevitable overlap between related (but not identical) systems.

For example, the Cobra and Viper shared many similarities, as did the various cat systems, such as Black Panther and Tiger. It was just this sort of organization

of previously disconnected and inchoate knowledge that was U Ba Than Gyi's great contribution, achievement and breakthrough.

U Ba Than asked this question: How do we share this knowledge with other interested individuals in a limited time? Many of the systems included as an integral part of their existence a rich and complex body of legend, myth, religious practice and encrusted tradition. These qualities required years, even a lifetime of study in order to assimilate the system.

As he engaged in cultural archaeology, restoration and preservation of the Burmese martial arts culture, the impossible task facing U Ba Than Gyi was this: how do you test the validity of the myth? He began to sort out family legends, stories, myths and traditions which could not be verified, and began to reduce his information to a system of principles. He left his son volumes of encrypted notes on the systems and principles he unearthed.

Animal Systems: A Repository for Principles

U Ba Than Gyi began to see that once these foundational principles could be discerned, articulated and removed from needlessly mythic contexts, a hierarchy of principles, strategies, tactics and techniques could be constructed. This would provide, he reasoned, a coherent, comprehensive, and consistent approach to martial disciplines across virtually all stylistic lines. The Elder Gyi established this structure. He organized, sifted, and classified his tremendous wealth of knowledge gained from hundreds of masters over many years.

In U Ba Than Gyi's approach, a set of combative behaviors was termed as a system. The system dealt with offense, defense, counter-offence and the like. The system consistently utilized the pervasive and sound underlying principles Dr. Gyi's father had discovered to formulate reasoned responses within a chosen context. For example, this meant that a large and heavy man chose Bull or Python.

U Ba Than Gyi removed other indigenous components of the behaviors which he felt were not necessary to understanding and manifesting the underlying principles. An example of these "removed" components could be beliefs in numerology, astrology and various superstitions.

Instead of creating a new mythology, the Elder Gyi took what we might recognize as a very Western and scholarly approach. He utilized the animal systems he constructed as a composite framework for particular strategic thoughts, tactical decisions and physiological weapon selection. But why did he choose animal systems to be the expository mechanism for his unique synthesis of fundamental cross-style principles? Why not a geranium style?

The answer remains rooted in myth shared cross-culturally down to the present day in numerous cultures, and across racial/ethnic boundaries. For example, there is the powerful German Eagle (and the American Eagle), the Russian Bear. Further, family crests in Europe feature animals of certain types as symbols for the family unit.

Dr. Gyi explains that we can only conclude, therefore, that a fundamental and powerful part of the human psyche is clearly fascinated with and identifies with animals.

U Ba Than Gyi chose the animal systems as unique repositories of the various principles for a wide variety of reasons, not the least of which was a three-fold analysis of why martial artists had instinctively imitated animals historically. First, there seemed to be a mystical attachment to certain animals along historic and cultural lines which increased the likelihood of students undertaking rigorous training to master the system. Second, we as humans feel awe for these animals and the grace of their motions. Thirdly, we feel that by acting as an animal, we escape from ourselves and in turn liberate ourselves from societal strictures of behavior and response. We liberate our instinctive levels of personal physical capabilities, what other systems may attribute to chi or ki.

Bando comes to America

Dr. U M. (Maung) Gyi is the son of U Ba Than Gyi, and was sent to many grandmasters of the various Burmese systems and disciplines by his father, in order to learn and assimilate the teachings his father had systematized. Dr. Gyi also competed in the brutal Bando Boxing bouts staged by his father's organizations in Burma. Dr. Gyi found himself in Washington, D.C. during the early 1960s.

At that time, the Japanese systems were openly recognized and practiced in New York, Washington, D.C. and Korean Tae Kwon Do was also coming to prominence. The American martial arts community was begun by servicemen returning from the Orient, such as Chuck Norris and Joe Lewis and others. They shared the skill and knowledge they had acquired overseas with the American public, which was responsive to this new art from the East.

