

# Sports Chanbara Overview

For thousands of years man has flailed and slashed weapons through the air. Mostly to defend and protect. Our inherent DNA in our genes still stimulate our bodies and minds when a knife or other bladed instrument is placed in our hand or in front of us. We don't really understand why this happens or what causes this phenomenon. But we do know this... The inherent feeling in one way or another is in all beings.

In the early stages of development, tools and weapons made from the earth were crude as man's existence. Wood and stone weapons slowly evolved into metal, thus the bronze age had begun. This age saw great advancement in bladed weapons. Especially, the mighty sword.

Through out the ancient world. The sword, one of mans most prized possessions represented both power and wealth. Man designed, built and studied the use of the sword. Most all design and technique were created for the practicalities of war and defense, that country's geography, culture and way of life.

The Japanese culture reverend the sword and all it represented. Throughout history Japan has always been the front runner of martial technique and the making of consistently well built and sought after swords.

Japanese warlords trained their Samurai with various metals and wood practice weapons. This was difficult for most Samurai because one wrong move or poorly executed technique could result in injury or even death. Every warlord and his Samurai army had their own special fighting technique. These techniques were tested out on the battlefield. The survivors later would polish the most effective technique and throw out the one s that proved useless.

Over centuries of civil unrest and war a single government finally united Japan. The Samurai no longer fought wars. But the warrior spirit was as strong as ever. In the Edo period there were as many as 30,000 sword schools of thought. One of the larger schools itto ryu discovered and added on to a new combative sport called Kendo that used protective gear and over

time turned it into a national sport. Now a combatant could practice difficult technique without out the chance of great bodily harm or death.

Kendo's weapon, the bamboo shinai is about one meter in length spit long ways into four pieces tapered at one end and held together by leather. This practice sword and the combatant's protective head and body gear made for a good game of physical chess. An excellent way to polish one's technique.

From modern Kendo came a new era of swordplay. Through science and technology this last century has offered the combatant a larger selection of materials that has made sword play easier to practice and master without pain or injury.

30 years ago Japanese martial artists and sword masters came together and created a new style. The Founder, Tanabe Tetsundo and his group of some of the strongest swordsmen in Japan called this new school of thought, Goshindo.

These martial artists and masters were very traditional. They also knew the times were changing and decided to educate today's public in the way of the modern Samurai. New materials made out of flexible plastics and the constant refining of swords for combat in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century proved to be a stroke of genius.

Not only was Goshindo faster than kendo. Kendo's heavy and cumbersome protective equipment was not needed. A light head mask to protect the face and eyes and a sword called the Kodachi which did not inflict injury to the combatant made such a difference that the Japanese public embraced this new combative sport and became part of the Japanese Department of Education.

Today, Sports Chanbara (Chanbara,a loose translation is sword fight is the fastest growing combative sport in Japan and is 200,000 combatants strong.

**Goshindo**, (translated: to protect the body) **had 3 divisions**.

1) Iaido- the art of drawing the sword.

The long sword (katana) and the short sword (wakizashi) are studied. The Toyama-Ryu style is the 8-form kata that was practiced by the Japanese Imperial Army.

2) Tameshigiri- The art of cutting.

Teaches the student of the sword ways to practice and polish cutting skills. The 6 dangiri and other cutting technique is practiced on a daily basis.

3) Kendo/Chanbara-The art of fighting.

Traditional Kendo was practiced to give the combatant, student and the master a well-rounded education in the sword.

The way of the Samurai and Sports Chanbara has everything in common. Sports Chanbara only uses weapons that made the Japanese Samurai warrior class famous.

1) Tanto (the knife, 18 inches long--45 centimeters)

2) Kodachi (the short sword, 24 inches long--60 centimeters)

3) Choken (the long sword, 39 inches long--100 centimeters)

4) Yari/naginata ( the spear 210 centimeters long)

5) Bo (the staff, 210 inches long)

Like kendo all Sports Chanbara fighting is done on a point system. Matches are one and three point elimination bouts. A one-point bout gives the combatant only one chance per fight. In reality warriors on the battlefield only get one chance.