The early American martial arts scene was distinguished and noted for its lack of commercial undertakings for profit and exploitation. Americans like the competitive aspects of the arts, and also felt it was exciting to learn the mysteries of the ancient East. Then, commercial schools were established in the wake of movie sensationalism. They provided mystic misinformation and stereotypes, such as the magic death touch, etc.

Dr. Gyi was a pioneer in the establishment of non-commercial martial arts in the U.S. He served as a chief referee and tournament director for many major tournaments and events in the 1960s. He served on the Board of Directors of the United States Karate Association (USKA) and of the Professional Karate Association.

Dr. Gyi served as referee at the famous 1975 Bill Wallace/Joe Corley fight in Atlanta. He is noted and recognized as a founder and pioneer of the American legitimate martial arts community, along with other names such as Richard Kim, Robert Trias, Peter Urban, Don Nagle, Henry Cho, Jhoon Rhee, Joe Lewis, Chuck Norris, Ed Parker and countless others.

Today, Dr. Gyi's Bando is taught nationwide, and thousands of students train or have trained under the demanding tutelage of the Grandmaster or his students.

The Evolution of Bando in the U.S.

Dr. Gyi originally taught what might be viewed as a very Japanese-oriented martial art, because this was what the American public in the early 1960s understood and was ready for. The earliest training in Bando occurred under Dr. Gyi in Washington, D.C. in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The training was

stark, realistic and hard. Bando tournament fighters developed a reputation for fierce rushes and strong, heavy contact. A number of Bando pioneers date from this period, such as Rick Niemera, Joe Manley, Lloyd Davis and Dr. Geoff Willcher.

Dr. Gyi then moved to Ohio, pursuing his doctoral degree in communications, which he earned after a three year period of study. At this time, many of the Washington, D.C./Maryland group of black belts also relocated as they finished college or found new career interests, and the nationalization of Bando was underway.

As the level of skill and conditioning in Bando practitioners increased, Dr. Gyi introduced Burmese Bando Boxing in the 1970s as a brutal full-contact arena for Bando practitioners to expand their knowledge of endurance, power and mobility. The 1980s saw Dr. Gyi open up training in the various animal systems to Bando black belts, as a means of perpetuating the underlying principles he has set out for us, based on his own knowledge and training. Dr. Gyi also began to teach deeper aspects of the kukri and dha in the 1980s.

In the 1990s, Dr. Gyi began to introduce grappling (Naban) and meditative and health aspects of the system (Monk system), as well as additional animal and weapons forms -- always stressing combative use and efficiency.

Now retired from his career as a university professor, Dr. Gyi concentrates on passing on his Bando knowledge to his students, both old and new. With new-found freedom of time, he travels the U.S. teaching practitioners of Bando and other systems about the global, universally applicable martial principles presented in his Bando system.

Dr. Gyi has encouraged his students to think creatively about martial systems and to continue to expand their understanding of how fundamental Bando principles operate and are applied. As a result, substantial body of literature has emerged on topics such as strategy, tactics and stepping.

More recently, he has begun to share more openly Bando's esoteric and demanding Monk System, a "non-violent martial art" based on altruistic spiritual and ethical principles. Dr. Gyi has continued to reaffirm the fundamental qualities of Bando by stressing speed, surprise and style (intelligently and efficiently designed actions accomplishing the design purpose of the art).

What is Bando Today: Overview

Bando is a multi-faceted martial art, with roots in China-Burma-India. The system was brought to America in the late 1950's by Maung Gyi (now Dr. U M. Gyi, Grandmaster.) It is practiced by a small group of dedicated students and teachers here in the U.S. under the auspices of the non-profit American Bando Association.

The Association is unique in that its purpose is to honor and support veterans. Dr. Gyi has retired from active involvement in the Association, but continues to maintain a demanding teaching schedule.

During the past half-century, Dr. Gyi has raised up a cadre of senior students who are now Masters in their own right. Grandmaster Gyi has appointed Masters for the various Bando animal systems and other arts, such as Kukri and the Monk System. The Bando system is comprehensive and diverse, even eclectic.