The five different weapons used in Sports Chanbara are all very unique and require hours of practice to become proficient.

The Tanto

The Tanto; the Samurai's last line of defense. 18 inches of knife and furr is more than a cold shaped piece of metal. The tanto has gone through history as the weapon which all Samurai men and women held close to them from birth to death. Moreover, the tanto is an extremely versatile working tool and weapon of protection. The tanto was long enough to feign off attacks and short enough to expertly maneuver and manipulate any fighting situation. There are many ways to hold, handle and fight with the short

blade. The Tanto is extremely easy to conceal and is large enough to stop even the biggest opponent in his tracks.

In Sports Chanbara the tanto is used to teach the martial artist how to maneuver in close quarters. The tanto used in conjunction with ju-jitsu and other hand/foot technique offering a fast and exciting match. The Tanto division is the only division where the combatant can use the weapon as well as kicks, hand technique and takedowns to score points. This division has the most bodily contact and chances for a bloody lip or a swift strike to a vulnerable area.

#### The point

The head, chest and stomach are the three general target areas. For a point to be scored the combatant has to attack within these three areas. The strike must be a stab, thrust or deep cut. Slashing would be considered weak and scoring a winning point would be difficult. Arms, legs and other lesser parts of the body would not receive a point.

#### The Kodachi

The Samurai's parallel to the American cowboy's six-shooter. These 2-foot razor-sharp swords also called *wakizashi* were the Samurai warrior's side arm. The Kodachi, which translates into small sword, is known as the spiritual sword of the Samurai. Japanese traditional ceremony rely on the presence of a Kodachi in one way or another. For example; the not so understood practice of seppuku or the act of suicide by cutting one's stomach uses a Kodachi. In action this close range weapon offers the combatant the largest selection of technique available.

Sports Chanbara's sword of preference is also the versatile Kodachi. From the beginner to the master this 2-foot short sword offers the combatant speed and agility. The length of the blade also offers the combatant a strong defense as well as a good offense. The distance covered and closed in a swift attack by a well-trained combatant is lightning fast. Only sword technique is used during matches. During practice and official matches many combatants try to incorporate hand and foot technique with the Kodachi only to discover that technique is surprising slow, cumbersome and does not work against the speed and accuracy of a correctly wielded Kodachi. Result: the arm or leg is hit and the point is scored before the hand strike is halfway to the opponent.

### The Point

The target areas are all main parts of the body. The head, torso, legs and arms. Stabbing, thrusting and slashing technique receive points. All committed *mein*, *kote*, *do*, *tsuki* and *ashi* strikes are legal. The strike has to be clean and swift where the opponent can not make a counter attack.

### The Choken

The Samurai warrior's weapon of choice. The world famous Japanese *katana* has mesmerized the rest of the world for centuries wield considerable strength and power. Used in battle the *katana*, which averaged 1 meter in length, was by far the most feared weapon. One stroke could easily cut a man in half. If, the *Kodachi* was known as the Samurai's six-shooter. Then the Choken would be known as the Samurai's rifle. The *katana* only left its scabbard when it was cleaned or used to cut down an opponent in battle.

Sports Chanbara's *katana* is called a Choken. It is by far the combatant's weapon of choice. This long sword wields decisive match winning points and it's defensive capabilities offer the combatant a large array of fighting possibilities. The Choken, although, is much more difficult to learn and practice. Most combatants start off on the *Kodachi* then graduate to the longer and much faster Choken. Matches using Choken offer the combatant a realistic fight and a chance to play "the ultimate game of physical chess".

### The Point

The target areas are all main parts of the body. The head, torso, legs and arms. Stabbing, thrusting and slashing technique receive points. All committed *mein*, *kote*, *do*, *tsuki* and *ashi* strikes are legal. The strike has to be clean and swift where the opponent can not make a counter attack.

### The Yari

The target areas when using a spear are the head, chest and stomach. Arms, legs and other lesser parts of the body would not receive a point.

### The Naginata

The target areas are all parts of the body. In a point match all committed *mein*, *kote*, *do*, *tsuki* and *ashi* strikes are legal.

### The Bo

The target areas are all parts of the body. In a point match all committed *mein*, *kote*, *do*, *tsuki* and *ashi* strikes are legal.

To be proficient in fighting the combatant must have a system to practice with. Many systems are difficult to follow and understand. Many teachers confuse the student and make technique seem more difficult than it really is. Remember, simple is best. Sports Chanbara's various techniques and methods have been used in battle over thousands of years.

A correct strong stance and stroke are the basics. Kihon is Sports Chanbara's main kata which provides those basics. This simple, but effective 5stroke kata takes minutes to learn, but years to master.

Attention

Bow

Stance

Mein strike

Kote strike

Do strike

Ashi strike

Chest thrust

Back to start

Close stance

Bow

From Kihon the combatants will warm up with rhythmic strikes and blocks the first of 6 sets.

- 1) mein, do, ashi(all swung to the right) up leg
- 2) mein, do up leg ashi(all swung to the right)
- 3) side mein, pull back do, pull back ashi(right)
- 4) side mein, pull back do, pull back ashi(left) 10 minutes
- 5) thrust, side mein, back hand do(right)
- 6) thrust, side mein, back hand do(left)

## **Strike training**

The correct timing and stroke is very important. All combatants have to practice their strokes and their aim. Yes, aim. Most students have great stroke and look very proficient and strong. Although, if one can not hit the target one will not win a point. This next exercise is very important for the development of a perfect and concise strike.

Mein down strike  
Kote down, fan, rotate strike  
Do right side fore hand/ left side back hand  
Ashi right side fore hand/ left side back hand  
Kote-mein half time down strike

## **60 second sparring**

Controlled and supervised sparring is very important for the combatant who wants to learn the correct ways to fight without getting hit and tired. All athletes and sportsmen are at the front of the line until one's stamina and energy is drained. With less energy and drive the combatant has the possibility to misjudge the target and be countered with a hit. Therefore, Sports Chanbara's sparring technique revolve around good posture, footwork, hand technique and ki through correct breathing. Remember, it is not important how you breathe in. It's how you breath out in sword fighting that keeps you mind and body concentrated on the way of the sword.

Attention  
Bow  
Kamie to  
Hajime  
Yame  
Sameto  
Bow

Switch to next combatant (clockwise circle)  
Bow  
Kamie to  
Hajime  
Yame  
Sameto  
Bow

Switch to the next combatant  
Bow  
Kamie to  
Hajime

Yame  
Sameto  
Bow

## **Free Time Sparring**

For the next 20-30 minutes one can practice with any sword or swords one chooses. Could it be a Tanto or a Choken. Try two swords together. Try a spear against two swords. There are many combinations the combatant can choose from. Just pick up the sword you like and use it. For beginners/primitive fencers most of the training will be done with a Kodachi.

The Kodachi is the correct size for studying all technique. Although, during the free sparring period one can try any and all techniques/methods and polish the moves that work for "YOU" and throw away the techniques that don't work. During this time fight the strongest and teach the weakest. Therefore, you too will become a good teacher and being a good teacher makes one a great student.

## **One point elimination matches**

All that is tried, trained and polished during class will now be put to the test. Enter the essence of the real fight. Big against small, tall against short, male against female, young against old. With Sports Chanbara there is no set winner. It's the one with the biggest heart.

Combatants learn various lessons and ideals through Sports Chanbara matches. Victory gives self-esteem and confidence. Defeat gives respect and humility. Victory or defeat both is praised for their spirit and emotion. Win, lose or draw combatants and spectators want to enjoy good matches.

Most matches in the United States are practiced with the Kodachi, Choken and Nitor-ryu (double swords).