Kickboxing

Bando kickboxing has been practiced in the U.S. since the 1970's. This full-contact sport has its roots in Burma (now called Myanmar), where it was once known as the "Sport of Kings." Royal Boxers were maintained as part of the Royal Court. Today, however, the Sport of Kings is not widely practiced in its homeland. Grandmaster Gyi modified the brutal kickboxing art of Burma for American use, eliminating some targets and some techniques.

Today, Bando kickboxing is led by Master Dale Minor of Ohio, a legendary Bando kickboxer. Each year in November at the time of Veteran's Day, in a unique tournament honoring veterans, Bando kickboxers compete with each other and with kickboxers from other systems to honor veterans, to test their skills and to practice brotherhood in the martial arts.

Middle Style

Bando also offers a rich tradition within its "Middle-Style" disciplines. For example, middle style fighting resembles karate tournament fighting, but is not of the typical "point" start-and-stop variety. Instead, fighters compete with controlled/limited contact for an entire round and judges make an overall assessment of the fighters' technique, skill, strategy and conditioning in awarding the match. In the annual Middle-Style Nationals (held on Memorial Day weekend)

Bando middle-style fighters meet and compete under rigorous rules, including round-robin fighting. Excellent conditioning is a must for these events.

The Middle Style Nationals also provide a forum for form competition in Bando's stick systems (long stick, short stick) and bladed systems (the Gurkha kukri and the dha). Empty hand forms from various Bando disciplines are also involved in the form competitions, including Bando's animal systems.

The Middle-Style nationals also feature seminars from leading Bando Masters, so that students from across the nation can have the opportunity to meet and train with Grandmaster Gyi's direct lineage students. On rare occasions, the Grandmaster himself will conduct a seminar.

Animal Systems

American Bando includes the following major animal systems: Boar, Bull, Cobra, Eagle, Panther, Python, Scorpion, Tiger and Viper. Each of these nine systems has a Master, personally trained for years by Grandmaster Gyi and designated as the leader of the animal system. These Masters, in turn, may appoint a Second, or apprentice Master, to inherit the system from them at some point in the future. Each animal system has unique weapons systems as well, some of which are still in the process of transmission by Grandmaster Gyi to the animal masters.

Weapon Systems

Bando features several families of systems for the long stick. These forms are typically done with a stick which is longer than the typical six foot karate "bo" staff. Lengths of seven feet are common, adjusted for the practitioner's own height. In addition, Bando also contains short stick forms which range from police baton drills to the difficult Wizard System. In the Wizard System, skillful manipulation of the stick and the use of unorthodox angles of attack combine to make the stick apparently "disappear" and "reappear", always to the disadvantage of the opponent. There is a Wizard long stick system as well. And, as indicated above, there are animal system stick weapons.

Bladed weapons are also taught to more senior students. The weapon which is symbolic of American Bando is the Gurkha kukri short sword. Grandmaster Gyi has designated a Master for the kukri. The Burmese dha is also taught in Bando, with several challenging forms available to black belt students.

Internal Systems

Bando systems range broadly from clearly “hard” and “external” systems (such as kickboxing) to softer and more internal approaches. One of Bando’s most unique systems is the Monk system, which is described by Grandmaster Gyi as a “non-violent martial art.” The Monk system emphasizes evasion, trapping and locking, as well as non-lethal strikes, all with a view to avoid or minimize harm to the attacker.

Health Practices

Bando also involves health related practices. There are forms and practices simply for meditative purposes, and there is the practice of Min Zin, similar in concept to Chinese Chi Gung (Qigong). Grandmaster Gyi has also introduced yoga systems involving the use of staffs, ropes and partners for static and dynamic flexibility training and for meditative purposes.

Special Programs

Bando offers special programs for training of law enforcement officials and military personnel. Also, training is offered for senior citizens designed to maintain or improve balance and flexibility, and some Bando schools also have well-developed youth programs.