## **Example match 16 combatants**

Kodachi  
8 vs. 8 first elimination  
4 vs. 4 second elimination  
2 vs. 2 third elimination



1 vs. 1 three-point match winner goes to next level

Choken

8 vs. 8 first elimination

4 vs. 4 second elimination

2 vs. 2 third elimination

1 vs. 1 three-point match winner goes to next level

Nitoryu

8 vs. 8 first elimination

4 vs. 4 second elimination

2 vs. 2 third elimination

1 vs. 1 three-point match winner goes to next level

The 3 winners of the Kodachi, Choken and Nitoryu divisions will compete with each other. No matter what weapon is used by the winning combatant he/she will be the grand champion. All combatants have the chance to win and better their skills.

## **Handling the sword**

It is of utmost importance to correctly hold the sword. Long or short, one hand or two there are gripping and handling techniques that enhance the combatant's control over the sword. Wielding a Choken(the long sword), the combatant must first relax and loosen up their arms and shoulders. A tense combatant is not effective in the fight. Gripping the handle also requires relaxed and limber hands and wrists. The backhand holds 80 % of the weight and the front hand holds 20%.

Imagine that the backhand is the engine and the front hand is the steering wheel. Grip the handle with the little, ring and middle fingers. The forefinger and thumb lightly pinch the handle. The front hand should use the same grip. The little, ring and middle fingers with the finger and thumb also pinching the handle, but using only 20% of the combatants strength.

When the combatant holds a sword with one or two hands there should be enough space on top of the hand where one could rest a Ping pong ball without rolling off the "V" area where the thumb and forefinger meet. The

combatant's hands should not be touching. They should have a few inches between them.

The combatant can always muscle in a point. Although, if the combatant makes a strong, smooth and large arched stroke there are 100's of possibilities concerning technique. First and foremost relax your shoulders and arms. Long flowing strokes are encouraged. Short, choppy strokes create bad habits and lessen ones offensive and defensive ability. Making a good shot to the head or casting out a line from your favorite fishing pole require a smooth execution. Imagine you want to get that hook, line and sinker out 30 yards. A short choppy cast would not get dinner. The fisherman as with the combatant must make a long and flowing stroke to get to the target.

Hold the handle loosely with 80% of the strength on the back grip. From a Chudan or center stance lift the sword above and slightly behind the forehead. Swing down to your target with your hands slightly wringing the handle to keep the sword's blade true and stable. Wringing the handle also gives the combatant 20% more snap and increases the speed. When wringing the handle the hand in back wrings clockwise and the front hand wring counter clockwise. Do not wring too hard as your shoulders will rise up and the combatant will telegraph the moves.

When the combatant has the correct grip he will have greater control over both heavy and light hits, large and short strokes and become a difficult adversary.

## **Striking**

The combatant's main concern in a Sports Chanbara match is to hit the opponent and win the point. The strike should be swift and concise. When a good strong and sound technique is executed both combatants in play know who received the point. Some strikes are not made with power, technique and strength. A combatant could easily strike an area different from what he was aiming for and with only a fraction of deliverance. It was, "just a scratch! But the results are what matters and in many cases "just a scratch" could be the winning point.

Combatants, who are comparably weak in physical power, can have more destructive power with an iron pipe or a metal bat than a barehanded

professional boxer can. In the heat of a battle a real sword that slightly strikes its mark and is considered "just a scratch" could be a fatal injury. The combatant must be conscious of every strike, whatever it is.

#### Mikiri-waza (Trying to out fox the opponent)

Predicting the opponent's movements and using them against him. Strategy and insight are essential no matter if it is a match or just an exercise. Nothing is more enjoyable than fighting a combatant where you strategically use techniques giving you a narrow escape from the attack. Hear the Choken whizz by your body. Just in the nick of time get out of the way block a well-placed strike and counter with a perfect shot. The combatant should know the basics, but also should practice techniques that are flexible, not restricting them in certain ways. Practice makes perfect and practicing mikiri-waza give the combatants' insight in the development of their own body and mind.

#### Aiuchi (double kill)

Aiuchi is when combatants simultaneously attack each other and both are hit. In a match both combatants would be defeated and eliminated from the match. It is the utmost importance that the combatant executes the shot without himself getting hit. Special attention must be given to each combatant's own technique to avoid aiuchi. The combatant can not win the match by simply striking the opponent first. Your attack is complete only when your opponent could not counter and return the stroke. The ultimate technique is to deliver a strike without a counter.

#### Zanshin (undivided attention)

Zanshin leads the combatant to victory. The combatant must always pay attention to his opponent and the surroundings. Be on guard at all times during the match and never let one's guard down until the match or fight is over. Some combatants have a tendency to look at other matches, but his own. Result, the loss of zanshin and victory.

#### Kiai (shout of self encouragement)

Mein, kote, do.....

In the art of the sword and the combative sport, Sports Chanbara emphasis is stressed more on the exhale than the inhale. Kiai, which comes from the depth of the body, multiplies the power of the stroke. Even though one can

not see a kiai, the kiai comes in many strengths, shapes and sizes! The amount of energy in every movement, stroke and attack can be regulated by the kiai. A long inaudible drawn out kiai usually will telegraph a long drawn out and possibly weak technique. A loud, sharp bark kiai usually provides the combatant with a sharp, crisp point winning technique. The kiai helps produce larger amounts of fresh oxygen and enhances one's metabolism. With increased oxygen and metabolism the combatant is able to practice/fight at a much better rate. Fatigue and loss of breath are minimized. Endurance and swift technique are maximized. Producing a loud voice also has great physical effect on the functioning of the lungs and other internal organs. "MEIN" the combatant barks as he attacks his opponent. Spits second timing, kiai and confidence wins the victory point and a stronger healthier body.

## **Judging**

A Japanese translation: The principle of Judging

Combatants come to Sports Chanbara matches with enthusiasm and the hope of doing their best. Doing ones best cultivates character. A referee should not put too much importance on the results. But to judge a match paying special attention to the combatant's attitude, zeal and pride that will cultivate and enhance stronger character in the combatant.

The referee has considerable responsibility when it comes to judging Sports Chanbara. The referee needs to put himself into the combatant's shoes to make quick, clear and correct decisions for the combatants and the spectators alike.

The combatant who might have to judge a match and make the deciding point must know the basic striking and blocking techniques used in Sports Chanbara. At first judging a match might seem difficult, but within a short amount of time the combatant will be able to make clear, sound judgements with confidence.

The ISCA provides a one day 8 hour training session with a physical and written test. The combatant will receive a certificate and the first grade ranking. The combatant will also receive an official judge's badge and can participate as a judge in all Sports Chanbara matches through out the world. For more information on Judging contact: Shihan Dana Abbott or the Kaicho in Yokohama, Japan.

Contest area

TANTO (Under 45 cm)

In Tanto, a division of sports chanbara. The head and mid-section are the areas mainly aimed at. Therefore, you need to pay special attention to protect these critically important areas. Strikes to the head are valid in Sports Chanbara. A combatant cannot get a game-deciding point if he strikes his

opponent's arm or legs. Abdominal areas as well as the chest or the throat are important places for earning points.

Combatants are allowed to try actions like a throw, kick or a takedown. These actions other than knocking your opponent down are, however, not counted for points as they are straightforward techniques. Combatants who are used to the kind of over-protected martial art that forbids kicking may be hesitant about this. However, they are encouraged to overcome that fear and try taking part in tanto, a sports chanbara division. A combatant is advised he not count too much on kicking or throwing as a means of fighting against his opponent's sword since the sword has the potential for killing by a single thrust.

Judging matches, it is remembered that referees have some likelihood of misjudgment due to the circumstances where the combatant's place themselves close to one another, and move quickly. Referees have also to draw a line between the atedome and mikiri. Referees need, therefore, to be trained to perceive the subtle differences in each opponent's techniques.